

Introduction

1. Do you remember Blue Laws? Do you remember when they were repealed?
 - a. Blue laws in the US mandated the shut down of certain businesses on Sunday.
 - b. You were expected to be in church, to spend time with your family, and to rest.
 - c. These laws weren't all bad, but you can't legislate morality or godliness.
 - d. Most blue laws have been repealed in the US, although some states still ban selling cars, prohibit hunting, and restrict the sale of alcohol on Sundays.
2. In today's text, Jesus is accused by the Pharisees and teachers of the law of allowing his disciples to work on the Sabbath, which was a violation of God's law.
3. **Read Mk 2:23-28.**

A. Breaking Sabbath Law? (23-24)

1. This is the fourth of five confrontations between the Pharisees and Jesus during his ministry in Galilee recorded in Mk 2:1-3:6.
 - a. In Mk 2:1-12 the Pharisees complained about Jesus' apparent blasphemy of God when he declared the forgiveness of a paralytic's sins before healing him physically.
 - b. In Mk 2:13-17 they complained about Jesus' association with sinners and believed that he had defiled himself based on the company that he kept with them.
 - c. In Mark 2:18-22, their complaint implied that Jesus and his disciples were less righteous than they were because of their failure to practice regular fasting.
 - d. In this passage they object to Jesus' disciples doing what they defined to be work on the Sabbath.
2. Regulations for the Jewish Sabbath
 - a. According to Warren Wiersbe, "God gave the people of Israel the Sabbath after they came out of Egypt (Ex. 20:8-11; Neh. 9:14), and it was a special sign between Israel and Jehovah (Ex. 31:13-17)" (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Diligent*, 39). Ex 31:13-17).
 - b. In Ex 20:8-11, part of the Ten Commandments, God commands his people, "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."
 - c. In order that they might not break the Sabbath commanded by God, the Jewish teachers of the law but a fence of laws around the people's activities to keep them from sinning.
 - d. What God intended as a day of rest and reflection/worship was turned into a burden.
 - e. Wiersbe notes that "Jewish tradition stated that there were thirty-nine acts that were strictly forbidden on the Sabbath. Moses had prohibited work on the Sabbath, but he did not give many specifics (Ex. 20:10). It was wrong to kindle a fire for cooking (Ex. 35:3), gather fuel (Num. 15:32ff.), carry burdens (Jer. 17:21ff.), or transact business (Neh. 10:31, 13:15, 19). But Jewish tradition went into great detail and even informed the people how far they could travel on the Sabbath (two hundred cubits, based on Josh. 3:4). In short, the Sabbath day had become a crushing burden, a symbol of the galling religious bondage that had captured the nation" (Wiersbe, 39).
3. What did Jesus' disciples do wrong?
 - a. Wiersbe explains, "It was not illegal for a hungry person to take some of his neighbor's fruit or grain, provided he did not fill a vessel or use a harvesting implement (Deut. 23:24-25). However, that was not what upset the Pharisees. What upset them was that the disciples had work on the Sabbath day!" (Wiersbe, 40).
 - b. To support their charge, the Pharisees would have pointed to Ex 34:21 which says, "You are to labor six days but you must rest on the seventh day; you must even rest during plowing and harvesting times." Plucking was considered 'harvesting' in the eyes of the Pharisees (Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, 60-61).
 - c. The disciples picked and thrashed the grain in order to eat it. This constituted work which was forbidden.

- d. The scribes and Pharisees considered the teacher (rabbi) to be responsible for the actions of his disciples. So, they brought their charge to Jesus.

