

Enjoy your Sabbath rest

Mark 2:23-28

²³ Once on a Sabbath day, Jesus was passing through the grain fields, and his disciples began to pick heads of grain as they walked along. ²⁴ The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath day?" ²⁵ He replied to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry (he and his companions)? ²⁶ He entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest and ate the Bread of the Presence, which is not lawful for anyone to eat, except for the priests. He also gave some to his companions." ²⁷ Then Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ So the Son of Man is the Lord even of the Sabbath."

Why are you here today? Why did you take time out of your busy schedule, to get dressed up and come to church? I hope you came here for some well-needed rest. I'm not talking about getting out of some difficult work at home or in the field or at a factory. I'm certainly not encouraging anyone to take a little snooze during the next 15 minutes. But we all need some rest—rest from the harassment we've endured all week. The struggles we faced have come against our soul. The devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh have been warring against us. And here you can finally find the rest you need. If you came here for physical rest you would have been just as good to stay at home. But if you came to find rest for your soul, you came to the right place. So enjoy some rest. Enjoy your Sabbath rest. First of all, it is rest you need for your soul. And secondly, it is rest only Jesus can give you.

God's people desperately needed rest for their souls at the time that Jesus was on earth. Their souls had been burdened by a group of men known as Pharisees. Pharisees were the self-appointed experts in God's law. If you wanted to know how God wants you to act, the Pharisees thought you should ask them. But sadly, the Pharisees didn't understand God's law. They totally misunderstood why God gave his law. A former Pharisee by the name of Paul explained why God gave his law in his inspired letter to the Romans: *Through the law we become conscious of sin* (3:20). God gave his law as a mirror to show us that we don't have what it takes to be right with God. God's law shows us how sinful we are and how much we need someone to save us from sin. But instead of directing the people to their Savior from sin, the Pharisees only burdened people by constantly holding God's law over their heads. To make matters worse, they even added more rules and regulations as a hedge around God's law. They felt that if you kept their rules, you were sure to obey God. Yes, God gave us his law. But it was not to show us how to get to heaven. Instead, his law shows us how we can't possibly reach heaven on our own. As so-called religious leaders of the day, the Pharisees definitely burdened people's souls by misunderstanding God's holy law.

One way they showed their false belief was in the way they treated the Sabbath day. Our text tells us, *Once on a Sabbath day, Jesus was passing through the grain fields, and his disciples began to pick heads of grain as they walked along. The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath day?"* When God gave Moses his law on Mt. Sinai, he did say, *"For six days, work is to be done, but the seventh day shall be your holy day, a Sabbath of rest to the Lord"* (Exodus 35:2). The Pharisees had witnessed Jesus' disciples picking heads of grain and removing the seeds from their shells so they could have a bite to

eat. The disciples had done nothing wrong by taking a handful of grain. In fact, Scripture does say, *“If you enter your neighbor’s grain field, you may pick kernels with your hands, but you must not put a sickle to his standing grain”* (Deuteronomy 23:25). The disciples had no sickles in hand. Yet the Pharisees saw this was wrong. They felt the disciples were harvesting grain and harvesting was unlawful work for anyone to perform on the Sabbath. So the Pharisees went on the attack.

But they didn’t direct their question at the disciples. Instead, they attacked Jesus. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. He was the one who issued the 3rd Commandment as well as all the others. But he didn’t come to our world to burden people with God’s law the way the Pharisees did. He came to rescue us by keeping God’s law perfectly in our place and by dying to pay for all our sins against that law. When the Pharisees attacked Jesus with their question, it showed they had rejected him. And by rejecting Jesus, they were losing out on the Sabbath rest they needed for their souls.

