

WHY COME TO CHURCH?

Mark 2:23 – 3:6 Text vs. 27 “*Jesus said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.’*”

One Sunday morning a pastor in Minnesota found ice on the roads making it impossible to drive to church. He decided to skate to church on the frozen river. Which he did! And when he arrived, the elders of the church were horrified! Their pastor had skated on the Lord’s Day. So, after the worship service they held a meeting where he explained that it was either skate to church, or not come at all. Finally, one elder asked, “Did you enjoy it?” When the preacher answered, “No,” the board decided then that it was all right for the Pastor to have skated on Sunday!

And in our lesson this morning, Jesus and His disciples were walking through grain fields on a Sabbath day. And as they walked, the disciples plucked some heads of grain to eat. The Pharisees following along saw what the disciples were doing and immediately complained to Jesus. Now, they weren’t suggesting the disciples were stealing. The Mosaic Law specifically stated, anyone could help themselves to the heads of grain when walking through some one’s field. In Deut. 23:25 it states, “*If you enter your neighbor’s grainfield, you may pick kernels with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to their standing grain.*” The Pharisees were accusing the disciples of working. Picking grain on the Sabbath. Jesus answered them how David ate the sacred bread in the Temple when he became hungry fleeing from Saul. (I Sam. 21:1-6) The Pharisees had concluded then that David was justified in eating the sacred bread, rather than starving. And here Jesus was saying, satisfying human need is more important than observing religious rituals, just as had been decided in David’s case.

Which holds important truths about our lives today. The Bible is filled with instructions about rest and recreation. In fact, rest and recreation are so important, God gave them a special name: *Sabbath*. The Jewish Sabbath, known as *Shabbat*, is observed by Jews on the seventh day of the week beginning Friday evening to Saturday evening. It’s a day of rest and worship. A day to remember how God rested after He created the world in six days. On the seventh day He rested after He had flung the stars into space and created the heavens and the Earth. The Sabbath honors the covenant made between God and the Jewish people to cease from work on that one day. The Sabbath. It is for prayer. For studying God’s Word. For sharing festive meals with family and friends. The Sabbath is a sacred day. Set apart for rest, worship, and reflection. It’s a gift from God to humanity.

He even put the Sabbath in the Ten Commandments. *Keep the Sabbath day holy*. It’s the fourth one, right up there with “Don’t commit adultery” and “Don’t murder.” That’s how important the Sabbath should be in your life. And Jesus said in our text this morning, “*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*” In other words, it was God’s idea for you take a day off. Every seven days, rest, worship, and revitalize. He did this for your own benefit, so you don’t burn out. But in our modern society, a lot of people don’t take a Sabbath. Even on their days off, they’re working. Many people attend a church service, then go home and get right back to work finishing all the things they didn’t get done during the week. That’s not keeping the Sabbath! Even if your spouse, or your boss, tells you to take a break, you may not. But you *must* rest! Because God commands it. And He always knows what’s best for you.

When Jesus said the Sabbath was made for man, He was saying the Sabbath was made to be a *blessing* for you, as were *all* the Ten Commandments. He was making it clear; man was made *first*. *Then* the Sabbath was made. God did not make the Sabbath, and then make man. According to the Genesis account, God created the first man, Adam, on the sixth day of the creation week. And then He rested. The Sabbath was made for our benefit as a sign that we are God’s children. It’s God who sanctifies you when you keep His day holy as He commanded.

In Mark 2:27 Jesus was not saying you may decide to keep, or not keep a Commandment of God. It’s not a day of legalistic rules. The Pharisees had turned the Sabbath day into manmade legalistic rules that had become a burden, not a blessing as God had intended. Those manmade Pharisee rules would have a person suffer on the Sabbath, rather than break a Pharisaic rule. And God would never have anyone perish or starve just to keep the Sabbath. God intended this day as a blessing. (Isaiah 58:13-14) And Jesus was pointing that out in Matthew 12:10-12 when Jesus asked the Pharisees, “*What man among you would not pull his sheep out of a ditch on the Sabbath? And how much more important is a man than a sheep? Therefore, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.*”

So, here we are. We are the priority. And the Sabbath is for our wellbeing. The Pharisee’s said, work was picking an ear of corn on the Sabbath. Even for food. And it was not lawful! But Jesus said in Matthew 12:12 that when a life needs food, *it is* lawful! It’s not breaking the Sabbath. The wellbeing of mankind is the priority of life. Not suffering! But what are you supposed to be doing on your Sabbath? How can you change the way you do your Sabbath so that you are honoring God? In our fast-paced world, many neglect the Sabbath. It’s called Burnout. Without rest, you *burn out*. Physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Re-discovering the Sabbath should be a priority for everyone! Just look at how church attendance is today. Religious worship attendance is declining. Before the pandemic, around 62% of Christians reported attending religious services at least once or twice a month. But by July 2020, only 13% of U.S. adults attended religious services, in person. Many churches closed. As did this one. However, as covid restrictions eased, attendance rose to 17% in March 2021. And then to 26% in

September last year. Currently, 27% attend church regularly. And that's about right. Before covid our regular attendance in Season had been around 130 going down to 50 in the Summer. Let's reclaim the Sabbath. Not as a duty. But as a gift! God designed the Sabbath as a privilege and a benefit for humanity. Not a task or a drudgery. Why should you come to church? Well, it's a busy world, and the Sabbath offers you space to reflect. To pray. A place to have emotional healing. The Sabbath allows you to connect with God by worshipping Him and deepening your faith.

Jesus explained in Mark 2:28 why He was able to tell the Pharisees what is lawful and not lawful on the Sabbath day; *"The Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath."* He didn't say, I am LORD Sabbath. Or I AM the Sabbath. Jesus said, *"I am Lord of the Sabbath!"* While church attendance may be declining, many still find being active in a church is important. Attending church can have a sense of belonging. Of having community support. Opportunities for spiritual growth and reflection. And the chance to engage in charitable activities. Additionally, a church provides space for you to connect with others who have similar values and beliefs. Church attendance can give you a sense of community and a purpose in life. So, Jesus told the Pharisees He had the authority to declare that picking corn for nourishment was a *need* that was lawful. And because He is Lord of the Sabbath, it is His day. That's why we say, *"This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it."*

As believers, we recognize Jesus is Lord—not just of the Sabbath, but every part of life. We find rest in Him, not only on a specific day, but every day! Our worship and devotion extend beyond rituals into a living relationship with God. Therefore, *Jesus* decides how the Commandment should be obeyed. *Not* the Pharisees! As the fourth Commandment states in Exodus 20:8-11, the Seventh Day is *"the Sabbath of the Lord thy God"* which confirms His claim to be Lord of the Sabbath Day.

Why come to church? You come to remember the Sabbath was made for you. To be blessed. Restored. And drawn closer to the heart of God. To pray and connect with God. Share meals. Have fellowship, and laughter. The true purpose of the Sabbath is for a weary soul to find rest in God's embrace. So, honor the Sabbath. Recognize it is God's gift to you. *"Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath Day"* reminds you of His authority, His grace, and the deep spiritual rest He offers. And may you find rest, healing, and spiritual renewal in the Sabbath—the oasis God has provided for you on your journey through life. Amen.