

The Gospel of Mark

Sermon series can be found at asburybham.org/sermons



Scripture Reading

Mark 2:23-3:6

One sabbath he was going through the cornfields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, 'Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?' And he said to them, 'Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions.' Then he said to them, 'The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.'

Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man who had the withered hand, 'Come forward.' Then he said to them, 'Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to

kill?' But they were silent. He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

Summary

An early and contentious interaction between Jesus and the Pharisees happens at the beginning of our reading for this week. On the Sabbath, Jesus' disciples were performing work that was forbidden by the rituals and traditions of Judaism. The Pharisees take following the Law seriously and so they challenged Jesus about his disciples' actions.

Jesus reminds the Pharisees that human beings were not made so that the Sabbath would have law-abiding practitioners. No, the Sabbath exists to benefit human beings so that they would have a day of rest to focus upon God and how their lives were a gift from that loving, creating, and saving God.

The Sabbath lasts from sundown on Friday through nightfall on Saturday each and every week. We are introduced to the concept of the Sabbath in the two passages in the Old Testament that cover the Ten Commandments. The practice of Sabbath is given to help God's people remember that God created the world and universe in six days and on the seventh day God rested - as well as that God saved His people from slavery in Egypt and brought them into freedom.

The Sabbath was a weekly time to recover — to recover physically as well as to recover spiritually. It was a time to remember who God is and what God has done as well as to re-center our lives as God's special and set-apart people.

The Disciples may have violated the letter of the Law, but the spirit of the Law cares much more about how the Disciples listened and followed Jesus more than if they ate some grain on the Sabbath.

Think about your own weekly calendar. How much of your week is dedicated solely to God?

How are you being reminded daily or weekly that you are God's beloved and that you are called to be God's witnesses in the world? How are you taking time to recover physically and spiritually?

Discussion Questions

- We established last week that the Gospel of Mark immediately introduces Jesus to his readers as the Messiah and the Son of God. Why is it important to know this as Jesus challenges core assumptions about how religious laws should be followed in Judaism? And where does Jesus get his authority to do so?

- Sabbath is much more than rest or “me-time.” Rest is important, but it is not the goal. Christians refer to our practice of Sabbath as the Lord’s Day. Our focus and attention should be upon how to live in harmony with and live for Christ. What could you do in your Sabbath practices that help you focus on these things? Why does resting free us up to focus on God?

- In his sermon on Sunday, Pastor Mike mentioned that Jews to this day often celebrate Sabbath with two loaves of bread on the dining room table to symbolize the double portion of manna that God provided in the wilderness wanderings in the Old Testament so that the people of God did not have to work on the Sabbath to collect food. Pastor Mike also talked about how Deuteronomy focuses on the practice of Sabbath as a reminder that God saved His people from slavery in Egypt. What Sabbath practices or activities can help us see God as our provider and savior?

- What role does weekly worship play in Sabbath? How should church leaders, pastors, and volunteers add additional time in the week to reap all the spiritual benefits of Sabbath?

- If you have read through the first four chapters of the Gospel of Mark with Asbury this Lent, discuss what you have learned or observed in a fresh reading. What have you seen with fresh eyes?

Prayer (ancient prayer by Augustine of Hippo, 4th century)

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.

Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.

Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I may love only what is holy.

Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, that I may defend all that is holy.

Guard me, O Holy Spirit, that I myself may always be holy. Amen.

Practice

- Consider a symbol that you can set on a table each Sabbath to remind you of how to live in harmony with God and each other. Perhaps bread, as the Israelites did? Be creative! Discuss with others why you chose the symbol.
- Be intentional this month about setting aside time for Sabbath. How can you connect with God differently than normal?

Lenten practices:

- Listen to the daily Lent meditation podcasts. You can find the meditations at asburybham.org/easter or you can access them from your favorite podcast app (search for Asbury Bham Podcast).
- Journaling is a wonderful spiritual practice. Pick up your complimentary Asbury journal at any Welcome Center. After listening to the Lent meditations, write about the ways God is stirring in your heart.