

## The Lord of the Sabbath

Mark 2:23-28 | J. Austin Becton | February 2, 2014

This morning we are going to follow Jesus through Mark 2:23-28. We'll be going back a few chapters from last week where we find Jesus and his disciples walking through the grainfields on the Sabbath. So, why are we in this text this morning? Some of the greatest battles in our lives are incited by the tension between our work and rest. Consider the young professional who has been working 70-hour weeks - exhausted - all they want to do is spend their weekend crashed in front of the TV in hopes to gain a little sanity. Or the mother that would love to serve more in Kid's Life but she is exhausted from the workweek and having to deal with their own kids at home. She just needs "some adult time." And, so she steps back from adding anything else to her plate, in hopes of gaining rest. Often we try to solve this tension by performing a balancing act between our work and rest. We seek some sort of variation of the old saying, "work hard, play hard." Mark speaks to this tension. Through this historical example of Jesus, Mark is calling Christians to dissolve the tension by "re-centering" their work and rest, rather than balance it. But how? Let's pray and then take a look.

### Service unto the Law

Jesus has been traveling throughout Galilee, he's gathered together his disciples, cast out demons, healed the sick, preached in homes ransacked with people - even a roof was torn off above his head while preaching. People fought to be near him. One Sabbath day, Jesus and his disciples, who were probably a little tired and hungry from all the stir they had created, were walking through grainfields and the disciples were picking some of the heads of grain, and along came these uptight, religious Pharisees who asked Jesus, "...why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" It's important to note that the Pharisees' concept of Sabbath was centered on the idea of ritual. If they were doing the right things at the right time, they believed themselves to be orthodox and therefore acceptable before God and others. For example, according to the Talmud - which is a sanctioned commentary on the OT Law that added further requirements on the Sabbath - it was forbidden to set a dislocated foot or hand on the Sabbath, or to repair a fallen roof - though it was permitted to be temporarily propped up. And, so these Pharisees would fight to prove themselves, and keep themselves from sin, by adding strict rules that kept them from transgressing the law and helped them to remain "holy" before God. As a result, their service transformed into a service of the law versus a service unto God. It became a self-oriented religion versus a God-centered faith. Their worth was now rooted in their ability to maintain a strict list of religious rules. This is exactly, what we see in the Pharisees when they confront Jesus about his disciples picking the grain. Because of their functional belief that they could please God through their own strength by mustering up enough gumption to perfectly obey the Law they became enslaved to the Law. So, their attention became centered on the Law, rather than on their Lord. And, the law became their god, and as a result they missed God standing right in front of them! As Christians it's all too easy for us to become centered on what WE are doing losing sight of what God is doing. How often do we get so obsessed and overwhelmed with our careers that we throw ourselves into a ridiculous amounts of hours of work each week. "If I can only put in few more hours." "If I can work a little harder." Only to find, that we are left disconnected, exhausted, and, honestly, too disinterested to spend any time in prayer to God. Maybe you started off enamored with Jesus, but over time church has become more about your social interaction with friends than the gospel, living in true community, and being missional. Note that the Pharisees were striving to please God. They weren't trying to defy and anger God; rather they were trying to obey the law in order to honor Him. The Pharisees weren't striving after something that was evil nor was the Law evil, itself. After all Jesus says, "I haven't come to do away with the Law, but to fulfill it." But, we lose sight of God here by looking away from Christ and looking to our work. We serve the law of work to find worth, but we know, deep down, it doesn't work. Working hard and creating good culture - both inside and outside the Church - is a good thing! Working hard to provided for your family, to be a good mom or dad, to care for the poor and marginalized, to honor God are all good and

honorable works! But, when the center moves from Christ onto our work of creating good culture - work becomes the standard, the measuring stick, the basis for our worth instead of Christ the standard who makes us worthy. And, when work becomes the standard it becomes about our performance - our abilities and our success rate - we have to measure up...we have to perform well. You need to put in more hours away from your friends, family, and church to find success in your career. You need to take on more responsibilities to prove that you are as good Christian. You have to work harder to show that you are worthy of your job, relationships, and God. And in the great pursuit of measuring up and proving our worth, we find ourselves emotionally and physically drained and in need of rest. Herein lies the Problem! This is where we begin to feel the tension and need for balance.

