

## **"Pssst! Would You Like 7 Extra Weeks of Vacation?"**

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

**4 February 2018**

Now, before we go any further in Mark, I have to tell you something that Mark just assumes that you and I know. I ran out of time to share it in the last few sermons, so I kept cutting it out of my manuscript, but we can't go any further in Mark without talking about this. We're going to get some insight today into what it was like in Jesus' day.

What modern day Bible readers may not know is that there was a big difference between the northern and southern parts of Israel during Jesus' day. Of course, we should not be surprised by this, as there are cultural differences between New York and Florida and Texas and California and Alabama and Wisconsin. And there are different accents in all of those places. Things are different. Cultures are different. And differences can make things messy.

And Mark expects us to know this as we read his gospel. In fact, his narrative is moving toward Jesus, who is from Nazareth, in the north, clashing with the religious leaders in Jerusalem, who are from the south. Jesus was not just different from the religious leaders because He was the Son of God, He was different in the way He spoke- *He had a northern accent*. He was from what was considered a "podunk" area. His cultural upbringing was different from those in the south. So we have to keep this in mind as we read Mark's gospel.

\* INSERT SLIDE OF PALESTINE IN THE TIME OF JESUS

You can see on this map that the town that Jesus is from is in the north. At the top of the map, Nazareth has the star by it. And the arrow points to Capernaum, which is where Jesus lived after He launched his ministry. And at the bottom of the map, you will find Jerusalem, where that star is. And then you have Samaria, which is in the middle.

Mark just assumes that we know that there were cultural differences between each of these geographical sections. Up north, where Jesus was from, it was a mixed area: you had believers living in close proximity to heathens. There were plenty of large pagan cities in the area surrounding the more conservative Jewish villages of Nazareth and Capernaum. And Galilee, in the north, and Judea, in the south were separated by Samaria, which sat in between them. And Samaria was an area which was made up of half-Jews, which just added to all the cultural differences. So the Judeans in the south despised their northern cousins and saw them as "backwoods rednecks" who lacked sophistication and they considered them more "worldly" because of the influence of the surrounding Greek cities.

And in the north, the Galileans spoke Aramaic, the common language that everyone spoke, but they had a certain "twang" to their accents. Think of maybe somebody from Alabama or Georgia. So the Judeans made fun of their northern cousins for being "rednecks." This is why, when Jesus was arrested and Peter denied knowing Jesus, those who heard Peter speak knew that he was a Galilean- *because of his Podunk Galilean accent* (Mark 14:70).

The Judeans in the south also despised the northern Galileans because they thought they were too lax in their commitment to the Lord. After all, those in the north lived about 70-80 miles away from the temple in Jerusalem. If they were really serious about serving Yahweh, why did they live so far away from the temple? And why did they live so close to all those pagan cities up north?

So a Jew from Galilee in the north, visiting Jerusalem in the south, though among his Jewish brothers and sisters, was still out of place. He was as much a foreigner as a Texan ordering pasta while visiting Jersey Shore. His accent would give him away as one of the rednecks from up north in Podunk, Galilee- those Jews who aren't that serious about God and lack *"a certain sophistication."*

This is the cultural backdrop and this is where Mark's gospel is headed: this redneck rabbi named Jesus, from up north will not just have an accent and lack a certain sophistication, He's from an area that's not too serious about God because they are surrounded by pagan cities. And to top it all off, this redneck rabbi will claim to be the Son of God, the Messiah, the Savior that the nation has been waiting for all these years.

That's why in John's gospel, when the disciples tell Nathanael that they have found the Messiah, Jesus from *Nazareth*, Nathanael says, *"Can anything good come from Nazareth?"* (John 1:43-46). Mark has structured his narrative around a geographical framework dividing the north and the south, culminating in the confrontation of Jesus from Galilee and the religious establishment of Jerusalem. Mark's gospel is moving toward an all out war between Jesus from the north and religious leaders in the south. And if we

read Mark without this background, without this understanding, then we will miss Mark's point: This is the story of Jesus of Nazareth."

So this is gonna make for a good story. This is gonna be a series that pulls you in and makes you want to binge-watch it. Mark wants us to know that Jesus has a hometown. He has roots. He has a history. He's from a Podunk town in the backwoods of Israel and the religious leaders will use this to try and discredit Him.

