

“The Mercy of Rest”

Mark 2:23-28; Mark 3:1-20

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Opening Prayer

This Lenten season, we have been focusing on the Gospel of Mark with an eye towards the Godly trait of mercy. Mercy, which goes hand in hand with grace and forgiveness, is an integral part of our relationship with the Lord. That is true when it comes to the Ten Commandments as well. Of the ten, this is the one we are looking at today, one that shows up in our readings from Mark. “Observe the sabbath day to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant or your ox or your donkey or any of your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you, so that your male and your female servant may rest as well as you. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day.” That comes from Deuteronomy’s giving of the ten commandments. The fourth commandment, to honor the Sabbath Day, is the longest in terms of sheer text. It is also one of the most important commandments ever given, as is apparent in its inclusion amongst the Ten Commandments. If you want the short description of the Sabbath Day, it is a time set aside to remember and reflect and to rest, it is also a time to trust in the Lord’s provision. While we struggle here in America to take seriously the fourth commandment of the ten, the Israelites did not mess around in the time of Christ regarding it. There were all kinds of added on commands, human made, that tried to flesh out what it was to do work on the sabbath and what it was to remain in “rest” as was commanded. These ranged from the obvious, that you couldn’t harvest your grain fields, to the downright ridiculous, that you could only walk 3000 feet in a day. Beloved, the day of rest was not given to the Israelites and to us to be a burden, it was meant to be exactly what it sounds like... a day of rest and remembrance and worship. In our readings from Mark, Jesus makes this very plain with a few incredibly important statements. “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.” “So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?” If you take to heart

those three statements made by Christ, then you will get all you need to know about God's merciful day of rest.

Our scriptures for today opened with Jesus traveling with His disciples through a grain field on their way to the synagogue. As they were traveling through, the disciples began to pluck a few heads of grain to eat as they were hungry. In the eyes of the Pharisees, the religious leaders of the day, this was unlawful. To eat the grain was fine. There were Levitical laws that allowed for travelers to take handfuls of grain like this to eat. The issue was with it being the Sabbath Day. To pluck the grain and rub it together in one's hands to remove the shell had been decided by the Pharisees to be a form of harvesting. It was forbidden. The irony is that by forbidding this type of plucking of grain, the Pharisaical law had overwritten God's own law about making sure travelers could eat. This is often the condemnation given from Christ towards the religious leaders, that they had laid upon the people much heavier burdens that were not commanded from God, and instead had overwritten the Lord's laws with their own. Jesus rebukes this type of man-made limitation on God's law not by calling them to account for going beyond the Lord's law (that happens later), but for their blatant misunderstanding about what the Sabbath is for. The day of rest is not meant to be a burden, filled with extra rules and regulations and laws, but rather it is to be a day of peace and comfort and remembrance and worship and rest for His people. "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."

The second statement follows the first. Jesus, God in human flesh, is Himself bigger than the Sabbath Day. To someone who thought Jesus was merely a man this would be outright blasphemy. But since we know Jesus is fully God, it is not blasphemy to state that He and His rulings are more important than the Sabbath Day laws. The Lord, not man, has every right to decide what is permissible and what is not on His day. To place extra restrictions on His day of rest beyond what was prescribed by Him is an exercise in folly. Jesus, is Lord of the Sabbath... not the other way around.

Jesus and His disciples in chapter three finally enter the synagogue on that same Sabbath Day. In the synagogue there is a man with a withered hand. The Pharisees, who are already looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, "find" one when Jesus calls the man forward. "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?" The religious leaders, who should have been the first to

shout that the Sabbath Day was for doing good, for worship of the Lord, for rest and healing as prescribed by the Creator, instead harden their hearts and don't answer Him. Jesus is grieved and angered at their hard hearts, and in an act that proves that He is Lord of the Sabbath, proves that the Sabbath is made for man, and proves that it is a day for doing good, Jesus heals the withered man's lame hand. The healing sets into motion what you and I already know comes to pass. The Pharisees and religious leaders leave and begin conspiring with others on how to have Jesus killed. They miss the mark completely, reject scriptural truth, and instead seek to kill the Son of God for daring to perform a miracle on the day that God set aside for the benefit of His people. Beloved, they miss that the day of rest is a day of mercy.

From here Jesus will leave the area and do more miracles, and any who come to Him are healed. Yet, practically speaking, I pray we would take notice of the Sabbath Day. Today it is no different Beloved. We are commanded to take a day of rest, to remain in the Lord, to remember His merciful salvation given to us, and to rest in Him. To quote Vera Schuck, one of our wonderful members, Sunday is there to recharge and refresh our batteries, to set us up for a better week where we are close to God. The Sabbath Day, which for us usually means Sunday, is given to us for our own good. It was never meant to be a day of difficulty or burden, going to church and being around other believers is not to be a burden, but a blessing. It was made for you, not you for it. So with that in mind, I would have you take notice of some of the wonderful benefits that God has placed for you in His day of rest that you are commanded to take.

To end tonight's message, to give you a little food for thought, here are some things both inside and outside of the church that are good that happen when you take a Sabbath Day as Christ describes. Inside the church (ideally), you find yourself closer to the Lord through worship. You hear the Lord's word spoken. You engage in prayer, both individually and communally, over many different things. You actively worship God through communion, through song, through engagement with your fellow believers. You can uplift your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ through prayer and conversation and fellowship. You yourself can be uplifted by being prayed over, communicated with, and loved on. You get to participate in the joys of getting deeper into the word in small groups or Bible study or Youth Group. Much like working out or eating healthy, you leave that time spent with other believers and the Lord refreshed and feeling good. Outside

of the church, if you follow the command to give that day to the Lord, you find yourself with more time with your family/friends. You have time to do things that recharge you for the week. It may be watching the game with your kids, or going on a walk through the park, or working on that favorite project in the garage. You were made to have time to live, and so long as you are not neglecting the Lord's involvement in it or neglecting your family, doing these things is good Beloved. The Sabbath was made for you, not you for the Sabbath. You don't have to be perfect to come to church, you don't have to sit around all day to adhere to the commandment. You were given this gift to rest, to worship the Lord who is Lord of the Sabbath, and do good. Thank the Lord for His merciful day of rest.

Closing Prayer