

Mark 2:23-28

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[0 : 0 0] Thanks friends for having me along. Again, as I said before, I met Paul a couple of months ago now through a connection with my father-in-law. My father-in-law is Welsh but he served as a minister at Grove Chapel and I think Paul was there as a student for a while. As you can tell by my accent, I'm not Welsh, I'm Australian. I'm not English either. My wife and I, as we said before, live in Tasmania and I've studied at the Theological College in Australia, Presbyterian College there and served as a pastor as well. I'm currently looking for a job if you know of any going. We've really enjoyed seeing more of the UK while we've been here but as you know, this is my segue into the sermon, as you know, holidays aren't always restful.

We just drove through London and I thought it was a Sunday afternoon in our hire-a-car that we've had a nice, we had a Sunday afternoon driving in Australia where you get big Volvos on the road and they just cruise at 10 miles an hour. But yeah, we did 10 miles an hour the whole way here from Crofton Park or less than that, probably 5 miles and then the roads were shut because of cycling so it turned into a bit of a stressful time. I walked in the door about 3 minutes past 6. But holidays aren't always restful. We had a 24 hour quiet over here with a toddler. That wasn't restful. We'd been sleeping in strange beds, driving on the wrong side of the road in France. So what's meant to be restful can leave you feeling restless sometimes. You know, like sleeping for instance. They have, you know, REM sleep where you, if you don't get that REM sleep during the night, I don't know how long it goes for, 90 minutes or something. But if you don't get that certain amount of sleep during the night, you don't get a deep rest. So the Bible speaks a lot about rest. It has a lot to say about rest. And I want to speak to you this morning about how you can find true rest. How do you mind true rest, deep rest that you really need, that we all need? Well the answer here is in Mark chapter 2. So we're going to look at, I want to look with you at the problem first, the thing that ruins our rest, that gets in the way of our rest. And then look at the solution where true rest is found and how you and I can have it. So first, the problem. What is it that really ruins our rest and gets in the way of our rest? And no, it's not toddlers or bad pillows or traffic. There's something much deeper to do with the human heart. And

I want to sum it up like this. It's religion. Let me show you why. Let me show you why. It's right here in this passage in Mark chapter 2. If you've ever read through the Gospels, you would have realised that Jesus plus the Pharisees plus the Sabbath equals trouble.

The Sabbath was a holiday, a day of rest. But when Jesus and the Pharisees hung out, sparks would fly. And look at verse 23 there. It's the Sabbath. One Sabbath it says. Jesus and his disciples are going for a leisurely stroll through the grain fields. It says corn fields here. And they're making their way through and it says his disciples began to pluck ears of corn. So they're snacking as they're walking along. It sounds relaxing, doesn't it?

They're going for a stroll and snacking as they go along. But the Pharisees, check out the Pharisees, they're on patrol in verse 24. They say to Jesus, the Pharisees were saying to him, look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath? So they're like parking ticket officers, traffic wardens that go around when other people are having the day off and they're booking people, looking for infringements. And that's what the Pharisees were doing here on the Sabbath, the day of rest. They're looking to hand out infringements. But can you blame them? The Sabbath is central to the Jewish identity. It's number four in the Ten Commandments, isn't it? Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Work was forbidden on that day and rest was commanded. The Pharisees were concerned about keeping this day holy and they, so much so that they added, they started adding their own rules so that people wouldn't break this day. 39 types of activity, actually, they were forbidden on this day that the Pharisees came up with. And that included reaping grain or corn, corn ears or whatever, ears of corn.

