

The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath

Mark 2:23-3:12

Key Verse: 2:28

“So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

In this passage Jesus reveals his identity as the Lord of the Sabbath. Though Jesus has the image of a servant, he rules the Sabbath with the authority of God. To do so, Jesus fought and won spiritual battles. Jesus defended the helpless and served the needy on the Sabbath. Ultimately, Jesus had to give his life to do so. Then the many in Israel recognized Jesus as their Lord and Savior. So, many came to him. Let's accept Jesus, the Son of Man, as Lord of the Sabbath. When we honor Jesus as Lord of the Sabbath we find real rest and peace. We find life in God. On the other hand, those who reject Jesus become Satan's agents.

First, Jesus declares his Lordship (23-28).

One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields with his disciples. The disciples were hungry. Perhaps they had skipped breakfast; they frequently missed meals as they traveled. In their hunger, the kernels of grain began to look very delicious, like loaves of freshly baked bread with butter and jelly on them. Unconsciously the disciples' hands extended to pick heads of grain. Then, suddenly, some Pharisees popped up and said to Jesus, “Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?” They wanted to arrest the disciples and take them to prison, or at least give a serious ticket for Sabbath violation.

The Pharisees regarded picking grain as harvesting, therefore as working on the Sabbath. They judged the disciples as guilty. However, their basis was their own interpretation of the Sabbath law. In this way, they condemned many ordinary people with their man-made interpretations. They strongly emphasized the negatives of God's word without truly understanding the positives. In that sense, they were like the devil in Genesis 3, who exaggerated, “You must not,” and omitted, “You are free....” They lost sight of who God really is. They had a reductionist view of man. Rather than seeing man as a great being, made in the image of God, they saw man like a rat in a maze. They were more concerned about enforcing legalistic ideas than loving God or loving man. With this mindset, they attacked the disciples to discredit Jesus.

How did Jesus deal with the Pharisees? First of all, Jesus taught them that God is not legalistic. Jesus referred to a specific incident in 1 Samuel 21:1-6, when David ate the consecrated bread which was lawful only for priests to eat (25-26). David was a man after God's own heart, the great King of Israel, and the foreshadow of the Messiah. 1 Kings 15:5 says, “For David had done what was right in the eyes of the Lord and had not failed to keep any of the Lord's commands all the days of his life—except in the case of Uriah the Hittite.” (David's act of eating the consecrated bread is not mentioned here.) God did not see David with legalistic eyes. Rather, God wanted to protect

David and to feed him when he was hungry. However, when David violated the Ten Commandments, God severely punished him. God is holy, but God is not legalistic. God was not upset at the disciples for eating heads of grain on the Sabbath. This was petty legalism on the part of the Pharisees. Jesus defended his disciples with the word of God so they could find rest on the Sabbath instead of condemnation.

Jesus also restored to the people the true meaning of the Sabbath. Look at verse 27. “Then he said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.’” In the clutter of detailed rules derived by the Pharisees, the original purpose and meaning of the Sabbath had been lost. With this one word, Jesus restored to them God’s purpose for the Sabbath (Gen 2:3; Ex 20:8-11). God did not give the Sabbath to burden man. God gave the Sabbath to bless man. The Sabbath is a gift from God, a day of rest to restore his body, mind and spirit after a week of hard work. It was not given to oppress man, but to edify and heal and encourage man. As someone said, “Rest stops are needed in the rhythm of the universe.” We should not feel burdened by the Sabbath. We should realize the privilege of the Sabbath and eagerly come to our Father God who wants to give us true rest and peace.

Most importantly, Jesus taught that he is the Lord of the Sabbath. Look at verse 28. “So the Son of Man is Lord, even of the Sabbath.” Jesus refers to himself as “the Son of Man.” This is a messianic title that is rooted in Daniel 7:13,14, which says, “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.” The Son of Man is the Lord of all mankind—all peoples of all nations. As the Lord of mankind, Jesus is also the Lord of the Sabbath. So Jesus can use the Sabbath as he sees fit. After his resurrection, Jesus appeared on the first day of the week, “the Lord’s day,” and established Sunday for Christian worship. We do not call Sunday “the Sabbath,” but “the Lord’s day;” yet it functions similarly. It is the day to worship Jesus and find rest.

