**JESUS IS LORD OF THE SABBATH**

***Mark 2:23-3:6***

***“So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” (2:28)***

In the previous passage, we learned that Jesus is man’s true source of joy and that we can have this joy when we become new wineskin-like people. Today’s passage teaches us about rest. The world is enveloped in fear due to conflicts, violence, and instability. People want peace and rest. But where can we find true rest? In response to this question, Jesus proclaims that he is Lord of the Sabbath. Let’s think about what this means to us.

1. **The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath (2:23-28)**

Look at verse 23. ***“One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain.”*** It was about April or May, the time of year when barley and wheat were ripe in Palestine. Jesus was going through the grainfields with his disciples. Jesus and his disciples were probably heading to Synagogue. In today’s terms, it was Sunday morning before worship service. To attend worship service, we prepare ourselves with enough breakfast and good clothes. However, since Jesus and his disciples lived off of the support of others, that morning, without necessary provision, they must have fasted unintentionally. As they walked, the young disciples were hungry and began to feel dizzy. While they walked through the grainfields, it was like passing by a bakery with fresh bread. So they began to pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hands and eat them.

Then suddenly some Pharisees popped up from among the stalks of grain and confronted Jesus, ***“Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?” (24)*** The religious leaders carefully spied on Jesus and his disciples’ every move in order to accuse them. What was their accusation? Theft? No! In the Law of Moses, God allowed the poor to pick kernels with their hands from their neighbors’ field as long as they did not put a sickle to the standing grain (Dt 23:25). In the Law, God indeed revealed his love and care for the hungry and needy like the poor, widows, or travelers. From their point of view, however, the Pharisees charged that Jesus’ disciples had harvested grain, something forbidden on the Sabbath (Ex 34:21). They regarded the disciples’ picking the heads of grain as reaping, rubbing them between their palms as threshing, and blowing away the chaff as winnowing.

What was Jesus’ answer to them? Look at verses 25-26. ***“He answered, ‘Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.’”*** The Jews showed great respect for David and the high priesthood. So Jesus helped the Pharisees from the account of 1 Samuel 21:1-6. Out of his jealousy, King Saul plotted to kill David. Noticing the scheme, David fled with his companions. It was urgent, without any necessary preparation to travel. He and his men were in great hunger and need as they arrived at the house of God where the high priest ministered. Upon David’s request, the priest gave him the bread that had been dedicated to God and that only priests were allowed to eat in the sanctuary area (Lev 24:5-9). David ate the bread and gave some to his companions. We know that both the high priest and David were men of God who respected and obeyed the Law more than anyone else, but they understood God’s heart as well as the spirit of the Law. What is God’s heart? In Matthew 12:7, at the same event as today’s passage, Jesus teaches, *“If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent.”* Mercy for the hungry and needy is God’s heart and the spirit of the Law and of the Sabbath.

Therefore, Jesus says in verse 27, ***“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”*** Jesus teaches that the Sabbath was made for man’s needs. Out of his great love and mercy for mankind, God gave us the Sabbath. The term “Sabbath” comes from the Hebrew word for “rest.” God created the universe in six days and rested on the seventh day. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy (Ge 2:2-3). Do you think God needs rest? No! God did this to set an example for man and give us rest. Man needs rest, physically, mentally, and spiritually.

During the past century, communist leaders tried to change the traditional cycle of six days of work, one day off in hopes of achieving higher productivity. They tried various cycles like 7 and 1, 8 and 1 and even 10 and 1. The result was that no other cycle made workers produce more than the 6 and 1 cycle. So Sundays were observed even in communist countries like the Soviet Union.

