

**Message #8****Mark 2:23-3:6**

If you really want to anger the religious Pharisees, do something on Sunday that their religious traditions forbid. Some Sunday afternoon go for a boat ride or go out to eat in a restaurant or help your neighbor fix his car or stop at a store to pick up some medicine or a few groceries. Order a pizza or let the children play outside. Just do something that doesn't agree with their codes and you will get the same response that Jesus did.

This is the kind of response He got. The Pharisees were a pious religious group of leaders who were very strict in their conformity to their man-made legal codes. They were given to carefully studying the O.T. law and enforcing their interpretations on the people.

When it came to the Sabbath Day observances, the Pharisees were scrupulous. They made up rules for people to follow and they expected that they would follow them. In fact, they had strict penalties for not following them.

What happens in this section is that Jesus does a couple of things on the Sabbath Day that infuriate the Pharisees to the point they want to destroy Him; they want to kill Him. He did not conform to their Sabbath Day rules and they wanted Him gone.

Now let us remember that Jesus has told His disciples to follow Him and He will make them become "fishers of men." So all of this is not only truth pertaining to Jesus Christ, but it is part of their training. What they learn here is this:

**WHEN YOU ARE FOLLOWING JESUS CHRIST AND THE WORD OF GOD AND DOING THE WILL OF GOD, YOU WILL BE HATED BY RELIGIOUS PHARISEES BECAUSE YOU DO NOT CONFORM TO THEIR MAN-MADE SABBATH DAY RULES, TRADITIONS AND CODES.**

Jesus Christ was controversial. What He did and said did not square with Pharisaical hypocrisy. Now in this text there are two main actions that Jesus was involved in on the Sabbath Day:

**ACTION #1** – Jesus and His disciples were traveling through a grain field and the disciples were picking some handfuls of grain. **2:23-28**

Now the Sabbath law given by God was that people should not do their normal work on the Sabbath Day. They should take a day and rest, reflect and reverence God. It was to be a day to be enjoyed, not a day to be schizophrenic because you didn't know if you could even breath.

The Jewish Rabbis had come up with a list of 39 things in the Mishnah you could not do on the Sabbath Day because they classified it as work. When it came to food, they broke it down into eleven things you could not do on the Sabbath Day with their own definitions:

- 1) You could not plant—do anything to promote plant growth—(i.e. no water, fertilizer).
- 2) You could not plow—make the soil ready—(i.e. drag a chair leg to soften soil).

- 3) You could not reap–sever any plant from its source of growth (cannot climb tree because you might break a branch).
  - 4) You could not gather–gather any earth-grown material at its original place (gather apples or berries in orchard).
  - 5) You could not thresh–remove desirable inner from undesirable outer (i.e. squeeze juice).
  - 6) You could not winnow–sort undesirable from desirable by using the wind or air.
  - 7) You could not sort–remove undesirable part from desirable part (i.e. filter water to purify).
  - 8) You could not grind–reduce size of earthborn thing (i.e. cut vegetable for salad).
  - 9) You could not sift–use any utensil to sort anything.
  - 10) You could not knead–use liquid to make something semi-solid.
  - 11) You could not cook–change temperature by heat–no baking, cooking, frying.
- (Rabbi Dovid Ribiat, *Activities Prohibited on Shabbat*, pp. 4-10)

**Verse 23** says that Jesus and His disciples were “passing through” literally “passing by or beside” a cornfield and they were picking some corn and eating it. **According to the Pharisees man-invented interpretations, they were guilty of “reaping” (above #3). They severed grain or corn from its original plant source.**

According to **verse 24**, these Pharisees were really upset because they were picking a little grain and corn for lunch and eating it as they walked along. This was something they considered to be unlawful even though it was not unlawful. The truth is their teaching about what you could not and could do on the Sabbath Day went way beyond what God revealed in His Word. They were mad that Jesus was not conforming to their faulty interpretations. They would much rather have these people go hungry and follow their man-made rules than give them something to eat.

Now we know having gone through Exodus that it was a violation of the law to work on the Sabbath Day (Ex. 20:8-11), which could be punished by death (Ex. 31:14). However, walking through a field and picking some corn or grain with your hand is not actual work.

This was not a violation of the O.T. Law. In fact, **Deuteronomy 23:25** says in the O.T. law that if you were traveling through a grain field, it was perfectly legal for you to pick some grain to eat. You could not harvest any grain with a sickle, but you could pick some in your hand and eat it. **So what Jesus and His disciples were doing was perfectly consistent with the O.T. law, but it was not consistent with the man-made rules and interpretations of the Pharisees.**

**The problem with religious Pharisees is that they always love their rituals more than the Word of God and more than the people.** To Pharisees, religious faith conforms to their humanly devised standards.