The Pharisees and the scribes wanted a paint-by-the-numbers Messiah, according to their ideas. And Jesus was not matching up. Who was He? Some redneck Messiah from a Podunk town? Who is He to say that He forgives sin? Why isn't He destroying Rome and leading a revolution to overthrow the government? And why is He hanging out with tax collectors and sinners? Why is He hanging out with Gentiles?

Listen: Be careful that you don't fall into this trap. Be careful that you don't have your own version of Jesus that is paint-by-the-numbers. He can't and won't be molded into the puny versions that we want. Be careful that you don't create your own version of Jesus that promises to give you your best life now. Let the Scriptures paint your picture of Jesus. Only that picture will save and satisfy you in this life and the next.

So we are in the middle of this section in Mark where we have five stories in 2:1-3:6, which display a steady intensification of the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders, particularly the scribes and Pharisees. In the first story, with the paralytic, the antagonism remained largely unspoken- Jesus read their minds and discovered their animosity. And what we saw a few weeks ago with Levi and the tax collectors, and now moving forward, the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees will result in verbal confrontations. And by the time we just get 6 verses into chapter 3, it will lead to a plot against Jesus' life. Their animosity will lead to a very real death threat against Jesus. But we're getting ahead of ourselves.

What we'll see today as we binge-watch Jesus is this-

#### **REST.**

The good news of the Gospel is that God offers us rest. We can rest in the finished work of Jesus on our behalf. No more treadmills trying to earn God's favor. No more working hard at trying to be good enough. All we have to do is rest. And that's good news for weary, exhausted, and beat-up sinners.

LOOK AT VERSE 23...

*One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. And the Pharisees were saying to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?" And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."*

You get the idea at this point in Mark's gospel that the Pharisees are following Jesus around, watching closely to see what He says and what He does. And then it happens one day! They get some dirt on Him. Well, actually, they get some dirt on His disciples, because Jesus never sinned. He never broke any of God's law, He kept all of it. But the Pharisees will take what they can get, so they jump on this chance to see the disciples breaking the Sabbath.

So it's the Sabbath, which starts on Friday evening at sundown until Saturday at sundown, and Jesus and His disciples are walking through the fields, closely followed, obviously, by the Pharisees, and they get hungry. So the disciples just reach out for a snack and pluck some heads of grain. No biggie. Part of the culture at the time was that you could grab a handful of someone else's grain as long as you didn't fill up a wheelbarrow. So what they were doing was fine. Everyone did it. If you were out walking and you didn't have a granola bar or some snack with you, you could grab a handful of someone else's grain to hold you over until dinner. God's word allowed this:

Deuteronomy 23:25

*If you go into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the ears with your hand, but you shall not put a sickle to your neighbor's standing grain.*

What the disciples are doing here was very acceptable. God made a provision for this in His law. It wasn't a big deal. What was a big deal was that this occurred *on the Sabbath* and the Pharisees had all kinds of rules and regulations about what you could and couldn't do on the Sabbath. Of course, God had commanded His people to keep the Sabbath holy and not do any work on it, but the Pharisees took that to a whole other level. As I said last week, the Pharisees elevated their own man-made rules and regulations

up to God's law. And they had all kinds of rules that concerned the Sabbath, specifically what actually entailed "working" on the Sabbath.

The Pharisees came up with 39 things that they considered to be "working" on the Sabbath, for instance: plowing, hunting, butchering, and even tying or loosing knots, sewing more than one stitch, and even writing more than one letter of the alphabet (see *The Mishnah*, "Shabbath"). You couldn't walk more than 1,999 paces (about 800 meters) on the Sabbath or it would be considered work and thus you would be breaking the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment. So playing in the Super Bowl on Super Bowl Sunday would be frowned upon by the Pharisees because you could only go up and down the field about 8x before you met your limit.

You could not set a dislocated foot on the Sabbath or repair a fallen roof. The rabbis tried to come up with a rule for every conceivable thing that might happen. So, if a building fell down, only a certain amount of rubble could be removed to see if there were any victims, dead or alive. If some were alive, they could be rescued, but if someone was dead, you had to leave the corpse in the rubble until sunset.

So you get the idea. These guys were over the top and out of control. They make micro-managers look like saints. And the reason they did this was because they wanted to protect God's law, the Mosaic law. They didn't want to break the 10 Commandments or any of the case laws in the law, so they came up with all of these rules and regulations that they referred to as a "fence." So they built a "fence" around the law.

