

Mark 2:23 – 3:6

Self-Righteous Religious People...

Hey good morning church. So good to be here with you today as we continue our time of worship through the Word of God today. Go ahead and open your Bibles, or your Scripture Notebook or your phone or whatever – go ahead and turn to Mark 2:23. Now some of you are thinking – wait a minute Paul we did Mark 2 last week – if that's you, you're right. We started Mark 2 last week, which was the first of 5 incidents that Mark records where the religious guys of the day kind of go at Jesus, and try and take him out. Today we're looking at the last 2 events starting in Mark 2:23 and goes through Mark 3:6.

Now, to set the stage here – remember from last week that Jesus claimed the authority of God (and rightfully so) when he forgave the sins of the paralyzed man – and then to prove to them all that he had authority to forgive sin he told the paralyzed guy to get up, take his mat, and walk. And immediately the brother's walking around.

From there, Mark records calling Levi (aka Matthew). And if you remember from our BLESS series when we talked about E – Eat – remember the super religious dudes got mad that Jesus was eating with sinners and tax collectors.

The 3rd incident is their questioning Jesus about not fasting. Because their concern – if you remember – was controlling people through all kinds of rules and rituals.

Which brings us to the 4th/5th interaction with Jesus – centered on another rule – keeping the Sabbath. Now, this one, the Sabbath, is HUGE in Judaism. Huge may be an understatement. Way back in Exodus, when Moses was leading the people of Israel (the 2nd book of the Bible and page 103 in mine) God blesses the people with a gift of the Sabbath – a day to rest and to worship:

READ Exodus 31:12-17

¹² The Lord said to Moses, ¹³ “Tell the Israelites: You must observe my Sabbaths, for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, so that you will know that I am the Lord who consecrates you. ¹⁴ Observe the Sabbath, for it is holy to you. Whoever profanes it must be put to death. If anyone does work on it, that person must be cut off from his people. ¹⁵ Work may be done for six days, but on the seventh day there must be a Sabbath of complete rest, holy to the Lord. Anyone who does work on the Sabbath day must be put to death. ¹⁶ The Israelites must observe the Sabbath, celebrating it throughout their generations as a permanent covenant. ¹⁷ It is a sign forever between me and the Israelites, for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, but on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.”

Now – we have to see this as a gift of God to His people. So important was this remembering of the Sabbath, that it was punishable by death.

The problem though – isn't the Sabbath – it's a gift of God's grace to us. The problem is that over hundreds of years a bunch of super religious dudes, **self-righteous religious guys took what was good and manipulated it and cruelly used it to control people.** I read this week that it was against the man made Sabbath laws to light a candle or a fire – but it was ok to hire a non-Jew to light the candle or fire for you. I hope you see the irony there!

Even now – orthodox Jews are incredibly strict about the Sabbath. I have a friend that roomed with an orthodox Jewish guy. Dude would unscrew the light bulb in the fridge before the Sabbath starts (presumably to night complete the circuit or light the candle). He would tell my friend like on Friday – “there's this football game I want to watch tomorrow. ESPN at 12:30 – make sure the TV is on and loud on ESPN at that time because I can't turn the TV on during the Sabbath.” Like, just even saying it sounds absurd to me.

So maybe just a small glimpse into the distortion of the Sabbath. Well, Jesus isn't messing around. He knows their hearts – and he's the great heart surgeon – exposing their wickedness, calling them to repent and believe. And in Mark 2/3 we have the 4th/5th interactions here with the religious leaders that Mark records in this section.

READ Mark 2:23-3:6

Lord of the Sabbath

²³ On the Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and his disciples began to make their way, picking some heads of grain. ²⁴ The Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?”

²⁵ He said to them, “Have you never read what David and those who were with him did when he was in need and hungry —²⁶ how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest and ate the bread of the Presence —which is not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests —and also gave some to his companions?”

²⁷ Then he told them, “The Sabbath was made for^[a] man and not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ So then, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

3:1 Jesus entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a shriveled hand. ² In order to accuse him, they were watching him closely to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath. ³ He told the man with the shriveled hand, “Stand before us.”

⁴ Then he said to them, “Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent. ⁵ After looking around at them with

anger, he was grieved at the hardness of their hearts and told the man, “Stretch out your hand.” So he stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

⁶ Immediately the Pharisees went out and started plotting with the Herodians against him, how they might kill him.