Now this is a more important theological point than most people realize. Jesus Christ is putting an end to the O.T. law, including the Sabbath Day traditions. But most do not understand that point and most still don't today.

In **verse 25** Jesus begins by basically saying have any of you great religious leaders ever read your Bible? Have you great religious scholars ever read the Old Testament? Have you ever read I Samuel 21:1-6 and a story about King David?

David and his companions were on the run from Saul and they came to the tabernacle that was located in Nob, which is not far from Saul's palace. They fled without food or weapons. The tabernacle had originally been set up at Shiloh (Josh. 18:1; I Sam. 1:9) but it apparently had been moved to Nob after Shiloh was destroyed (I Sam. 4:2-4; Jer. 7:12).

David went into the tabernacle and requested some food during the time when Abiathar was the high priest. Now when you read I Samuel 21:1-6, we learn that Abiathar's father, Ahimelech, was actually the high priest who gave David the bread. According to I Samuel 22:20, Abiathar was the son of Ahimelech.

Now when Jesus refers to this, he mentions Abiathar as the high priest which zeroes in on the one who was very loyal to David (I Sam. 22:22-23). Ahimelech had been killed because he helped David, and Abiathar was the true high priest who was left.

Now what happened was David went into the tabernacle and wanted some food and the only food that was available was the consecrated bread in the tabernacle. There were twelve loaves of bread baked of fine flour that was set out before the Lord each Sabbath Day on the table in the Holy Place.

When the fresh loaves were brought out, the priests would eat the ones from the previous week (Lev. 24:5-9; Ex. 25:30; 35:13; 39:36). Now Jesus says in **verse 26** that according to the strict law, David and his men were not permitted to eat this bread, only the priest could eat it. But the priest gave David the bread and Goliath's sword.

So David technically broke the law physically. But the reason he was forced to eat this bread is because of the evil Saul who had killed the priests and was out to kill David. Now of course the reason Jesus brings this up is to show that their dedication to their strict religious rituals was never the intent of the O.T. law. Paul would say the purpose of the O.T. law was to show we are all guilty.

After Jesus told these Pharisees this Bible story, he made two statements that would have been staggering to the Pharisees and would have rocked their theology:

**Statement #1** - The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. **2:27**

Here is a revolutionary statement that would have shocked all Israel—the Sabbath is for man's good. If you check the chronology in creation, man was created first before the Sabbath rest day (Gen. 1:27; 2:2-3). What Jesus is saying is that the Sabbath was given for the good of man and not man for the good of the Sabbath.

Most of the statements we read in the O.T. about the Sabbath Day say it is a holy day for the Lord (Ex. 16:23-27; 20:8-11). However, Jesus is setting forth something that was foreign to these people. Jesus certainly believed that the Sabbath was a holy day for the Lord, but He also knew that it was not a day given for rigid, religious Phariseeism that invented a bunch of man-made rules and traditions.

This statement was not about to make the Pharisees happy. God created the Sabbath Day for human beings. He did not create the Sabbath Day in order for people to become slaves of religious ritual.

The Sabbath Day was a day of rest and renewal and worship. It was a day to not work, and rest the body and mind from normal work and it also was a day to refresh the soul by worship. God did not design the Sabbath Day so a bunch of religious leaders could make up a bunch of rigid restrictions. That is the point of Jesus right here.

Now we are not under O.T. law and we are certainly not under Sabbath Day law. In fact, the Sabbath is nailed to the cross (Col. 2:16). We don't even go to church on the Sabbath Day. We go on the first day of the week. But I do think we may make an application.

It is good for man to take a day off from work to rest, relax, reflect on God and reverence God. It is good for man to take a day to back away from the anxieties of the temporal world and rest and refocus on the eternal God. It is good for man to do this. It is healthy, wholesome and spiritually nourishing. In fact, men and women who don't do this are actually missing out on something that is good for them to do. They are short-changing themselves. But this does not mean you cannot go for a boat ride, bike ride or get a burger.

**Statement #2** - Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. **2:28**

This statement would infuriate the Pharisees. First of all, Jesus is claiming He is the Son of Man. That phrase comes from the book of Daniel that clearly indicates the Son of Man is God who will one day rule the universe (Dan. 7:13-14). Second, He says He is the "Lord" which means I am the One who is the master who has total authority over the Sabbath Day.

