

**Mark 2: 23-28; “Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath”, Sermon # 12 in the series –
“Astonished at His teaching”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on June 22nd, 2014, in the Morning Worship Service.**

Religious men who do not know God, are; by their very nature, so socially oriented that they take their cues for everything that they believe and do from other men. The Christian is one who does not need to do that. The Christian is told in God's Word to imitate what is good and right and true; he does not quibble with that. But he does something which religious men who do not know God would not dare to do. He lives his Christian life submitting to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Scriptures which are His Word. And when another religious person attempts to question his religious practice, he is able with God's help to justify what he is doing. He does not feel any compulsion whatsoever to submit to the traditions which men have made up, which surround the commandments which he intends to keep. The reason for this ought to be apparent to everyone, but sadly it is not. The Christian does this because He knows that it the only way to really please God, and it is the only way to truly be free. He remembers the words of St. Paul in Galatians 5: 1, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.” Every Christian who is walking in the Spirit and walking in the truth sooner or later learns how to do this. The best way of learning it is from the Master Himself.

Even though the Lord Jesus was criticized and questioned by the Pharisees as to what His disciples were doing on the Sabbath; Jesus was well able to defend them, and Himself, as their Lord who was permitting it. In doing so, the Lord Jesus was demonstrating His authority to all religious men. And He was furthermore showing us how we can defend ourselves against all the attempts of religious formalists to take away our Christian liberty, in regard to how the commandments of God are to be kept. The question that we are asking this morning is this. “What did the Lord Jesus say in this situation, to defend the actions of His disciples, and preserve their spiritual liberty in regard to keeping the 4th commandment?” And, “What should you and I do and say, when confronted with a similar situation; we who do not have the Lord Jesus physically present with us to defend us?” We can learn from the example of our Lord. He showed these religious formalists where the real authority came from, for what his disciples were doing. Real authority and real freedom for what we are doing, in terms of keeping the commandments of God, and not falling into the false religious practice of keeping the commandments of men, comes from Jesus Christ Himself. It comes from asking ourselves what it was that Jesus said on this particular day. Jesus made three statements in His defense of His disciples, and this strategic defense of Christian liberty I hope you will make your own.

1st of all - He referred the formalists to the Scriptures for the answer to their question. (Verses 25 and 26)

He did this by asking a question of their original question. Sometimes it is good to ask questions of the questions that are asked of us. Jesus often did this with the legalistic Pharisees. Sometimes the way that people ask questions of us shows that they want to control our lives and the way that we worship and serve God, by the way that they ask their questions. They are spiritual bullies. Their question to Him was, “Look, why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” If you are the teacher of these disciples why do you let them break the Sabbath? His response to them was, “Have you never read”...? This answer of the Lord Jesus to them is the same answer to every question in regard to how we are to live, what we are to believe and what we are to do. “Have you never read?” How many thousands of our questions about what we are to do in every situation of our lives are answered by a thorough study of the Bible. The question is: Do we read it for ourselves, or do we let others make religious statements about what we are

to do, or not to do, without ever checking it out to see if God has said that this is what we are to do or not do?

Let me ask, how it is with you this morning? Take the temperature of your spiritual health. Do you study the Bible for God's answer to your questions or is your life and obedience up for grabs to the person who can bully you the most? The Christian is not called to submit to the tactics of the spiritual bully, a man like this Pharisee who confronted Jesus. His call is to render to God a sincere and willing obedience. But in order to defeat the tactics of the spiritual bully you must know your Bible. Jesus knew that some of the worst spiritual bullies are those who know the Bible, but they only know it in a legal sense. They are only interested in your being obedient in a sense of outward compliance. You will make no problems for them if you do as you are told. Even if what they are asking you to do is only to render an obedience to men's added traditions in relation to the commandments of God. That was what was happening here in the passage that we are studying. But the Christian is not called to submit to these additions. He is called to submit to his parent's authority when growing up as a child or young person. He is called to submit to the elder or elders of the church and to obey them when they tell you the Bible truth. But the Christian is not being asked by God to become a person who submits to laws which men add to the commandments of God.

