



THE GOSPEL OF MARK

Study Guide Full
Mark 2:23-3:6
August 11, 2019

What has been an intensifying conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees through the first few chapters of Mark is going to reach a boiling point by the end of this week's passage—one centering on the Sabbath and the identity of the one who is Lord of the Sabbath.

As Jonathan Wilson preaches this week on these verses regarding identity—via the sermon entitled, “Who does he think he is?”—and as we contemplate our own identity as Jesus' disciples (within the gospel of Mark that is some refer to as “a manual of discipleship”), we ought reflect:

Are our human-shaped Christian theology, practices, and ideologies actually encouraging us to life, as Christ's disciples?

23 *One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. 24 The Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?”*

25 *He answered, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? 26 In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.”*

27 *Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. 28 So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”*

3 *Another time Jesus went into the synagogue,*

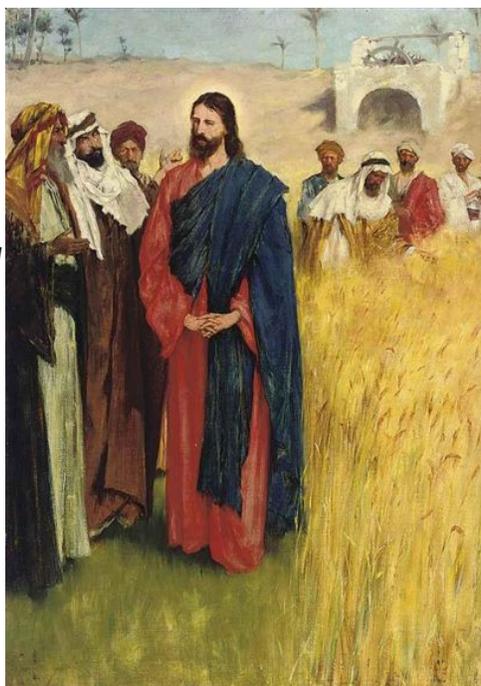


and a man with a shriveled hand was there. 2 Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. 3 Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone."

4 Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent.

5 He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. 6 Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

*Christ in the Cornfields
on the Sabbath*
William Henry Margetson
1861-1940 (artnet.com)



Mark 2:23-3:6

Notes:

Commentary Notes:

vv. 23-28. Before we eagerly condemn the Pharisees for their legalistic approach to the Law, it is helpful to consider why Sabbath keeping was so essential to the Jews and to Jewish identity. Sabbath keeping, as part of the ten commandments (as in Exodus 35), was not only a reminder of the sovereignty of God's creative act at the beginning of the

Discussion Questions:

Study: If you have not recently read the passage of David, on the run from the murderous Saul, in hunger, review 1 Samuel 21:1-6. Even as we notice significant details

world; it was also a reminder of the exodus from Egypt that would make the Sabbath possible. As such, within the sacred space of God's good created world, it was a reminder that Israel was to be distinct from the world so as to be a light to the world. The Sabbath, then, was an essential reminder of whose they were, and who they were to be. And this was particularly true in later centuries during the exile when, in a foreign land, and without the key marker of Jewish identity that was the sacred space of the temple, Israel tried to maintain their distinction.

So, it is no small matter when Jesus' disciples violate Sabbath prescriptions in the Law (see Dt 23 regarding picking grain), and this is true especially as the Pharisees see the Sabbath as *supreme*, even over essential needs of humanity, like healing. What is the effect of their skewed theology? They have come to view regulations over relationships: strict Sabbath regulations over life-giving relationship with the one authority greater even than Sabbath and Sabbath keeping—Jesus Christ.

between what the Hebrew narrator tells us and what Jesus recounts, the question is still worthwhile: How does that passage inform our passage in Mark? Why do you suspect Jesus appeals to a story about David?

Discuss: At the crux of this conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees is the matter of Jesus' identity over and above key markers of Jewish identity, such as Israel's identity as Sabbath-keepers. Translating the passage through the centuries, what are some key markers of Christian identity, about which Jesus might challenge us to remember that his identity reigns supreme?

Discuss: For those of us who are retired, and for all of us who are living in fellowship and love with our retired brothers and sisters in our congregation, an important question must be asked: What does Sabbath rest look like for those who are retired? On the other end of life's spectrum, we might ask: What does Sabbath rest look like for the children we are raising?

Discuss: Why would it be unhelpful to read this passage and "woodenly" conclude that the Sabbath is simply not for Christians?

Reflect: How have Sabbath practices poured out the grace of God into your life in the past? What are challenges to Sabbath-practicing as regards the schedule of your own life? Sit quietly over these questions.

Meditate: In what ways is Jesus challenging your understanding of what is good and "lawful", particularly with regards to customs and practices in your life?

vv. 3:1-6. The Sabbath conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees takes on flesh and blood form in the healing of the man with the shriveled hand. The Greek verb here ξηραίνω (*xeraino*) deals with drying, and denotes withering as a result of paralysis; it is likely that the man had a chronic claw-like hand due to muscular atrophy.

Note the key detail that this Sabbath healing occurs in the synagogue. It was one thing for Jesus to blaspheme and heal at a home (2:7), but in the synagogue?!? No wonder the Pharisees and the Herodians, the group loyal to the Roman ruling figure Herod Antipas, plot to kill.

And don't miss the irony here: while Jesus does good in healing, the conspirators do evil in plotting to kill; while the man's hand was withered, the schemers' hardened hearts are the only body parts that are actually problematic with regards to the Sabbath.

Study: As this is the final controversy story in this opening portion of Mark, it would be helpful to summarize: review the various ways that Jesus identifies himself; and review the "opponent" in each pericope—the opponent behind the opponent.

Reflect: How does Jesus's example of doing good by caring for one's neighbour and those in need challenge you this week, particularly in light of traditions considered important?

Confess: The Message translation of verse 2 does well to bring out the sense of the Greek word παρατηρέω (*paratereo*), as in to watch maliciously for a person or to observe tradition scrupulously: "The Pharisees had their eyes on Jesus to see if he would heal him, hoping to catch him in a Sabbath infraction." Confess: Lately, in what ways have you been tempted to judge others with malicious suspicion regarding "holiness"?

Discern: How are you proclaiming to your neighbourhood the good news that the kingdom of God "has come near" in the form of restoration and healing? How are you going forth and doing so with others in the FBC family? Towards this end, is it time to consider Connection-Group fellowship?

Discern: What is one practical step you can take to demonstrate to your neighbourhood that we follow a God who provides much needed rest in a frantic and anxious world? How do you perceive the busyness of your neighbours? What might you do to bless them with God-inspired rest?

Pray: Pray for the United States and for Hong Kong, in light of recent tumultuous events. Also consider: How might Jesus's words in this week's passages—of a redefinition of identity, customs, and what is good and lawful—speak a timely word into these situations?