But the Sabbath is about far more than a break for physical rest. It is a day to feed our spiritual need. It is a day to remember God’s creation and salvation (Ex 20:8-11; Dt 5:15). It is a day to reflect on God’s almighty power, provision, protection, and guidance. As we reflect on God’s love and power, we praise, give thanks and worship him. We also rejoice in God’s grace, confessing our sins and receiving forgiveness. It is a day to let go of all our anxieties by trusting in God and enjoy fellowship with our eternal Father and the people God has given to be with us. The Sabbath is a marvelous gift and blessing from God. What a wonderful privilege and grace that we have the Sabbath day! To secure this blessed day for us, God said in the Fourth Commandment: *“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy” (Ex 20:8).* This is God’s command not to restrict our freedom but to give us true freedom and rest. The Sabbath is truly made for man as a gift from God. Therefore, if we cherish this privilege and keep the Sabbath with holy reverence, we continue to taste the joy of the kingdom of God, where true rest is.

In Jesus’ day, however, observance of the Sabbath had become largely external and formal, and there was more concern for the letter of the law than for the needs of people. When the Jewish religious system lost the true meaning of the Sabbath, it became legalistic and dead. The Pharisees did not rest on the Sabbath. They watched Jesus and his disciples like religious police. On the Sabbath, they had no love of God in their hearts. They had no compassion for the hungry disciples. Their grounds for accusation were far from the heart and mind of God. In this moment, Jesus claims his authority to correct their error and restore the true meaning of the Sabbath. Look at verse 28. ***“So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”*** Let’s think about a few lessons we can learn from Jesus’ proclamation.

First, Jesus is the Creator God. In the first chapter of the Bible, we read that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth through his words and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Here, the Hebrew word for God (*Elohim*) is plural but always takes singular verbs. God exists as three Persons – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and they always work together in one will as the perfect One. After completing his creation work, God instituted the Sabbath to give rest to man. The Creator God is the Lord of the Sabbath. By saying, ***“So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath”*** Jesus reveals that he is God the Son who created the universe and made the Sabbath for man together with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He claims his deity in order to help the Pharisees and the world to know the true meaning of the Sabbath.

Second, Jesus is the Giver of the Sabbath (rest). Jesus said, ***“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”*** Jesus proclaims, “I made the Sabbath for you, but you lost the Sabbath due to your sins. So I came to restore the Sabbath for you.” Here Jesus reveals the love of God. God has great compassion and mercy on man’s fallen state. He knows that we all went astray like sheep and became restless wanders apart from him. God sent his Son to restore his rest to us. How does Jesus restore this rest? Once John the Baptist cried out as he saw Jesus coming toward him. *“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn 1:29).* Jesus takes away our sins. Sin deprives us of our peace and joy. It breaks our relationships with God and others. But as we bring our sins to his cross and confess to him, Jesus washes away all our dirty sins by his blood shed on the cross and gives us peace and rest.

In addition to our sin problems, Jesus also takes away all our life problems. He invites each of us, *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Mt 11:28-29).* Jesus asks us to come to him by faith, bringing all our problems that make us weary and burdened. He then promises that he will give us rest. Every Thursday evening, we bring our church’s trash cans from the enclosure to the end of the driveway because every Friday morning, city workers come with their big garbage truck. Without exception, they take away the heavy and smelly garbage from the cans as long as we put them there. Then the trash cans become very light and clean as we bring them back. Likewise, while living in this world, we may have many burdens like school studies, hardships at work, worries about the future, or financial concerns. Or they may be emotional pain or an unforgiving heart in various relationships. Oftentimes we may struggle with a sense of failure, low self-esteem, or hopelessness. Parents and Bible teachers are concerned about their children and Bible students. Jesus asks us to entrust all our burdens to him. Then he takes away the burdens and gives us rest. The garbage truck comes only on Friday, but Jesus takes away our burdens whenever we come to him and lay them down before him. We may think that nobody understands our suffering. But our Lord is humble and gentle. He is able to empathize with our weaknesses because he has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin (Heb 4:15). He is always available and cares for us 24/7. Jesus is the source of our true rest.