**What these leaders should have realized is that Jesus came to put an end to the O.T. Law. John had been clearly preaching this. He taught that the law was through Moses, but grace and truth would come by Jesus Christ (John 1:17).**

What this means is that Jesus is claiming I AM God and the Sabbath Day is about Me. It is about worshipping Me. If I want to take my disciples through a cornfield and have them eat some corn on any day, you would be wise to shut your mouths.

Now Jesus is the Messiah and He is God and He can do whatever He wants on the Sabbath Day. Who do you think makes the grain and corn to grow on the Sabbath Day?

Ronald Kernaghan said that he had been raised in a strict religious home and had a bunch of Sabbath Day rules. He said one time his mother was at his home one Sunday afternoon and was watching his boys play. They were running around and playing and his mother said, “If your grandmother could see what you let your boys do on the Sabbath she would roll over in her grave” (*Mark*, p. 65).

Well this shows you how Pharisaical things had become. We don’t worship on the Sabbath and that grandmother is no longer dedicated to legalism, but in eternity truly grasps grace.

**ACTION #2** – Jesus went to a Synagogue and healed a man on the Sabbath Day. **3:1-5**

According to **verse 1**, Jesus entered the synagogue again and there was a man with a withered hand. The Greek word indicates it was deformed and dried. There was no life in it.

According to **verse 2**, the Pharisees were watching Christ to see what He would do. The word “watching” means they were closely and narrowly and scrupulously observing Him. They were watching Him like a hawk (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 343).

We may recall that Jesus had healed twice before on the Sabbath Day. He cast the demon out of the Synagogue right while He was in the service and also He healed Peter’s mother-in-law on the Sabbath at his home (Mark 1:21-31). Plus, He cast out many demons in synagogues (1:39).

Now the Rabbis debated whether or not you could give any medical attention to anyone on the Sabbath Day. In fact, apparently they even debated whether you could save someone’s life on the Sabbath Day because the Mishnah says, “whenever there is doubt whether life is in danger this overrides the Sabbath” (m. Sabb. 5:1-4). They came up with a rule that said, “In the event that a human life is in danger, a Jew is not only allowed, but required to violate any Shabbat law that stands in the way of saving that person.” They use an illustration of a woman in labor. If a woman is in active labor it was the responsibility to take that woman to the hospital even if it were on the Sabbath Day (*Activities Prohibited on Shabbat*, p. 18)

But the problem here is that this is not life-threatening in any way. The guy just has a crippled hand. Since this man’s life was not in any danger, they would consider any action taken by Jesus to be illegal. These Pharisees would just as soon see this man crippled rather than healed.

Jesus is not intimidated by these vipers. According to **verse 3**, He told the man to get up and come forward.

When the guy came forward, according to **verse 4**, Jesus said to the Pharisees: Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath or harm on the Sabbath; to save a life or kill?” Now He knew the Pharisees wanted to kill Him on the Sabbath Day which they believe is lawful, but they don’t think He has a right to help someone.

Now **verse 5** tells us that Jesus knew what was in their hearts and He was angry and grieved. Mark is very careful to point out the emotions of Jesus in this. Peter was there and he would have seen this. Jesus was literally angry. This is a strong Greek word which has to do with “wrath anger.” This is Divine wrath, righteous anger. This was a very righteous, wrathful anger. Also He was grieving. This was very emotional.

Their hearts were hard. These were hard-hearted religious leaders who did not want the truth of God’s Word and they did not want the grace of God. They would much rather hold on to their man-made religious rules.

They wanted to do harm to Him on the Sabbath Day. Instead of doing something good, they wanted to kill him. These Pharisees are nothing more than self-righteous, religious hypocrites.

So Jesus said, “stretch out your hand” and when the man did, his hand was healed.

Now look at **verse 6—the Pharisees immediately left and they began to try to plot the assassination of Jesus Christ with the Herodian’s.**

The Herodians were a pro-Roman group. These are the people who eventually arrested and beheaded John (Mark 6:14ff). The Pharisees were an anti-Roman group. But they made “strange bedfellows” in wanting Christ dead.

Both of these groups viewed Christ as a major threat and they wanted to get rid of Him.

Jesus really rubbed the religious Pharisees the wrong way: 1) He reached out to sinners; 2) He ate grain on the Sabbath Day; 3) He healed in a Synagogue. They wanted Him dead.

One of the real dangers of rigid legalism is that one can delude himself into believing that God is really satisfied with strict adherence to religious rules.

Religious people who are dedicated to their church or religion more than the Word of God have hard hearts that anger God.