Jesus can give us true rest. To do so, Jesus subdues the powers that cause strife and unrest to mankind. One is the power of evil spirits. Jesus has authority to drive out evil spirits (Mk 1:25,26). Another is the power of sin. Jesus has authority on earth to forgive sins (Mk 2:10). Finally, there is the power of death. Jesus has the power to give eternal life (Jn 5:24). Only Jesus can give us true and lasting peace. Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath.

Then we must examine our attitude toward our Lord and toward the Lord’s day. Why do we come to church on Sunday? We come to meet Jesus and restore our love relationship with him. We come to listen to the word of God and pray. It is good to refrain from mundane activities to worship Jesus from our hearts. It is good to turn off our cell phones, computers and televisions for a while. When Mother Barry was a college student, she decided not to study on the Lord’s day, but to worship, read the Bible and pray. Her soul found rest, and her grades improved. Even though Dr. John Jun travels a lot, he does not travel on the Lord’s day. Instead, he has worship service by any means. When we honor Jesus on the Lord’s day, Jesus blesses us and gives us rest.

Eric Liddle was a world class sprinter who represented Scotland in the 1924 Paris Olympics. Eric trained intensely for over a year and was a favorite in the 100-yard dash. However, the first qualifying heat was on a Sunday. Eric believed that it would dishonor the Lord for him to run on a Sunday. So he made a very costly decision to forfeit the race. He seemed to give up a gold medal. But to him, it was more important to honor Jesus as Lord. God used his decision of faith to inspire many to honor the Lord on Sunday. At the same Olympics, Eric was able to compete in the 400-yard race. No one expected him to do well. Just before the race began, a fellow Christian handed him a note, quoting the word of the Lord from 1 Samuel 2:30, "Those who honor me I will honor..." Eric ran the race of his life and won the gold medal.

Dr. Abraham Kim was an officer in the Korean army. In 1978 he went to Oregon State University to study for a Ph.D. in ocean engineering. His main purpose was to be a missionary. He spent his weekends preparing the Sunday worship service, especially the Sunday message. Then his advisor was unhappy, thinking that Dr. Kim should work 24/7 on his Ph.D. One day he challenged Dr. Kim to give up Sunday worship service or be dismissed. Dr. Kim decided to honor the Lord by keeping his Sunday worship service. He was dismissed. God was pleased by his faith and blessed his ministry, raising three leaders. Moreover, the Lord opened another way for him to study. He found an advisor who accepted all of his work and enabled him to finish his Ph.D. on time.

Throughout the USA and Canada there are many house churches. Though husband and wife are busy just to survive, they give first priority to having Sunday worship service in their homes. They prepare the word of God diligently and serve others sacrificially. They may look small, but they are giants in the spiritual world. Their good spiritual influence brings the Lord's blessing to their families and to this nation. We must think seriously about our attitude toward the Lord and the Lord's day. Frankly, some of us need to improve. Some come to worship service late, poorly dressed. Some sit in obscure places and daydream. Some do not prepare a proper offering. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. Let's do our best to honor Jesus by honoring the Lord's day.

Second, Jesus demonstrates his Lordship (3:1-6).

Jesus not only declared, but demonstrated with power that he is Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. We can imagine how much this man suffered from his disability. He could not work properly; perhaps he needed public aid. He must have been self-conscious, doing his best to hide his deformity. In his shame, his inner man began to shrivel also. He was nearly a social recluse. He must have sat in the back of the synagogue almost unnoticed. But this time, the Pharisees took great interest in him and escorted him to the front.

The Pharisees watched carefully to see if Jesus would heal the man. If so, they would immediately charge Jesus with "healing on the Sabbath." Jesus knew this. Jesus could have avoided the controversy by healing him later. However,

Jesus wanted to make a point: Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus would not be frightened or coerced; Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus told the man with the shriveled hand, “Stand up in front of everyone.” The atmosphere grew tense. Onlookers knew that a showdown had come. The man must have felt somewhat helpless, caught in a struggle bigger than himself. He had to make a decision to stand up or not. Something about Jesus’ words moved his heart. He felt the love of Jesus and the holiness of God in Jesus. He knew it was right for him to stand with Jesus.