The first thing we see is they were mad that Jesus’ disciples were picking grain to eat. Because they presumably were hungry!

V24 Why are they doing what is unlawful?

- They were simply eating and picking grain on the wrong day. But so often **self-righteous religious people are more concerned with others’ actions than their own.**

V25 – Jesus points them to David – the great King of Israel – man after God’s own heart. In 1 Samuel 21 David and his men go to the priest hungry – but the only bread the priest had was called the Bread of the Presence – only a priest could eat it. David wasn’t a priest, neither were his men – but they ate the bread that was reserved for the priest. Not only that, the priest Abiathar allowed for David and his boys to eat up!

And he reminds them in V27 that the Sabbath was a gift to mankind – a gift of God’s grace to them. To stop from working, to rest, to trust that you can accomplish more in 6 days while honoring the Lord by taking the rest that you physically need – more that way than you can accomplish in 7 days of work paying no attention to the Lord or your own body. While we, as Christians, we aren’t under the Sabbath laws – I will tell you the principal behind Sabbathing is extremely important. Taking time each week to rest and to worship. Trusting that a rested soul and body can accomplish more in 6 days than a worn out soul and body can accomplish in 7.

Similar principal here with tithing – giving to the Lord freely of what he’s given to you. Knowing and trusting that bringing to the Lord a 10th of all that you make and earn -

Don’t miss that the Sabbath was a gift of God’s grace to His people. A day to rest and worship. And they took a good gift from a loving and gracious God and turned it into a power play to control and manipulate people.

Self righteous religious people – often take a good gift from God and abuse it, miss the point of it, and worship the gift rather than the giver.

Jesus tells them in V28 that He even has authority over the Sabbath – that He’s Lord of the Sabbath. Well, I can assure you that doesn’t sit well with these grumpy old Pharisees.

Well Jesus goes to the synagogue and there was a man needing to be healed. And it says in V2 they were watching him “in order to accuse him”. Ever feel like someone’s just always watching to see if you mess up? Maybe someone in your neighborhood always looking to see what’s happening wrong at your house. Or someone at work or school or in your home always

watching just waiting to pounce on you. I'm a recovering fault finder by the way. I've been on both sides of that. That's what these guys were doing. They were waiting to accuse him of breaking their rules. **Self righteous religious people love to play the comparison game.** But in contrast – Spirit-filled believers celebrate the work of God in others.

So Jesus asks them this question – is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath – and they were silent. They knew they were wrong – they hated Jesus because he was a threat to them – and their hearts were hardened. **See here that Jesus cared for their souls** – he was concerned for them. It says he was grieved because of the hardness of their own hearts. While they hated Jesus, he was grieved for their spiritual state. **Self righteous religious people are rarely grieved for the spiritual state of others.** They would rather condemn others. But in contrast, Spirit-filled believers deal first with their own sin, then humbly and graciously help others in repentance – seeking restoration rather than condemnation. Because, **Self righteous religious people love to evaluate the motives and actions of others', but rarely look in the mirror to evaluate themselves.**

So Jesus heals this guy. And they got angry. Wanted to kill him. They were threatened by the clear working of God. They weren't interested in the Kingdom of God. Instead they were more concerned with their own kingdoms.

CONCLUSION:

When we read and study a story like this – a lot of times it's easy to point fingers at those guys and think to ourselves: "how could they have been so stupid" or whatever. And I guess that's ok if we start there, but we certainly can't stop there.

1. See that we all are like the Pharisees in many ways

There's a drift in all of us toward becoming a little Pharisee. At some point, all of us have to go deeper and see how we can be just like the Pharisees. In my own life, I gotta tell you, in my own life there's a little arrogant punk just waiting to get out. Jealousy, bitterness, unhealthy desire for control and/or power. And I have to kill it. Like really kill it – or it'll consume me.

2. Honestly check yourself

- Am I concerned with my own rightness, or am I consumed with the greatness of Jesus.

3. Deal ruthlessly with the sin in your own life

- Call it for what it is
- Repent regularly
- Habitual issues – get help (that's what I've done)

4. Reflect Often

- On the grace of God in your own life
- On the grace of God in the lives of people you know

FINALLY – this will only make sense if Jesus has saved you. If you have turned from your sin and are trusting in Jesus alone – that’s the only way the you and I can ever be freed from self-righteous nonsense.