B. Jesus' Response to the Charge (25-26)

1. Jesus answered with a story.
 - a. He loved to answer questions with questions as we have seen.
 - b. Matthew 12:3-8 gives a fuller account of this encounter.
 - c. Wiersbe notes, "Mark's Roman readers would not be interested in Jewish prophets and priests, so Mark focused on David, whom the Romans would recognize as a great hero and king" (Wiersbe, 40).
2. The story Jesus told was one about King David and his men from 1 Sam 21:1-6.
 - a. "David went to Nob, to Ahimelek the priest. Ahimelek trembled when he met him, and asked, 'Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?' David answered Ahimelek the priest, 'The king sent me on a mission and said to me, 'No one is to know anything about the mission I am sending you on.' As for my men, I have told them to meet me at a certain place. Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find.' But the priest answered David, 'I don't have any ordinary bread on hand; however, there is some consecrated bread here—provided the men have kept themselves from women.' David replied, 'Indeed women have been kept from us, as usual whenever I set out. The men's bodies are holy even on missions that are not holy. How much more so today!' So the priest gave him the consecrated bread, since there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence that had been removed from before the Lord and replaced by hot bread on the day it was taken away" (1 Sam 21:1-6).
 - b. "The argument is reasonable: If a hungry king and his men were permitted to eat the holy bread from the tabernacle (1 Sam. 21:1-6), then it was right for the Lord of the Sabbath to permit His men to eat the grain from His fields. David broke a definite law given by Moses, for the showbread was for the priests only (Lev. 24:5-9), but the disciples had violated only a man-made tradition. God is surely more concerned with meeting the needs of people than He is with protecting religious tradition. The Pharisees had their priorities confused" (Wiersbe, 40).
3. There is a technical point in Jesus' account in Mark that you may have noticed.
 - a. Jesus gives the name of the High Priest as Abithar, but the priest named in the 1 Sam 21:1-6 text is not Abithar but his father Ahimelech.
 - b. The phrase "in the days" (Gk., *epi*) should possibly be translated the same as it is in Mk 12:26 – "in the account of."
 - c. "In the first century there were no chapters and verses in the Old Testament. Jesus most likely referred to the section of the scroll of Samuel in which this story could be found, the section associated with Abiathar" (James A. Brooks, *Mark*, 66).
4. Despite this technicality, the point of the story remains the same. If great King David could break the law in a time of need, then why could not Jesus? ". . . on both occasions pious men did something forbidden" (William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 117).
5. Of course, the question that would have arisen next in the minds of the Pharisees would have been, "Well who are you? You are certainly no King David!"

C. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath (27-28)

1. Jesus answered their unasked question with a statement and a declaration about himself.
2. The statement: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (27).
 - a. Origin of the Sabbath is in Gen 2:2-3: "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done."
 - b. Rest for God and all of his creation was part of God's good plan from the beginning.
 - c. This truth about the purpose of Sabbath rest was affirmed by the Pharisees and teachers of the law.

3. The self-declaration: “So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath” (28).
 - a. This is another use of technical phrase “Son of Man” (cf., Mk 2:10).
 - 1) This was a favorite term that Jesus used of himself.
 - 2) The reference to the “Son of Man” is based on the powerful figure revealed in Daniel 7:13-14 who was empowered by God with “authority, glory and sovereign power” over all the nations.
 - b. By claiming to be the Son of Man, Jesus stated that he had God-given authority over the Sabbath and would define it according to God’s original intent rather than according to the laws and traditions of man.
 - c. Jesus declared himself as deity with divine rights. The Pharisees and teachers of the law really had something to worry about now!

D. Lessons for Us

1. “As Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus releases us from legalistic pressure and frees us to joyful obedience” (Akin, 59).
2. Legalism is a dead end.

Akin writes, “Few things are more destructive, seductive, and deceptive to a true and vital relationship with God than the deadly poison of legalism. It is destructive because it breeds death rather than life. It is seductive because it has a natural allure for the flesh that causes us to look to ourselves rather than to Christ for our spiritual status before God. It is deceptive because it makes us think we are the spiritual elite when actually we are spiritual slaves. . . Legalism is characterized by looking for the shortcomings in others rather than in oneself. It looks for what is wrong in someone’s life in order to criticize and condemn them rather than what is right in order to commend and encourage them. It reinforces feelings of spiritual superiority and elitism that are man centered rather than Christ centered. It focuses on external behavior rather than the internal issues of the heart! . . . Do not let man-made religious rules make you a spiritual slave” (Akin, 59-60).
3. Christ has fulfilled the law and we as his followers are no longer bound to follow these Old Testament ceremonial laws.

Paul made this point when he said, “Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ” (Col 2:16-17).
4. “Remember that the Lord’s Day is to be a blessing, not a burden” (Akin, 61).
5. Instead of finding faults in other people, find ways to commend and encourage them? “Is there any situation where it is our right and our duty to find fault in others?” (Akin, 63)