\* INSERT FENCE AROUND THE LAW SLIDE

The Pharisee believed, *"If we can keep you from breaking the 'laws' on the outside, then you won't break God's laws on the inside."* Our man-made rules will act as a "fence" and keep people from breaking God's law. The Pharisees believed that if people obeyed the "fence" of rules that they set up around the Mosaic Law, then they wouldn't break God's law and therefore would not end up in exile again.

So when Jesus and His disciples are walking through the fields, in the eyes of the Pharisees they are breaking at least 2 rules: walking too far on the Sabbath and plucking grain on the Sabbath. Again, the disciples were not breaking God's law, but they were breaking the man-made laws that the Pharisees had set up.

LOOK AT VERSE 24...

*"Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?"*

Jesus was raised on flannel graphs in Sunday school so he brings up an Old Testament story that the Pharisees knew. Jesus appeals to a time in David's life (1 Samuel 21:1-6) when David and Co. were on the run from King Saul. They had no food, so David entered the holy place (the tabernacle) in search of food. And he asked the priest if they could eat the "bread of presence," which was the 12 loaves of bread that were inside the tabernacle. These 12 loaves of bread were off limits to anyone but the priests, but since David and his men were starving, they ate the bread. Because it was a sanctity of life issue, an exception was made.

And that's what Jesus is saying here. This was an exception to the rule. It would go against the heart of the law to allow someone to starve to death just because they weren't a priest. The human thing to do would be to let someone eat the forbidden bread if they were starving. Again, an exception to the rule based on the sanctity of human life.

But then Jesus gets to the heart of the matter concerning the Sabbath:

LOOK AT VERSE 27...

*And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."*

What Jesus says cuts right to heart of the mindset of the Pharisees: people are not made for Sabbath rules. The Sabbath was actually created by God in order to bless humanity and enhance its well-being. It was a gift, not something given so that we would worry about how many paces we walk. The Sabbath was given by God so that we could be replenished and restored, and rejuvenated and repaired and recalibrated. It was not given to be some religious weight and burden, which is what the Pharisees and religious leaders of the day had done.

Bruce Waltke said, *"The Sabbath... is a reminder that God does not value humans by their ability to*

*produce. We are not machines. We have worth apart from what we produce. It is a difficult lesson.” (An Old Testament Theology, p. 421)*

It is a difficult lesson to learn. As I was meditating on and studying Genesis 1 last week I was struck by this idea: Genesis 1 was written to a people who came out of 400 years of Egyptian slavery. They did not know how to rest. They had to learn how to rest. The Sabbath was a very generous gift of Yahweh given to a weary people who simply did not have a category for “rest.” All that they knew was 400 years of backbreaking labor in Egypt working tirelessly for Pharaoh. All they knew was work, labor. They had to learn how to rest. And we do too. We have to learn what it means to rest, because we’re not good at it. We’re good at go, go, go, go. What we’re not good at is resting. Just look at how you spend your weekends! Go, go, go, go. Do, do, do, do. And what we need more of is-

## **REST.**

Let me give you some good news today. God gave you a gift. God gave you one day a week to get replenished and restored and rejuvenated and repaired and recalibrated! He gave the Sabbath so that you could gather with your brothers and sisters and get re-calibrated with the Gospel! He gave you the Sabbath as a gift to rest- to spend the day worshipping and resting. To save you from running around and exhausting yourself.

John Walton said, *“We recognize his role of Creator God by our observance of the sabbath, in which we consciously take our hands off the controls of our lives and recognize that he is in charge.”* (The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate, p. 123-124)

One day a week you can be reminded, because you, like me, often forget, that Jesus is in charge. One day a week we can take our hands off the controls of our lives and be reminded who is really in charge.

Why would you want to miss it? What Jesus says in verse 27 applies directly to us! The Sabbath is a gift- a gift from a good God who wants you to enjoy His rest- to rest in the finished work of His Son Jesus. And if you take Sabbath rest seriously, God will give you extra vacation days! Did you know that? If you observe the Sabbath, you get extra vacation days! Who doesn’t want that? Jesus offers you extra vacation days! This is proof that God is good! God loves vacation days! Would you like some extra vacation days? Well guess what? The Sabbath offers you that, once a week.