[4 : 39] And that included. And also, one of the other things was walking more than a thousand steps in a day. And here's Jesus here with his disciples and his disciples are plucking grain heads as they're going and they're walking along too. So was that classified as reaping or not? It says they were plucking here, they weren't plucking ears of corn, they weren't reaping. And have they walked more than a thousand steps? We don't know. It's not clear from the passage what the infringement was. And I don't know if it was clear to the Pharisees either. They had ongoing heated debates at the time about what was prohibited on the Sabbath day and what was allowed. So much so that the day wasn't actually restful anymore. It had become a day about restrictions rather than a day of rest. You can think about it like this. If my son, who's two years old, we had the day off with him, a holiday, and we took the day off. But before, in the morning, I said to him, son, listen here, we're going to have a day off today and it's going to be a nice relaxing day together. But before we do, we give you some rules. You can't play with your favourite toys. You can't go outside. You can't make too much noise. You can't eat your favourite food, etc, etc. So if I was to layer on these extra rules, that wouldn't be a day of rest, would it?

Because he'd be worried about whether or not he was going to break these rules and I'd be worried about whether or not he's keeping them. So the day wouldn't be restful anymore. And that's exactly what's happening here on the Sabbath, in Jesus' day with the Pharisees. It turned into more work because they were worried about keeping the rules. The word Sabbath means to cease, to stop. And one day in seven, the Israelites were commanded to cease from their work, to stop. And that's a good thing. I wonder if you, have you ever thought where the concept of the week comes from? Seven days, you know, a month is because of lunar cycles, years because of the earth revolving around the sun, you get seasons. But where does the concept of the week come from? Well, Genesis tells us that God created the world in six days and on the seventh day he rested. And he made us do the same. Imagine if there was no week and the days just rolled into one another. It's kind of like that now. Most places seem open on Sundays here. I know in the communist regime, they tried to change the seven day week and introduce the ten day week or something, but it only lasted for a certain amount of time and they had to change it back. Why? Because God didn't create us to be slaves. He created us to work and rest. He didn't create us as cogs in the machine. He created us as humans, made in his image to work and to rest like him. And if you remember at one point in Israel's history, they actually were cogs in the machine under Pharaoh. They were slaves. Pharaoh was a hard taskmaster. If you remember, he used to get them to make the mud bricks and they couldn't get any time off. They were slaving away under Pharaoh, like working like dogs. And then remember the Lord delivered them. That's what Exodus is about. And he redeemed them from slavery. And he revealed himself, didn't he, as the God of rest. The God from Genesis that rested. The God that calls his people into his rest, calls them into the promised land. In Deuteronomy chapter 5, the Lord is commanding the Israelites to keep the Sabbath day holy. And he says, he links it to the Exodus when he brought them out of Egypt. And he says, remember that you were slaves in the land of Egypt. And the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm. And then he says, therefore, the Lord your

[8 : 46] God commands you to keep the Sabbath. So the Sabbath was about remembering. What do you do? You remember, you're passive, aren't you? You're trusting in what God has done. Ceasing from your work and trusting in this God of rest. The God, that's what the Israelites were meant to do. Remembering and resting in the God who had redeemed them from slavery. So here I want to say that here we see the heart of the problem with the Pharisees. The heart of the problem.

So by creating, here it is, by creating all these extra laws, extra rules on the day, they changed the Sabbath from remembering. That's what they were meant to do. That's what it says, remember the Sabbath day. So remember what God had already done. That's what they were called to do. Past tense. And changed it into what I must do. So do you see that? Do you see the difference there? They changed it from remembering past tense, resting in what God had done in his deliverance, and changed it, created these laws and changed it into what must do you see that? And that's what I mean by religion. When I say religion, and it's the enemy of true rest. Religion is things I must do to gain acceptance with God. So religion says if I perform, if I obey, then I am accepted. If I perform, if I obey, then God accepts me.

Martin Luther, you know, the reformer, he said that the default mode of every human heart is this. You operate, I perform, I obey, then I'm accepted. So it's working to get right with God. My worth and acceptance is based on what I do, rather than what God has done for me.

I don't know if you're here and you're just visiting maybe, you walked into church and you're not religious. Well, I think all of our hearts act in this way. If we're not finding it in things we do, religious things we do, we're finding it in work or study or acceptance from people. And the thing is, it makes you restless because how do you know if you've ever done enough?

How do you know if you've kept these rules to a point where God will accept you? It's an eternal struggle because you can never get that verdict now because you're basing your identity on the things you do and trying to get acceptance that way.

