

## MARK 2:23-4:34

### LORD OF THE SABBATH

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## WHO WERE THE PHARISEES?

- 175 BC Syrian ruler Antiochus IV set up pagan altars all over Israel, including in the Temple in Jerusalem, but was met with resistance by the Hasidim ("faithful ones"), a group that embraced both the Written Torah and the developing Oral Torah.
- 165 BC With support from the Hasidim and others, Judas Maccabeus drove the Syrians out of the Temple and removed the pagan altar.
- 135-104 BC Judas' nephew, John Hyrcanus, sought to adopt Greek practices from the Romans, prompting the Hasidim to rebuke him. He sided with the Sadducees and they broke away, solidifying the group known as the Pharisees ("separate ones").

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## WHO WERE THE PHARISEES?

- 103-76 BC Hyrcanus' son, Alexander Jannaeus, continued to adopt and expand Greek practices, resulting in an uprising supported by the Pharisees. After Jannaeus put down the rebellion he crucified 800 rebels in one day.
- 63-37 BC The Pharisees supported a Roman effort to resolve a Sadducean power struggle, resulting in Rome installing Herod as king.
- 37-4 BC Because the Sadducees opposed Herod's rule the Pharisees initially enjoyed a favorable relationship with him, but they eventually turned against him because of his impiety and corruption.

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### WHO WERE THE PHARISEES?

- Strong commitment to both the Written and the Oral Torah.
- Widely regarded by the people as authoritative.
- Political rivals with the Sadducees (less pious aristocrats).
- Actively undermined corrupt or foreign rule.
- Heavily persecuted.

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### THE CRITIQUE (2:24, 3:2)

The main categories of [labor forbidden on the Sabbath] are forty minus one: Seeding, plowing, harvesting, bundling, threshing, winnowing, selecting, grinding, sifting, kneading, and baking. Shearing wool, bleaching it, carding it, dyeing it, spinning, warping, setting up two loops, weaving two threads, undoing two threads, tying, untying, sewing two stitches, and tearing in order to sew [two stitches]. Trapping a deer, slaughtering it, skinning it, salting it, tanning its hide, scraping it, and cutting it. Writing two letters and erasing in order to write two letters. Building and destroying, Extinguishing and kindling, Hitting with a hammer. Transporting from one domain to another. These are main categories of labor: forty minus one.

Mishnah Shabbat 7.2

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### THE CRITIQUE (2:24, 3:2)

One is liable if he carries out a cow's mouthful worth of straw; or a camel's mouthful worth of pea-stalks; or a lamb's mouthful worth of grain; or a kid's mouthful worth of grass; or moist garlic or moist onion leaves [the size of] a dried fig; or a kid's mouthful worth of dry garlic or onion leaves.

Mishnah Shabbat 7.4

One who desecrates the Sabbath through an act for which a wanton violation renders him liable to spiritual excision, and a violation in error obligates him [to sacrifice] a sin-offering.

Mishnah Sanhedrin 7.8

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THE ANSWER (2:25-26, 3:4-5)

- 1. Legalism distorts God's intent (2:27; Lk 11:37-54).
- 2. Legalism produces a hard heart (3:5).

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LEGALISM QUESTIONNAIRE

- 1. Do you keep score?
- 2. Do you view the disciplines as things to do to be a "good" Christian, or to please God?
- 3. Do you "humble brag?" Is it important to you for others to know how you serve Jesus, or how you've been "used by God?"
- 4. Do you compare your spiritual life to others? Do you look down on people less disciplined, or people too rigid?
- 5. Is it difficult for you to unconditionally forgive others, or grasp the unconditional forgiveness of God?
- 6. Do you find yourself thinking everything would be better if more people thought / acted like you?
- 7. Do you view the Bible as a book of rules to follow or as a means to growing in intimacy with Jesus?
- 8. Do you view God as someone to obey more than someone to love?

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LEGALISM VS. GOSPEL

Legalism:

- 1. Goal is moral behavior.
- 2. Means of acceptance.
- 3. Willpower fueled by guilt and shame.
- 4. Lacks the power to transform.

Gospel:

- 1. Goal is God Himself.
- 2. Means of grace.
- 3. Empowered by the Spirit, fueled by love.
- 4. Participation with the Spirit, who alone has the power to transform.

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THE ANSWER (2:25-26, 3:4-5)

- 1. Legalism distorts God's intent (2:27; Lk 11:37-54).
- 2. Legalism produces a hard heart (3:5).
- 3. Legalism conceals Jesus (2:28).

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THE LORD OF THE SABBATH

"The word *Sabbath* means a deep rest, a deep peace. It's a near synonym for *shalom* – a state of wholeness and flourishing in every dimension of life. When Jesus says, "I am the Lord of the Sabbath," Jesus means that he *is* the Sabbath. He is the source of the deep rest we need . . . Most of us work and work trying to prove ourselves, to convince God, others, and ourselves that we're good people. That work is never over unless we rest in the gospel. At the end of his great act of creation the Lord said, "It is finished," and he could rest. On the cross at the end of his great act of redemption Jesus said, "It is finished" – and we can rest."

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THE LORD OF THE SABBATH

"On the cross Jesus was saying of the work underneath your work – the thing that makes you truly weary, this need to prove yourself because who you are and what you do are never good enough – that it is finished. He has lived the life you should have lived, he has died the death you should have died. If you rely on Jesus' finished work, you know that God is satisfied with you. You can be satisfied with life."

Tim Keller, *Jesus the King*

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THE LORD OF THE SABBATH

“Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

Romans 10:4

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“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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

~ Jesus

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**Small Group Discussion Questions**  
**(Mark 2:23-4:34)**  
**March 10, 2016**

*Allow each person in your group to answer one of the following questions:*

- *What did you learn this week?*
  - *What are you going to do about it?*
  - *Who are you going to tell?*
1. The Pharisees were so obsessed with the Law that they ended up perverting it by imposing things on it that did not belong. Instead of a tool to bring them to God, the Law had become their god. Do you think obedience to a checklist of things to do produces burdensome stress or joy? Why?
  2. What are some ways we still make the Christian life about the Law? Go around the group and identify some of the symptoms that reveal a life devoted more to the Law than to cultivating intimacy with Jesus.
  3. In *Jesus the King*, Tim Keller writes, “Most people in the world believe that if there is a God, you relate to God by being good . . . there’s a code of conduct, and if you follow it God will look upon you with favor. But they all have the same logic: If I perform, if I obey, I’m accepted.” Do you identify with this performance-based-acceptance way of thinking? If so, share with the group how this manifests itself in your life. Using references from the Gospels, discuss with the group what Jesus has to say about this thinking.
  4. The gospel stands in direct opposition to this performance mindset. There is a finality in the finished work of Jesus that brings about the true Sabbath, a deep rest in our souls. What are some of the major differences between living a life devoted to the Law and a gospel type of life? What are some practical steps your group can take to remind and encourage one another not to ritualistically observe the Sabbath, but to moment-by-moment draw near to the Lord of the Sabbath?

“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

~ Jesus (Mark 2:27-28)