The Christian is one who reads his Bible to see what kind of an obedience he is to render unto God. And in the Bible he reads, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." If his conscience is working in the right way, he will attempt to keep this one day in seven holy; this day which is in the New Testament dispensation, Sunday, the Lord's Day. He does this because he recognizes, having read in the Scripture, the fact that Jesus Christ did not come to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfill them. He came to fulfill the ceremonial law and to set it aside. He came to fulfill the moral law and give it back to the Christian to keep, by his faith working through love; love to God and love to his neighbor. A Christian, if he is reading his Bible correctly, thoroughly, and thoughtfully ought to be able to see that God has not abolished His moral law summarized in the 10 commandments. He also should come to understand that all of those commandments are not to be kept from a legal spirit; that he will go about to keep them from a gracious, a thankful, and a loving spirit. He will be striving to love God in his obedience to God. And he will be striving to love man in his obedience to God. These commandments, including Sabbath keeping, are to be kept by the grace of Christ, realizing that in ourselves that there are going to be many shortcomings, faults, and sins in our commandment keeping, but these, having been covered by the blood of Christ, all of our works will be acceptable to God. This gracious spirit in keeping this commandment should apply toward the way that we view others in their attempts to keep the Sabbath holy.

There are many Sabbath-breakers in our society, and even many Sabbath-breakers among those who profess to be Christians. How are we, who love God's law and all of His commandments going to convince them that they should remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy? It will not come by bullying them into it. I believe that our responsibility is to look at the words of the Lord Jesus, learn what His mind was, and is on the subject. The Lord Jesus could have fed the disciples that day, miraculously, just as He fed the five thousand in the wilderness. But He did not do this for them. He allowed them to travel on the Lord's Day, and it appears that He also did not disapprove of their being able to eat while they were traveling on the Lord's Day. Even while they were passing through someone else's field and would be eating at someone else's expense. They were walking through a grain field that day and they began to pluck the heads of grain. They were taking food for themselves, but they were not stealing. How do we know this? We would know it only if we read the Scriptures.

Turn with me to Deuteronomy 23: 24 and 25. Here we find a law, in the law of God, that pertains to the exact situation that the disciples were in. "When you come into your neighbor's

vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes at your pleasure, but you shall not put any in your container.” “When you come into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor's standing grain.” You see, God in giving these laws was being gracious to those who were in the very situation that the disciples were in on that Sabbath day. They needed food. There was no friend or relative to give it to them. They were observing the Sabbath. They were following the Master and attending upon His ministry. But the law which covered this situation was in God's law, and one of the reasons that it was there was so that people's needs might be provided for while they were observing the Sabbath. In “picking the heads of grain and rubbing them in their hands”, as it says in Luke 6: 1, the Pharisees who were following along supposed that these disciples were working on the Sabbath. They were doing a sort of threshing. It was a violation of one of the 39 main categories of work which were forbidden on the Sabbath in the Mishnah, the third of which was reaping. But what Jesus is saying here is that the Scriptures themselves are the only authority and the final authority in all matter of faith and practice. It is not the traditions of men, or the additions of men to the Scriptures that are our authority for what we do in our religious observance; it is because of what God had said Himself in His Word that gives us the authority and the freedom to go about to keep His commandments in this way that Christ's disciples did.

The answer of Jesus, in this case, was the Scriptural precedent of David. “Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry, he and those with him: how he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the showbread, which is not lawful to eat except for the priests, and also gave some to those who were with him?” Turn over with me to 1 Samuel 21 for a few moments. At this point in David's life, he was fleeing from Saul; fleeing for his life. And he came to Nob, the city of the priests. In verse 1b it says, “And Ahimelech, was afraid when he met David, and said to him, ‘Why are you alone and no one is with you?’” “So David said to Ahimelech the priest, ‘The king has ordered me on some business, and said to me, ‘Do not let anyone know anything about the business on which I send you, or what I have commanded you.’” “Now therefore, what have you on hand?” “Give me five loaves of bread in my hand, or whatever can be found.” “And the priest answered David and said, “There is no common bread on hand; but there is the showbread, if the young men have kept themselves from women.” “Then David answered the priest and said to him, “Truly women have been kept from us about three days since I came out.” “And the vessels of the young men are holy, and the bread is in effect common, even though it was consecrated in the vessel this day.” “So the priest gave him holy bread; for there was no bread there but the showbread which had been taken from before the Lord, in order to put hot bread in its place of the day when it was taken away.” We see from this that David was given ceremonially holy bread to eat by Ahimelech, who was Abiathar's father. Abiathar was probably ministering right there with his father on that day, and he was to be the only priest who lived to tell the story, because all of Ahimelech's household was to die as a result of this help given to David.