[11 : 29] You know, in Sweden, I read about this the other day, some of the best working conditions in the world, short work days and long holidays. But at the moment, there's a bit of a crisis going on over there with young people burning out. And it's not the work that's doing it because they have great work conditions. It's this extra pressure and anxiety that comes from wanting to perform, be healthy and look great. And there's pressure that comes from that, always having to look great and feel good. And good is never good enough. When you're constantly comparing yourself to people on social media or whatever. So there's this work that happens underneath our work, the work of self-justification. It's a work that even when you're resting, you're doing it. Even at times of rest, your heart can be not resting and trying to gain acceptance and compare yourself with other people. So you know that film, Chariots of Fire?

It was based on a true story about two Olympians competing in the Paris Games in 1924. One of them was Eric Liddell, or Liddell, however you pronounce it. He was a Christian.

Remember, he refused to run on the Sabbath day. And because of that, he actually missed out on his chance at winning a gold medal. And he's compared with another runner in that film, Harold Abrams. Abrams and Liddell were both trying to win gold medal. They were working hard.

The difference was seen in the film that Abrams was doing it out of a need to prove himself. He was doing it out of a need to prove himself. At one point in the film, he says, I've got ten seconds to justify my existence. Ten seconds to justify my existence.

But Liddell, on the other hand, he only wanted to please God who had already accepted him. He knew he accepted, he had believed in the gospel and he knew that God accepted him in Christ. And that's why he can say to his sister in the film, God made me fast and when I run, I feel pleasure.

[13 : 42] So here it is. Abrams, in the film, was weary even when he was resting because he was trying to justify his own existence by things that he did.

But Liddell was rested even when he was pushing himself to the limits. So how can you and I find this rest, this true rest?

And I'm going to move on to the solution now. It's found in Jesus' response to the Pharisees' accusation. So look there in verse 25.

Jesus says to them, This story is from 1 Samuel chapter 21.

David was an outlaw at the time and he was on the run from Saul and he goes into the house of God desperate and hungry and he's in search of food.

[14 : 57] And the only food there is the showbread. These were 12 newly baked loaves that they lined up, laid in two rows before God.

And this was done every Sabbath day. But the thing is, only the priests were allowed to eat that showbread. And David took it and he ate it, didn't he? And gave it to those who were with him, his hungry soldiers.

So why does Jesus use this story? Well, it could be. One of the reasons, I think, is that it's an example of putting human need above religious ceremony.

And that's surely a part of it, I think, why Jesus uses this. It's that God desires mercy and not sacrifice. Jesus shows this by healing.

In the next story in chapter 3 there, he shows it by healing on the Sabbath day. God's law should never be at odds with human flourishing.

[15 : 57] Because that's why it was given. That's why God gave his law to promote human flourishing. Look in verse 27 there. Jesus says, the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.

So God didn't make you to keep rules. He made the rules to keep us, to keep humanity in a state of happiness and flourishing. But I think the real reason why Jesus uses this story is because David acted above the law.

And in Mark's Gospel, Jesus is always pointing to himself. He's always pointing back to himself. David is the true king of Israel, acted above the law. Didn't he?

Got away with it. He was given a place of special privilege. Jesus is putting himself in the same category as David. In fact, he's putting himself far above David.

Look there in verse 28. Therefore, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath. Or here it says, so the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.

[17:06] Okay, what an astounding statement he's making there. By calling himself Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus is saying that I define what's lawful on the Sabbath because I instituted it.

Remember Mark is announcing to us the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, which is the divine Son of God.

That's who he's announcing to us. Back in chapter 1, you read it. He's the eternal Son of God who's become one of us. Jesus is the Lord. Mark's proclaiming to us that Jesus is the Lord who created the world in six days and rested on the seventh.

Jesus is the Lord who delivered Israel out of bondage and thundered the law from Mount Sinai. Now here he is amongst us, walking amongst us.