You and I need to be on our guard against becoming Pharisees. Each one of us has a sinful nature that wants us to pad ourselves on the back every time we enter God’s house. How arrogant to think that we are doing God a favor by being here. You think God is pleased with what he sees going on in our worship lives? He’s got angelic choirs praising him daily and all humanity seems to offer is half-hearted worship at best. You think God is satisfied with just one hour a week from us? God expects 24 hours a day, 7 days a week of worship filled lives. Whether we are at home, at work, or at play, we are to do all things to his glory. And when we get the chance to enter his house to hear his holy word and sing his praises, do we treasure the opportunity. Do we always come to worship with an attitude like the Psalmist, King David: *“I rejoiced with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord’”* (Psalm 122:1). Did any of you have to struggle to get here. Did sinful flesh try and trick you into thinking the best rest you can find is waiting for you on your couch in front of the TV, or on a golf course, or in bed. But remember that’s the same enemy that has joined forces with the world and Satan himself to burden your soul all week. But you have come to the right place. For here you do find rest. It’s rest that your soul needs. Because here you find Jesus. And he’s the only one who can give your soul rest.

The people in Jesus’ day needed the rest that only Jesus could give them. The Pharisees had so burdened them with all their rules and regulations, especially regarding the Sabbath. Jesus had to set them straight. He cited an example from the Old Testament to show the proper understanding of the Sabbath. He told the Pharisees, *“Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry (he and his companions)? He entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest and ate the Bread of the Presence, which is not lawful for anyone to eat, except for the priests. He also gave some to his companions.”* To reveal the proper understanding of the Sabbath, Jesus went back in Israel’s history when there was a power struggle for Israel’s throne. King Saul was Israel’s king. But he had turned away from the Lord and lost God’s favor. As a result, none of his sons would succeed him as king. Instead, God chose the youngest son of Jesse, a young man named David, to be the next king of Israel.

David showed he had what it takes to be the king of God's people. On one occasion on a battlefield he put his complete trust in God and went to war against a giant of a man that would make any NFL lineman look puny. But Saul wasn't willing to hand his throne over to David. Instead, he sent his army after David to kill him. As David was running for his life, he and his men entered the house of God for refuge. Famished from his flight he asked the priest on duty for some food. But all they had to eat there was the twelve loaves of bread that God had reserved only for the priests to eat. Yet a man's life was at stake here. So the priest gave David and his companions the bread.

Jesus used that example to show there is a law that supersedes ceremonial laws like the Sabbath. It is the law of love. Jesus went on to show them how to properly look at the Sabbath. He said, *"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."* The Pharisees needed that reminder that mankind was the crown of God's creation. To serve man God gave him the Sabbath day. On that day man could find some rest from his busy workweek. But more importantly he could find rest he needed for his soul. On the day of rest he went to worship his God. There he would see and smell the blood of sacrificed animals. That slaughter gave him a graphic reminder that it would take blood to rescue him from sin. That day was also a time to study and ponder God's saving promises. In that way he'd find his Savior who would shed his blood for all sin and leave us at peace with God.

Jesus wanted his people to find rest for their souls. That is why he sent out this gracious invitation: *"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"* (Matthew 11:28-30). Jesus wants everyone to know that true rest can only come from him. That is why he ended our text saying, *"So the Son of Man is the Lord even of the Sabbath."* Unlike the ocean of animal blood that came from sacrifice upon sacrifice, Jesus made one sacrifice for all mankind by dying on a cross to pay for sin once and for all. In Jesus people can find full redemption and complete forgiveness for all their sins. Because of Jesus we are now at peace with God. Yes, only Jesus can give our souls rest that we desperately need.

When you come to worship each week, make sure you don't come empty handed. I'm not talking about bringing your children or grandchildren or a friend with you. Although that is something you should definitely do. I'm not reminding you to bring your offering either, although first-fruit offerings are a good expression of faith. When I say, "don't come empty handed," I mean bring with you all your sins that have burdened your soul. Lay them all at the cross of Jesus. Then walk away with a clean conscience knowing that in Jesus you truly sparkle in God's eyes. Come to his table often and receive the body and blood that your Savior gave and shed for you to win you God's forgiveness. Then leave church filled with the Holy Spirit that you can't help but worship him with thankful lives 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. Then keep coming back week after week after week. You need that rest for your soul. And Jesus in word and sacrament is the only one who can give you that rest.

So if you came here to find rest for your body, you might be disappointed. If you came here to find forgiveness and peace in Jesus, then you've come to the right place.