Look at verse 4. “Then Jesus asked them, ‘Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?’” Jesus’ question made the issue simple and clear. It was really all about motive. The law of the Sabbath could be used for good or for evil. There is no “neutral” in the spiritual world. There are only two sides: good and evil; God’s side and Satan’s side. God is the giver of life. Satan is the destroyer of life (Jn 8:44). Jesus, with the Spirit of God, wanted to save life. These Pharisees, the incarnation of Satan, wanted to kill.

Here we learn that spirit and motive is most important. God made man with the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, the breath of life. This Spirit enables a man to do good and to be a blessing. Without the Spirit of God, a person is filled with evil spirits. Such people cannot please God, no matter how well they know the law. We must have the Spirit of God, the Spirit of life (Ro 8:2). This is more important than what we know.

The answer to Jesus’ question was obvious, but the Pharisees were not going to answer. They were unconditionally unrepentant. They were driven to eliminate Jesus at any cost. They should have been the conscience of the nation, but they had no truth in their hearts. So they could say nothing. Their silence was deafening.

Look at verse 5a. “He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’” Jesus was angry because the Pharisees intentionally hardened their hearts. Then they became vile instruments of Satan who were willing to plunge their nation into darkness. Later, they would crucify Jesus. Jesus knew this. Yet Jesus did not draw back. Jesus pressed forward as a conquering king. Jesus would honor and glorify God on the Sabbath at the cost of his life. Jesus would rescue one helpless man on the Sabbath at the cost of his life. This same life-giving spirit compelled Jesus to die on the cross for the sin of the world (Mk 10:45).

Look at verse 5b. “He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.” Jesus spoke, and it was done. This was clearly and obviously the work of God. The bright light of God’s love and healing grace overpowered Satan and his agents. They could not remain in the synagogue, but went out, like cockroaches exposed to light. They gathered again in secret places with the Herodians, who were their arch-enemies and ungodly men. They began to plot to kill Jesus. They had been completely devoured by Satan. This happens to those who oppose Jesus.

Let’s think for a moment about the man who was healed. It was not easy for him to stretch out his shriveled hand. No one wants to expose his weaknesses publicly. But he did so when he believed the love of Jesus. He trusted Jesus in a crisis. As he stretched out his hand, it was completely restored. This was the beginning of a new life for this

man. He could once again work hard to support his family. He could hug his wife with two strong hands, as a husband should. He could teach his children how to play baseball, not only soccer. More than that, he knew the love and saving grace of Jesus. He would never again have to withdraw and live in the shadows of darkness. He could live with confidence in the love of Jesus. Jesus gives healing and everlasting victory to those who trust in him. Let's stretch out our hands to Jesus when we pray today.

Third, Israel recognizes her Lord and comes to him (7-12).

News about Jesus spread rapidly all over the nation. Suffering people rejoiced that the oppressive power of the Pharisees had been broken. They rejoiced that the Lord Jesus had come in power to heal and save. When Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, a large crowd from Galilee followed him. Soon, large crowds came from Judea, Jerusalem and Idumea in the south, the regions across the Jordan to the east, and from Tyre and Sidon in the northwest. They were so eager to touch him that they pushed forward forcefully. Jesus was more popular than any athlete or rock star. The disciples had to prepare a small boat for his protection. Jesus healed all diseases and drove out evil spirits. People who had long been oppressed found the love of God, healing, and true freedom in Jesus.

Here we see that when the people of Israel found their Lord who could heal them, they came to him in great numbers. But now there was another problem. There were so many people and only one shepherd, Jesus. From now on, Jesus would begin to raise his disciples as shepherds like himself who could serve their suffering people.

In this passage we learned that Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. We must come to Jesus on the Lord's day. We must recognize him as Lord and honor him and worship him with all our hearts. Jesus forgives our sins, heals our diseases, and drives out evil spirits. Jesus gives us real rest and peace. Let's pray for our people to honor Jesus on the Lord's day and be blessed by God.