

THE LORD OF THE SABBATH

Mark 2:23-3:6

Key Verses: 2:27-28

Then 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."

Today's passage includes three events: First, Jesus teaches the true meaning of Sabbath (2:23-28). Second, Jesus heals a man with a shriveled hand (3:1-12). Third, Jesus calls the twelve apostles (3:13-30). The Pharisees were supposed to be spiritual leaders for God's people, but they were useless to God because they were proud and self-righteous. They were indifferent to the suffering people. The people wandered around like sheep without a shepherd. But Jesus was not discouraged. He called the Twelve to train them as his disciples so that they could take care of God's sheep.

I. JESUS DEFENDS HIS DISCIPLES (2:23-28)

Look at verse 23. "One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain." The disciples were poor; they were also very busy following Jesus who was taking care of many sick people. They often had to skip meals. So they were always hungry. One Sabbath, while they were walking through the grainfields, they picked some heads of grain, rubbed them in their hands, and ate them, hoping to satisfy their growling stomachs. The Pharisees saw them and said to Jesus, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" (24) They accused Jesus and his disciples for violating the law of the Sabbath.

How did the disciples violate the Sabbath law? Actually it was legal to pick some kernels with hands in a neighbor's grainfield, as long as a sickle was not used (Dt 23:25). But to the Pharisees' eyes, the disciples violated the law by doing work on the Sabbath (Ex 20:10). Specifically, by picking heads of grain, they reaped; by rubbing the grain in their hands, they threshed; and by flinging away the husks, they winnowed. The Pharisees were very legalistic. They had no compassion toward the hungry disciples of Jesus.

We learn from the Bible that the Sabbath law, which is the fourth commandment (Ex 20:8-11), is very simple. It is a day set aside by God for us to get spiritual rest in him. We are to worship God and to serve his people. We are to keep the day holy. God must be the center of the day. But the Pharisees hedged the Sabbath law with so many petty rules that its primary purpose was lost. For them, the law was the center of the day.

Jesus was not ashamed of his disciples' poverty. He was not ashamed of their action. Jesus defended his disciples by citing a historical precedence. He told the story of David in the book of 1 Samuel (21:1-6). David was a fugitive at that time. He was fleeing for his life, along with his men, from the murderous king Saul. He went to the tabernacle in Nob, to Ahimelech the priest, and asked for food. But the priest had no food except the consecrated bread, which was lawful only for priests to eat (26). In his compassion toward his starving men, David took and

gave the consecrated bread to them, knowing well it was unlawful. By telling this story, Jesus taught them that love and compassion are higher than the law. The law of God cannot be a collection of rules and regulations only to oppress people. Essentially, it should be the guidebook through which one can come to know God and his wonderful love for humankind. Therefore, if we observe God's law ignoring the spirit of the law, we only become legalistic. The Pharisees had no spirit of the law.

Look at verses 27-28. Jesus continued: *"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."* What is the true meaning of the Sabbath? "Sabbath" means rest. It is the day of rest in God after for six days of hard work. It is for our spiritual rest. Spiritual rest comes when we worship God by listening to God's words and when we serve others. It is not a passive, 'lie on a couch' kind of rest. We come to God and have rest in him through our active worship and fellowship with him. This is the reason we call our Sunday gathering "worship service." Jesus is the center of the Sabbath day. In this way, Jesus defended his disciples. Likewise, we must learn how to embrace and defend our sheep. We also must protect our sheep from legalistic Christians. Sometimes we ourselves become legalistic toward others. We must repent and follow Jesus' principle.

II. JESUS HEALS A MAN WITH A SHRIVELED HAND (3:1-12)

After this, Jesus went into the synagogue. A man with a shriveled hand was there (1). He had a serious life problem because his one hand was shriveled. A man's hands symbolize hardworking spirit and creativeness. Do you know why God gave two hands to us? Because effective work requires cooperation. But this man could use only one hand. So he was always a loser. When someone punched him twice, left and right, he could only punch him back once. In addition, he could not enjoy playing a game of basketball. Neither could he play the violin well.

We don't know how this man's one hand became shriveled. Something terrible must have happened to him. Since then, he couldn't work well. Nevertheless, he had to make a living. But every time he applied for a job, he was turned down. Because of his one shriveled hand, his whole outlook on life must have been crippled. To this man, a day of salvation came. As soon as Jesus saw him, his heart went out to the man. Jesus had compassion for the man. He understood his agony in life. Jesus was ready to make him whole. But it was a Sabbath day and the Pharisees were watching him closely to see if he would dare to heal the man on the Sabbath, violating the Sabbath law (2). Jesus could have postponed the man's case until later. But Jesus did not look for expedient ways in helping his sheep.

What did Jesus do for the man in this situation? Jesus did not care about the Pharisees' sting operation. Out of his messianic compassion, he was ready to risk his life in order to heal the man with a shriveled hand. Look at verse 3. *Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone."* This was a direct challenge against the religious authorities. But it did not matter to him. Jesus wanted to heal him so that he could work hard with his hands and support his family, and be a blessing to others. At the same time, Jesus wanted to help the religious leaders. They all had perfect two hands, but their spirit was crippled. So Jesus asked them, in verse 4, *"Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?"* Jesus wanted them to think about what they were thinking in their minds. He wanted them

to stand on the side of the truth. But they remained silent (4). They suppressed the truth. The law is good, but if there is no spirit of the law, it only becomes a weapon for the strong to oppress the weak. The Pharisees often made use of the law and burdened their suffering people. In this instance, they were using a man with a shriveled hand as bait to trap Jesus.

Jesus looked around at them in anger and was deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts (5). Jesus was angry when the leaders of the nation were so corrupt spiritually, and so heartless that they even used the helpless man as bait. If one of the Pharisees had a son (or an ox) who fell into a well, he would immediately pull him out, regardless of the Sabbath day (Lk 14:5). Yet, they were too selfish to take care of others. But Jesus was different. Jesus cared for the man with a shriveled hand. He said, "*Stretch out your hand*" (5). How did the man respond? By faith, the man stretched it out, and it was completely restored. Jesus changed this man's life!

Jesus also says to us, "Stretch out your hand." It's not because the shriveled hand is pretty to look at. It is not easy for us to stretch out our shriveled hand. We'd rather stretch out our good hand. But we must stretch out our shriveled hand in order to be healed. Some people wonder why we talk about our terrible sins in our testimonies and share them publicly in front of everyone. It is our way of responding to Jesus' invitation, "Stretch out your hand." We all have in one way or another secret and dark elements in our lives. Mostly, we try to keep them in a corner of our souls, although they often drain our emotional energy and spiritual strength. May God help us to stretch out our shriveled hand for Jesus' healing touch!

When the Pharisees saw what Jesus did, they immediately went to the Herodians, the collaborators with Rome, in order to make a plot to kill Jesus (6). They did not stretch out their shriveled hand to Jesus.

We learn today that Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath. ???