

## Mark 2:23-3:6

Pentecost 2; June 2 & 3, 2024

*“Will you just stop it.”* Picture this scene: Mom and Dad and their two younger children are on a long car ride. Brother and sister are sitting in the back seat. Their electronic devices have run out of power a while ago, and they have no way to charge them. The young boy has gotten bored out of his mind. So, he begins to touch his sister on the head, then the arm and then the hand. Suddenly, she bursts out: *“Will you just stop it.”* But he doesn’t. So, finally dad says to him: *“Stop touching your sister.”* He does for two minutes. Then he starts to poke her on the head, the cheek and then the arm. She responds the same way. *“Stop touching me.”* The command comes from the front of the car: *“I thought I told you to stop touching your sister.”* *“I’m not, I’m poking her.”* He told him to stop poking her. That lasted for a couple of minutes. Then he started to put his finger in front of her face making sure that he didn’t touch or poke her. Then came the command from the front seat: *Will you just stop it!* The point: some people are clever enough to find any loopholes in the law and use it to their advantage.

That’s what the Pharisees had done with God’s Law. Mark writes in our text: **“One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?”** When God gave his people his Law, he wanted them to see how much He loved them. He wanted them to see that he considers some things so precious, that he wanted some of those things protected. The Pharisees had now taken that gift of the law and turned it into a burden filled with a bunch of rules. They took the commands of God and added more. They became very legalistic the law. They would use it to trap and maintain control of God’s people. At times they would focus on finding the loopholes of God’s Law. The Law was meant to benefit humanity, not burden it. The Law was also meant to show the heart and compassion of Jesus.

Jesus names one of those laws in our text – the Sabbath Day. The word **Sabbath** was a word that meant rest. The Sabbath Day was meant to be a gift from God. He wanted them to rest. Jesus isn’t just talking about physical rest, but he also wanted them to focus on the **spiritual rest** that the Messiah would bring to this world. The Pharisees had made the people slaves to the law. As believers in Christ, God wants us to follow the Law as a way to show the love that we have for a God who has loved us so much. So, how are we to look at the Law? Some may simply look at the Law as just a bunch of rules that will be broken anyway. Others may use the Law to guilt people into following God. Some may use it to terrify people. Or we can look at the spirit in which the Law was given. The law was designed to be a benefit to our relationship with God. It was show us that God desires mercy and not sacrifice.

One may look at this text and ask the question: *So, what the big deal here anyway?* Jesus wanted the people to see what the Pharisees had done with just one of those laws – the third commandment. They had taken that one law and surrounded it with 39 additional laws to list all the things that they were not to do. At issue here is what constitutes work? Is it work to just pick a few kernels of wheat to satisfy hunger. In fact, God had commanded the farmers to leave some of the rows in their fields so that the poor may be able to come and food. Again, it was meant to show how much God loves his people. Picking a few handfuls of wheat to satisfy the rumbling in the tummy, was certainly not work.

Jesus continues: **“Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.”** If the purpose of the Law was meant to show God’s love, they would know the account that Jesus uses here. David and his men were on the run from King Saul. Saul wanted to kill David, because David was going to be the next king that God had appointed. They were in desperate need for food. So, David approaches Abiathar the high priest asking for food. Abiathar did not have any bread. So, Abiathar goes into the temple and takes five of the twelve loaves of bread that had been consecrated to God. They were meant for only the priests to eat after they were rotated out after seven days. Even though Abiathar did not have permission to do this action, he had compassion on David and his men. But Abiathar also knew the summary of the Law was to love God and to love your neighbor.

**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.”** In other words, Jesus is saying that legalism has no place in God’s Church. Jesus is not saying that we can simply dismiss any commandment that we may not like. But the law doesn’t control every action. Jesus lets the law

serve its purpose by giving the opportunity to love one's neighbor. Eating a few kernels of grain was not showing that Jesus disregarded the command to rest by working. Instead, he let his disciples eat a few kernels of wheat to put off their hunger. It didn't contradict the command of rest on the Sabbath Day. The law was there to show God's love.

In the last part of our text, Jesus shows the same principle at work. **“Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, “Stand up in front of everyone.” Then Jesus asked them, “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they remained silent. He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.”** This time, Jesus didn't break a single one of those 39 rules. He never touched the man. I wonder what the look on those Pharisees looked like? They were angry. Once again, Jesus let the law serve its purpose by giving the opportunity to love one's neighbor. So, he healed the man.

The pharisees had sight of God's love found in the Law. They lost sight that they did not earn God's promise of eternal life by keep all the rules and commands. Instead, they would find it in the one who would keep the commands of his heavenly Father even going to a cross to die for our sins. You see there are no loopholes out of sin. But there is only one loophole out of sin – Jesus. In Christ – we are loved by God. In Christ – we are forgiven sinners. In Christ – heaven is open for us. In Christ – we have eternal rest. Amen.