The parallel between this story and that of Jesus letting his disciples pick the heads of grain on the Sabbath day is really quite striking, and its application by our Lord Jesus is very appropriate. David and his men were being chased by Saul. Jesus and his disciples were being sought out and observed and questioned in a critical manner by the Pharisees. Both Saul and these Pharisees had murder in their hearts, if we were to read further on in each account. Both situations involved the need to show mercy, and to recognize the common and everyday need of food on the Sabbath day. It was a work of mercy and necessity that was going on in each case. The showbread was taken off the altar on the Sabbath day and fresh and hot new bread was placed on the altar. Then it was permissible for the priests, and the priest only to eat the old bread. But this feeding of David and his men was of greater priority than the ceremonial law being enforced. In Jesus' case the question was the same. Were these men going to be

permitted to eat the heads of grain which they picked and rubbed together between their hands? If the Pharisees were truly merciful men, the answer would be “yes” according to Jesus. In Matthew 12, the parallel passage to the one that we are studying, it says in verse 7, “But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless.” The point here, is that we can learn to answer the formalist who comes to us insisting that what we are doing is wrong and sinful, if we know the Scriptures and if we know what God is, or is not requiring. God is not insisting that we abstain from travel, or from working to prepare food or from eating it on the Lord's Day. And for us to insist that it should be so, in order to fulfill the commandment that the Sabbath is a day of rest from this kind of labor, is a misapplication of Scripture. When we know the Scripture, it is very important how we apply the Scripture. If we end up with particulars of Sabbath observance that go beyond what is written, or that make us unable to show mercy to the basic needs of people, then we are not keeping the Sabbath in a way that honors God.

This leads us to Jesus' second statement in defense of his disciples: He showed the formalists the intent of the commandment. (Verse 27)

“And He said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.” But these Pharisees believed that what Jesus was permitting was the breaking of the Sabbath. We have seen that his disciples were not breaking the Sabbath. Jesus has shown us this from the Scriptures in the example of David. Now Jesus gives to them, and to us, the intent of the commandment. The intention of God in giving it was for the health and the strengthening and the refreshing of man through a weekly Sabbath rest. “The Sabbath was made for man”. This was the intent of God's giving the commandment in the beginning. Turn with me to Genesis 2, verses 1-3. In chapter 1 of Genesis we find that God created the heavens and earth in six literal days. God spoke and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast. God did not need help from evolution or the chaos of random chance. He is the God of the immediate creation. But God did something very wonderful and beautiful for man in the beginning after he created him on the 6th day. Let's read about it. “Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished.” “And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.” “Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.” This was the last thing that God did in the original physical creation. It was to institute the Sabbath.

Did God need rest after His great and mighty work of creation? Absolutely not! We read in Isaiah 40: 28, “Have you not known?” “Have you not heard?” “The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary.” He is omnipotent. He has endless and boundless sources of strength and energy. He who keeps Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. But He who was the creator of man in the beginning, our wise and holy Creator knew that Man would need rest. He would need rest from his work. He was created in God's image and likeness and yet he, unlike God, needed rest and refreshment from all of his work. He knew that man needed rest in order to the health of his body. And he needed to find his rest in God Himself. He needed the Sabbath to remember to worship God who gave both work and rest. Both spiritual and physical rest come from our God. The reason that we as Reformed Baptists believe that this commandment of keeping the Sabbath is still to be observed is not only because we find it in the Decalogue, but also because it was given to man before the 10 commandments. It was a permanent institution given to men by God before Moses ever went up on Mt. Sinai. This shows us conclusively that its intent was and is “for man” since it was given in the beginning. God rested from all His work of the physical creation. It was His holy intention that man rest from his work 1 day in seven.

Why did the day change from the seventh day to the 1st day of the week when Jesus rose from the dead? It was to show all men that they need more than a physical rest one day a week.