He's become one of us here. The Communists, I think it was Dick Lucas, who was, I think he's friends with Paul Levy and he's a preacher at, what's the church again up the road?

[18:20] St. Helens. He was there for a long time, wasn't he? And I remember hearing that he did this very clever thing with a Communist newspaper around Christmas time, I think it was, and a Communist newspaper said that the working man has become the master.

And he flipped it around and said, talking about the Gospel, that the master has become the working man. And that's what we see here in Mark's Gospel.

That's who he's proclaiming to us. That's who this Jesus is. He's the God of rest that has become the man of sorrows. Isn't he?

He worked with his hands. He worked as a carpenter. He worked with his hands to heal the sick.

We see there he worked to keep the law perfectly. He worked to keep the law perfectly for you.

And he did that. He even rested perfectly for you. For you and I haven't rested, as we should, have we? We're constantly, our hearts drifting from God.

[19:26] And we've got an unbelieving heart when we should be resting and trusting in God. We're not really. But Jesus, the good news is that Jesus has rested for you.

He kept the law. He kept the fourth commandment perfectly. He rested in God for all our self-righteousness. He trusted in God, even in the most difficult circumstances, remember in the Garden of Gethsemane, that he was sweating blood, thinking about the gruesome work that he had done to take on the cross, where he would die for the sins of the world.

And he said, not my will, but your will be done. We just sung that, didn't we? He rested and trusted in God and went to the cross for you. Remember on the cross he said that it was finished.

It's finished. It's done. The work is done. The price is paid. So that's the only way that you and I can find this deep rest.

Because you get the verdict now, the verdict that everyone is searching for, that Abrams was searching for, trying to justify his existence. You and I can get that verdict now, where we're justified and sanctified, where God looks at you and says, this is my beloved child in whom I'm well pleased.

[20:49] Not because of what you do, but because of what Christ has done. That's the difference. That's how you get that deep rest, that's like the REM sleep. That's how you get that spiritually, is to look to Christ and trust in him.

Trust in Christ, believe in Christ, rely on Christ instead of your own strength. He's the Lord of the Sabbath. That's what he says here. So you can cease. The good news is that you can cease trying to find approval from others.

You can cease trying to be righteous on your own. You can cease from running around like crazy trying to get approval from your parents or your teachers or even your church.

there's always something else you'll need to do. There's always someone else you'll have to please to show the world that you're worth something, that you're valuable.

But the gospel, the good news about the gospel, what Mark is proclaiming, that Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath, that he's the Lord of rest and he calls you to come to him. The gospel means that you don't have to prove anything to the world or to other people.

[21 : 59] You don't have to earn anything. The world doesn't depend on you. Your salvation doesn't depend on you. It doesn't depend on whether you come to church or read your Bible. It depends on Christ alone.

Well, friends, I want to finish up by saying can you hear the sweet voice of Jesus calling you when he says, come to me all you who labour and are heavy laden and I'll give you rest.

He says, come to me, anyone. Anyone, I ask it without conditions, without qualifications, anyone, to come to him. I wonder if you've ever done that. Maybe you're here and you haven't done that. I'd encourage you to do it, to come to Christ, to enter the rest.

Believe in him, trust in him. Just means, maybe that's a bit of Christian jargon, resting in him is like you're resting in your chair. You're putting all your weight on it.

You're leaning on it. You're trusting in it, that it's going to hold you. So we do the same with Christ. And he calls all to come to him. And he says, I will give you rest.

[23 : 06] Maybe you've already done that. You're here. The Bible says you need to strive to enter into that rest. It says, watch out for an unbelieving heart, an evil and unbelieving heart, which goes away from Christ, which forgets about him.

And that's what the Lord's Supper is about, isn't it? That's why he instituted it for us, which we get to have later. Remember, he said, do this in remembrance of me.

And then I want to encourage you that every Sunday you meet together, it's Resurrection Day, it's the Lord's Day. Now, give expression to what you believe as you gather here. Praise Jesus as you gather and give yourself a break.

Let's pray. Bye. Bye.