Ray Ortlund says,

*The point of the Sabbath is a dress rehearsal for a future eternity of glad rest in God... But in our frantic modern world, the Sabbath offers wisdom that has lasted since the beginning (Genesis 2:2-3). It is not written on our calendars as much as we are built into its calendar. It seems to be part of the God-created rhythm for weekly human flourishing. If we did set apart one day each week for rejuvenation in God, we would immediately add to every year over seven weeks of vacation— and not for “whatever” but for worship, for community, for mercy, for an afternoon nap, for reading and thinking, for lingering around the dinner table with good jokes and tender words and personal prayers.*  
(<https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/rayortlund/2015/08/13/quietness-of-heart-1/>)

If you observe the Sabbath and you take a day to worship and rest, that adds up to over 7 weeks of extra vacation every year! If that is not proof that God is good, I don’t know what is!

We need the Sabbath. Why? Because we’re all tired. We’re all worn out. We all go and go and go and go and Monday morning comes again and we just want a break. And that’s one reason why we don’t have 10,000 programs here at Grace. We know that life is busy. What we don’t want to do as a church is add to your exhaustion. We limit the programs we do here so that we’re not burdening you and dumping more things on your plate. You’re already busy. You’re already booked tight. You already need a vacation!

And God knew that we would work ourselves to death, so He came up with a vacation plan for humanity: *the Sabbath*. God knew that we would work ourselves to death, so He came up with a plan to give us rest. One day a week we can gather with our church family on Sunday, hear the good news of the Gospel, get recalibrated, and then do it again in 7 days.

Would you like 7 extra weeks of vacation? Celebrate the Sabbath. Come and get connected to the rest of the body and have your memory restored. Come be reminded of who you are in Christ. Come get connected to the rest of the body and be reminded of your true identity. Come to church on Sunday, fellowship in Gospel community, sing your heart out to Jesus, hear the Gospel preached, get refreshed, and then go home and take a nap, read a good book, show mercy to those who need it, linger around the dinner table with good jokes, tender words, and personal prayers. Why miss out on this? Why miss out on the gift of Sabbath rest and renewal? Why give up 7 extra weeks of vacation? Why miss this opportunity

to gather with your church family and hear about Jesus, hear about forgiveness, and hear about heaven, and hear that it is finished?

We all come in here burdened every week and we need to be reminded every week that it is finished. We need to be reminded that God's grace is big enough to cover our mess. We need to be reminded that God does not deal with us according to our sins. We need to be reminded that we have been wildly forgiven.

If you observe the Sabbath and you take a day to worship and rest, that adds up to over 7 weeks of extra vacation every year! Try adding that to your Gospel presentation! Somebody should make a bumper sticker or t-shirt that says,

*"Come to Jesus. He will give you 7 extra weeks of vacation."*

Put that on a t-shirt or a coffee mug and I guarantee you that somebody will ask you about it. Why? Because we're all tired. We're all worn out. We all go and go and go and go and Monday morning comes again and we just want a break. And God knew that we would do that, so He came up with a vacation plan for humanity: *the Sabbath*.

Now, you'll have to *work hard to rest*. I know that sounds strange, but you will have to work hard to rest. You will have to work hard at going to bed early so you won't be tempted to sleep in. You will have to strive to get your family here every week. And if you happen to work on the Sabbath, as some people have to, you need to find another day in the week to rest. We all need rest. We all need Sabbath. Why miss joining your church family where you can be reminded each week that you have to fight to rest! Why miss being reminded each week that you need to strive-

- 1) to rest from trying to earn God's grace
- 2) to rest from busyness
- 3) to rest from worry, to rest from stress about the future

Well, the Pharisees are not done with Jesus. In fact, they are about to hatch a plan to take Him out.

LOOK AT CHAPTER 3, VERSE 1...

*Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man with the withered hand, "Come here." And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.*

So it's another Sabbath day and the Pharisees are following Jesus around again and this time they are in the synagogue to worship and hear from God's word. And the Pharisees see a man with a shriveled hand and they are watching Jesus like a hawk to see if He will try to heal this guy on the Sabbath. They wanted and needed evidence to try to get rid of Jesus, so this was their chance.

What they didn't know, or forgot, is that Jesus- as the Son of Man, as the Lord of the Sabbath, as God incarnate- He knew their hearts and could read their minds. So Jesus called the man over and He straight up asked the Pharisees: *Is it allowed to do good or bad on the Sabbath? Can you save someone's life or take their life on the Sabbath?*

But they were silent. And Jesus was angry with them because their hearts were hard. They, of all people, as the spiritual leaders of the nation, should have been compassionate. But they had hate in their hearts. So Jesus "looked around at them with anger" Mark says. I would love to have seen this! What did His face look like? And then with compassion, Jesus calls the man over and heals him.