They need a spiritual rest from their works so that they would believe in Jesus Christ. Salvation is not by our works, not even by the finest of them. We must cease from them. We must rest from them. We must believe in His finished work on the Passover week. We must believe that only Jesus kept the Sabbath day holy in the way which the 4th commandment requires. And believing in Him we find rest; rest for our soul, an eternal rest which cannot be taken away from us, and a Christian Sabbath day on the first day of the week to remember all that God has done for us. He did not merely give us a physical creation that we should enjoy and be refreshed by, but He has given us a second and more important spiritual creation through Christ's keeping the law and Christ's dying for our sins. Having the Jewish 7th day Sabbath come to an end shows Christ's fulfillment of the whole law including the Sabbath. We are no longer under law, we are under grace. But having the Christian Sabbath, or what we call the Lord's Day, shows forth that blessed truth that we believe in this salvation which God has given to us in Jesus Christ. We have gone beyond the old Jewish religion of types and figures, of ceremonies and sacrifices, of sabbath festivals and days of the Old dispensation. They were all given by God, but they have all truly been fulfilled in Christ. We want to worship God by this new and living way which Christ has made for us. We do not worship God by the letter of the law, or by the traditions of the rabbis added to that law. We worship God in spirit and in truth on the 1st day of the week knowing that Christ was raised from the dead on the first day of the week. We remember this day to keep it holy. We remember this day by being thankful for all that Christ has done and is doing for us. And we realize that this is God's gift to us. The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. We joyfully lay down the physical labors of our weekly job and we eagerly take up the spiritual delights of God's Word, His worship and His service. We rejoice to be in Christ's house and to eat the bread which is provided for us, at another man's labor and expense. We freely take the heads of the grain of His word and rub them greedily between our hands in order that we might satisfy our spiritual hunger. And in this not only our bodies find rest and refreshment but our souls do as well.

Let me ask you this morning if this is the way that you observe the Christian Sabbath? Do you call the Sabbath a delight? Some Christians do not believe that its observance is necessary at all. They believe that since we are not under the law but under grace, that there is no need to keep the law as it is found in the 10 commandments. But to those who believe this I would ask, would you nullify the obligation of the any of the other of the 10 commandments? Would you think that it permissible to steal or commit adultery, or lie, or covet? I think not! Then why would you try to nullify the Sabbath day? Why would you hinder the blessing of God through Jesus Christ our Lord on this 1st day of the week? The Sabbath was made for man. I would say that perhaps if you think this way it is because you think that the Sabbath day, and its observance are a burden and not a blessing. I think that this is what some Christians think, but I would convince you that you are deceived.

When I first came to think that there was a Sabbath reserved for the people of God which is spoken of in the New Testament, it was many years ago. I was attending a church where the Sabbath day for Christians was unknown and untaught. I was working on Sunday at that time, at a lumberyard in Silvis, Illinois, and I did not like working on Sundays. My hours were from 1-4 on Sunday afternoons sometimes. The reason that I did not like it was that I could not be at church as much as I would like. I couldn't hear the word of God preached as much and as often as I liked. In the church that I attended the Christian people who came did not have anyone teaching them about the Sabbath commandment, but they simply loved to be there because they loved the Lord. Most of them came to all of the services and were there whenever the doors were opened. They loved being there because they loved Christ and they loved His word. But one day while I was reading in my Bible I came across these words from Isaiah chapter 58, verses 13 and 14. You can turn with me to them if you like. "If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath,

from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the Lord; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father.” “The mouth of the Lord has spoken.” I meditated upon this Scripture for some days wondering if there was such a thing as a Christian Sabbath, and concluding after a time that there must be.