### **Rest in the Law of the Sabbath**

When we serve outside of Christ we will seek rest outside of Christ, because “master work and rest” says we need balance. So, whatever we serve is where we will seek rest! This is what the Pharisees end up doing. Instead of serving the Lord and finding rest in him, they served the law, expecting to find balance and “rest” through the rituals of the Sabbath. Your sabbath will be consumed by what you love and value most. The Pharisees loved the law so it consumed their Sabbath. They may have had moments of not having to work, but because of the tension they felt on the Sabbath to uphold the stipulations of the Sabbath...their day of rest was spent. This is often where we can find ourselves. We’ve been working diligently through the week - and even weekend. We’ve put in hours upon hours of studying for school. We’ve been pulled between our life responsibilities and our kids. We just need a break. And so we turn to find a little balance to the hectic week through...a quick weekend getaway or vacation, a couple hours in front of the TV browsing through Netflix, or a quiet, relaxing evening at Hopfields with a freshly tapped, dark golden IPA (actually its been a rough week let’s tack on a few more - “just this once”). But, what happens when we don’t get our weekend getaway, our movie, our quiet evening at Hopfields? What about the vacation that you come back from and think “Man...I need another vacation?” You don’t have patience with your kids. You’re grumpy so you don’t lovingly interact with your neighbor - and especially not your chatty co-worker. You’re too tired to worship with the church, let alone to serve on the Create & Restore team. And so to ensure that we effectively maintain balance between work and rest - and keep our sanity - we have to cut back on some things. “I just need a break from serving in Kid’s Life.” “I just need to distract myself from stresses of life.” “I just need to get away from work for the weekend!” As Christians this often results in us removing ourselves from worship and community, prolonging our lack of perseverance through difficult and trying times. But the same is found in the secular realm - consider the increasing demand for “work-life balance”; for more PTO, flexible scheduling, and working from home. We will work hard but we need you to allow us to balance that with flextime or time-off. Remember the saying, “Work hard, play hard.” Like the Pharisees, we seek rest! We’ve find little fragments of it here or there...we didn’t have to work for a moment...we got a hour of peace and quiet at home. But, what we really desire more and more of is “SABBATH!” Rejuvenation, restoration, perseverance, and joy! But, we are looking in all the wrong places!

### **The Lord of the Sabbath**

But there is GOOD NEWS! The Pharisees have called into questions Jesus’ and the disciples’ commitment and obedience to the Law and the Sabbath. And Jesus responds turning the table upside down! “Have you never read what David did...” Jesus quotes from I Samuel the story of David and his men when they were fleeing Saul and were hungry - and so they entered house of God and ate the bread of the Presence. J.R. Edwards says, “[Jesus] cites David’s violation of the Torah not as an excuse for his action but as a precedent. In making the allusion to David, Jesus is inviting a comparison between his person and Israel’s royal messianic prototype.” Jesus continues, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.” Jesus’ first declaration was that the Sabbath was not instituted in order for mankind to be centered on a list of sabbatical regulations; rather it was instituted as a blessing for

mankind. For us to have a time set aside. Not simply to do nothing, but to look to, reflect on, and enjoy God and the work he's doing! And, boldly declaring his royal, messianic essence as the Son of God Jesus cries, "I am the Lord of the Sabbath!" Jesus is announcing, "In and through me, the Lord of the Sabbath, you will find everlasting rest - not the cheap, temporal rest found in the absences of work - but an everlasting rest that will give you perseverance, renewal, and JOY to press on in holy service towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God found only in ME! Jesus' saying, "Stop looking around and look to me!" You want to really serve and you really want to create good culture? You want to truly find rest? Look to Jesus! He's calling you to "re-center" your work on him. You really want to do well at as a professional, writer, or musician? Don't simply resolve to put in more hours and days of work? Look to JESUS! You really want to serve your family and kids well? It's not about always ensuring your house is spotless and in perfect order, your kids are in bed at exactly 7 p.m., and you have a date night every week. It's about JESUS! Look to JESUS! You really want to create good culture, serve the city and the church? It's not about piling on more and more responsibilities and commitments, trying to barrel through it on your own strengthen to make a difference! Don't look to your own creativity and abilities. LOOK TO JESUS! He's the ONE that came not to be served but to serve, and to give my life as a ransom. He's THE KING SERVANT! You need rest? He's calling you to find rest in him! You are exhausted from the consistent tug-a-war between work and kids? Don't simply plop in front of TV. Look to JESUS! Life has worn you out? Don't simply pull away from God, community, and serving one another! Fall into the arms of JESUS! He's right in front of you. He's crying out with boldness and authority, "I AM THE LORD OF THE SABBATH!" It's not about you finding "balance" between work and play or serving and Sabbath. It's about "re-centering" on Jesus! How quickly we fall prey to the desires and urges in our heart that we can do it ourselves, through our own abilities - that we can blaze our own paths to God! But Jesus is crying out, "NO! No, you can't...**BUT**, I can! And you can come after ME!" Who are you serving? Where do you seek rest? Christ is calling us to turn to him as Lord of the Sabbath! He's declaring, "Through me you will find rest!" The Apostle Paul, he never took time off. "But he's an apostle; a sort of super Christian! Right?" No, he had plenty exhausting days and needs. He was brutally beaten, shipwrecked, tossed in prison, and was constantly on the road to preaching and fighting for the gospel. But he is able to press on because he continually finds his rest in Christ! Matthew 11:28, "Come to ME, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Jesus has pointed the way! He has pointed to himself as the King Servant and the Lord of the Sabbath. He is calling you to look to him in your work, in your service! Will you re-center you career, your responsibilities as a parent, your ambitions and goals on him? Will you find rest in the Him, knowing he, alone, will sustain you? Will you find in him the peace of God, which passes all understanding? It's in Christ that we find peace and joy! It's not about our ability to balance things out. It's about Jesus...He is the true Balance.