Then the Pharisees were done. They had enough. They wanted Jesus dead. They were so blind that they didn't see it! Jesus was to bringing life on the Sabbath and they make plans to kill Him! Is it lawful to save a life or kill on the Sabbath? Jesus saved this man's life, if you will, He restored this man and they want to murder Jesus! Instead of celebrating, instead of rejoicing that this man was healed, they actually go and conspire with the Herodians about how they can kill Jesus. They make plans to murder a man who saved a life on the Sabbath! And they want Jesus dead so bad that they conspire with some other people that they can't stand: the Herodians. Who were they?

The Herodians were Jews who were supporters of Herod, who, as we saw in our Advent series, was a crazy psychotic leader. Herod was a psycho. And the Herodians were Jews who did not like how stuffy the Pharisees were. They wanted to embrace Roman values. They were progressive and liberal and the

Pharisees hated them. But these 2 opposing groups come to gather and conspire to kill Jesus because He is a threat to both. Jesus is a threat to Rome and Herod and the Herodians, who fear that He will take over and rule as the long-awaited Messiah and Son of Man. And Jesus is an obvious threat to the Pharisees because He does not play by their rules. So these 2 enemies come together and start making plans how they can kill Jesus.

The Pharisees demonstrate that religion will wear you out. It will run you ragged. And it will puff you up and anger you because people will not be doing as you expect. And so they start exhausting themselves and working hard to find ways to kill Jesus.

But there's a deeper rest we need. Not just a physical one. We need soul rest. The Pharisees were all about *religion*. The Pharisees mantra was, *"If I perform for God, if I obey, then I'm accepted."* But Jesus comes along and declares the good news of the Gospel, which is completely opposite of religion. The Gospel says, *"I'm fully loved and accepted in Christ, therefore I will obey."* Those are 2 completely different worldviews.

Which one do you live under? What do you believe?

*"If I perform for God, if I obey, then I'm accepted."*

Or, *"I'm fully loved and accepted in Christ, therefore I will obey."*

The Sabbath is one of clearest signs of the gospel: *We accomplish absolutely nothing and God still loves us!* The Sabbath challenges all of our "Do more, try harder" instincts. On the Sabbath we accomplish absolutely nothing, we do nothing, and God still loves us. Yes, we desperately need physical rest. We are exhausted. We're worn out. But we also need a deeper rest. Rest from trying to earn God's favor.

Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath, says to you and me today-  
**REST.**

And Tim Keller says-

*When Jesus says, "I am Lord of the Sabbath," Jesus means that he is the Sabbath. He is the source of the deep rest that we need. He has come to completely change the way we rest. The one-day-a-week rest we take is just a taste of the deep divine rest we need, and Jesus is its source. When Jesus says in effect, "As the Lord of the Sabbath, I can give you rest," what does that mean? When Jesus calls you to rest, he is calling you to take time off, physical and mental time off from work on a regular basis. But there's another level of rest, a deeper level... there's a work underneath our work that we need rest from. It's the work of self-justification. It's the work that often leads us to take refuge in religion. Most of us work trying to prove ourselves, to convince God, others, and ourselves that we're good people. That work is never over unless we rest in the gospel... On the cross Jesus was saying of the work underneath your work— the thing that makes you truly weary, this need to prove yourself, because who you are and what you do are never good enough— that is finished. He has lived the life you should have lived, he has died the death you should have died. If you rely on Jesus' finished work, you know that God is satisfied with you. (King's Cross, p. 42-43)*

And that's what the table before us today is all about. It's about His life, His death. It is finished. Jesus paid it all. And that's what we're going to celebrate as we eat the Lord's Supper. We're going to eat and then rest.

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"Pssst! Would You Like 7 Extra Weeks of Vacation?"

Mark 2:23-3:6

Sermon Study Questions

1. What does it mean that we have to work hard to rest well? Do you find it easy or difficult to rest on the Sabbath? In what areas do you need to slow down, rest, and trust the Lord?
2. Read Matthew 11:28-30. Do you enjoy the rest that Jesus offers? What burdens have you been carrying? What cares do you need to cast on the Lord (1 Peter 5:7)?
3. Where are you trying hard to prove yourself and convince others and God (and yourself)?
4. Which one do you live under? What do you believe?

*"If I perform for God, if I obey, then I'm accepted."*

Or, *"I'm fully loved and accepted in Christ, therefore I will obey."*