And what these verses were talking about was the difference between my finding my own earthly pleasures and occupations and finding the pleasures that God only gives to those who know and believe that the Sabbath is one of his greatest gifts to man. The Sabbath is a greater gift in the New Testament than the Old because of Christ. He has taken all of the legalism out of the commandment. He has fulfilled all of the type that it was, and the ceremony that it was. He was the only one who kept the Sabbath perfect in the first place! He now gives it back to us who believe in Him as Christians, filled up with His obedience and with all the blessings that the Triune God can bestow upon those who believe. But it is hard to believe in Sabbath blessings if you only think of the Sabbath as an Old testament ordinance. Hebrews Chapter 4, verse 9 says, “There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.” By the way, I quit my job at Payless Cashways. One of the main reasons that I quit was because I had to work on Sunday. I did something that perhaps may seem foolish to all of you. I quit my job before I had found another one to replace it. But Jenni and I prayed fervently that I would find another one because she was pregnant with our first child Rachel, and we didn’t want her to work outside the home any longer. I looked in the phone book and called all the names of all the non-union painting contractors that I found listed. And only one of them responded to my plea for a job. But he took me on, and carried me with Him for four years and taught me most of the painting trade. But it was God’s gift in that it not only provided for our family’s needs but it also enabled me to begin to observe the Sabbath in a Christian way. It is sad to me that more Christian churches do not teach about the Sabbath; that it was made for man. It is the command of God but is it like every other one of His commands; one in which we should find delight. And what a delight it is! What a blessing is a holy rest from all of my pleasures, my work, and my words! There is nothing legalistic about it at all unless I myself or others make it burdensome to me. Jesus does show us how to keep the Sabbath commandment in a non-legalistic way. The question is: Will we keep it?

For those who are reading, I would like to give you a third point to consider from this text.

3rdly and finally- He showed the formalists His own authority in relation to the commandment. (Verse 28)

Now notice the wording of Jesus’ statement. “The Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.” Notice that it says: “He is Lord of the Sabbath”, not He was Lord of the Sabbath. He doesn’t say, “I have come to fulfill the law and so the Sabbath will be done away with.” “I was Lord of the Sabbath, but because I am Lord; now everything related to the Sabbath will go.” No, it is the divine obligation of every Christian to observe the Christian Sabbath. It is still, like all the other commandments of the law, a law that we are under as a rule of life. In fact our Lord Jesus, who is Lord of the Sabbath, actually says in Matthew Chapter 5, verse 19, “Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments,(referring to the 10 commandments specifically in the verses that follow) and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” The Sabbath is not specifically mentioned in the commandments that follow, but it is certainly included. It may in some people’s minds be “the least” of the commandments. I don’t know about you, brethren, but I do not want to be placed in the category of being “least” in the

kingdom of heaven on the day of judgment because I broke the Sabbath and taught all of you that it was alright if you do the same. I want the Lord Jesus to be pleased with my obedience, even though in many respects it is deficient, and even though I see myself as an unprofitable a servant in His sight. I want to obey His commandment to remember the Sabbath day. The Lord Jesus is my Lord, and the Lord of my Sabbath observance. I will observe it according to the grace and the truth that He has given to me. He is the ultimate authority in my life, and no man can be that authority over my conscience. But just because that is so, it is no reason for me to think that I can have a casual view of my observance of the Lord's day.

The Lord will judge his people, and each of us shall give an account of ourselves in the great Day which is coming. He is the One who had the authority as the Son of God to say these things to the blind Pharisees standing in front of Him. But He calls Himself the Son of Man because He would die on the cross so that I might have freedom in keeping the commands of God. I am not condemned for my Sabbath-breaking if I believe in Jesus. But I may need to repent of it in terms of my present lack of concern to honor the Lord on His day. I am quite sure that many Christians have a lot to learn about keeping a Christian Sabbath. It is a commandment of the Lord to be observed; not rationalized away because of personal inconvenience. It did not pass away with the Jewish feast days and the sabbaths that are mentioned in Romans 14: 5. In that place, the Apostle Paul said "One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike." "Let each be fully convinced in his own mind." He is saying this in relation to a New Testament believer's observing Old Testament feast days and ceremonial sabbaths. But the Apostle would never say anything against the 4th commandment of God to Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy. Surely if it were abrogated, he would have spent many verses showing why it was the case.

No, the 10 Commandments are not something which a person makes up their own mind about whether they will keep them and observe them or not. The Jewish 7th day Sabbath is gone, and the Jewish ceremonial sabbaths are gone, but the Christian Sabbath has been given to us until He returns and the Eternal Sabbath begins. When Jesus stated to the Pharisees that the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath, He was defending me in my desire to have freedom in observing the Christian Sabbath just as much as when He defended His disciples who walked with Him that day in the field. The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. Is he your Lord? Then you should not only observe the Christian Sabbath, but you should delight in it as well. Do not let any man take it from you.