Third, the Sabbath must be observed to Jesus’ honor. Jesus said ***“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”*** Here we must not misunderstand Jesus’ teaching to mean that we are to be honored or exalted on the Sabbath. The Sabbath was made for us, but we are made for God. We are made for the praise and glory of God. The object of our worship on the Sabbath is God. Jesus’ proclamation, ***“So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath”*** means that Jesus is God and is to be remembered and worshiped on the Sabbath. To give us rest, Jesus, who is in very nature God, humbled himself and made himself nothing by obeying the Father’s will – even death on a cross! Therefore, God the Father exalted him to the highest place so that every knee should bow and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord (Php 2:6-11). God the Father is pleased and glorified as the Son is honored and glorified. We can rightly worship God as we remember Jesus’ death and resurrection, learn from his humility and gentleness and obey him as our personal Lord and King. Only through Jesus can we approach the Father and worship him in truth. As a result, we can have true rest in our souls. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. That is why we Christians now call the Sabbath the Lord’s Day and celebrate the Sabbath on the first day of the week in remembrance of our Lord’s resurrection. Praise God the Father, who gives us true rest through our Lord Jesus Christ, Lord of the Sabbath!

1. **Stretch out your hand (3:1-6)**

Now look at 3:1. ***“Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there.”*** This was another Sabbath day. Jesus attended a local worship service to teach the people, and a man with a shriveled hand was present. According to Luke’s Gospel, it was his right hand that was shriveled (Lk 6:6). These days, handicapped people can have jobs, and they have reserved parking spaces, stairways, and seats. But the situation was vastly different in ancient times. This man couldn’t have a job. He probably made his living by begging. He lost strength and beauty; he lost self-esteem; he lost hope. His life was sorrowfulness itself without peace and rest. This man needed comfort and restoration. But he did not receive a warm welcome in the synagogue. Verse 2 reads, ***“Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath.”*** The Pharisees showed no concern or compassion for this man. They only tried to use him as bait for finding grounds to accuse Jesus.

Jesus could have healed the man after the Sabbath to avoid their trap. Instead, Jesus said to the man, ***“Stand up in front of everyone” (3). Then Jesus asked them, “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they remained silent (4).*** Jesus exposed the wickedness of the religious leaders who were doing evil on the Sabbath by seeking an opportunity to kill Jesus. ***He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, “Stretch out your hand” (5a).***

Jesus was deeply concerned for the man and wanted to restore him so that he might work hard for the glory of God. The man might have hidden his shriveled hand under his robe as much as he could. But Jesus helped him to stand before everyone and expose his shriveled hand. The man obeyed and stood up overcoming his self-consciousness. As Jesus commanded, ***“Stretch out your hand,”*** he stretched out his shriveled hand by faith. What happened? His hand was completely restored (5b).He must have praised God with his restored hand and arm, hugged Jesus with tears and shaken hands with others joyfully. By healing the man, Jesus called him out of the darkness of sorrow and despair and into the wonderful light of his grace. By this Jesus proved that he is Lord of the Sabbath, who came to give man rest, restoration, and new life.

Each of us may have some shriveled element in our own lives. It may be shriveled love, hope, or courage. Whatever it may be, Jesus sees our weaknesses with the eyes of a docotor. We don’t need to be ashamed of our weak points before Jesus or people. Jesus wants to heal us and give us restoration. So he says, ***“Stretch out your hand.”*** May God grant us faith to stretch out our shriveled hands to Jesus and experience his mercy and grace!

The man received Jesus’ Sabbath blessing and went home as a new creation in Christ (2 Co 5:17). People witnessed the wonderful work of God on the Sabbath. But ***the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus (6).*** This teaches us what we need to do more actively on the Sabbath. Rather than doing evil like the Pharisees, we need to see our brothers and sisters’ needs and care for them so that they might be healed and restored in Christ. Out of mercy and compassion, we can invite weary and tired souls to our worship service and bless them to be refreshed through Jesus Christ, Lord of the Sabbath.

Today, we learned about the true meaning of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a marvelous gift and blessing from God for man’s rest. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath, who can give us true rest and restore us. On the Lord’s Day, we can come to Jesus bringing our life’s concerns and entrust them to his care. We need to remember the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus, who died and rose again to free us from the power of sin and death and give us true rest in this life and forever. Remembering God’s love and the riches of his grace in Christ, we can praise and worship him and enjoy the beauty of his creation with our brothers and sisters. May God help us to actively participate in Jesus’ healing and restoration work with God’s heart and mind!