**JESUS IS LORD OF THE SABBATH**

January 27, 2013

Mark 2:23-3:6

Key Verse 2:28 “So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

Last week we learned that new wine must be put into new wine skins. Old wineskins are stiff and worn out. They cannot stretch to accommodate the new wine, rather they will burst open and the wine will spill out. One of the characteristics of the old wineskin person is “unteachable”. In today’s passage, the Pharisees reveal themselves to be old wineskins, by their refusal to learn from Jesus’ teaching about the Sabbath, and through their stubborn hearts. On the other hand, the man with the shriveled hand stretched out his hand by faith, overcoming his pride and shame, and Jesus healed him. Let’s learn today that Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath, and Jesus can heal our shriveled hands when we stretch them out.

**First**, Jesus declares his Lordship (23-28). One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields with his disciples. The disciples were hungry. Perhaps they had skipped breakfast; they frequently missed meals as they traveled. In their hunger, the kernels of grain began to look very delicious, like freshly baked muffins. Unconsciously the disciples’ hands extended to pick heads of grain. Then suddenly some Pharisees popped up and said to Jesus, “Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?” They wanted to arrest the disciples and take them to prison, or at least give a serious ticket for Sabbath violation. The one good thing we can say for the Pharisees is that they were zealous for the law. But their zeal was not based on knowledge (Rom 10:2). The fourth commandment says, “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth and everything in them, but he rested on the seventh day.” In order to keep the Old Testament Sabbath, they had to know what is work and what is not. The Bible is vague about this. It tells us that collecting firewood is work, but that eating a meal is not. Then where do you draw the line? Is what the disciples are doing called work? To the Pharisees, in their zeal to keep even the tiniest letter of the law, they interpreted work in the broadest manner. They said that if you carry more than an ounce in your pocket, then you are working. (Everyone here who has a wallet in their pocket, therefore is working.)

How did Jesus answer? First of all, Jesus taught them that God is not legalistic. Jesus referred to a specific incident in 1 Samuel 21:1-6, when David ate the consecrated bread which was lawful only for priests to eat. David was a man after God’s own heart, the great King of Israel, and the foreshadow of the Messiah. 1 Kings 15:5 says, “For David had done what was right in the eyes of the Lord and had not failed to keep any of the Lord’s commands all the days of his life except in the case of Uriah the Hittite.” (David’s act of eating the consecrated bread is not mentioned here.) God did not see David with legalistic eyes. Rather, God wanted to protect David and to feed him when he was hungry. However, when David violated two of the Ten Commandments, “Do not commit adultery; Do not murder,” God severely punished him. God is holy, but he is not legalistic. God was not upset at the disciples for eating heads of grain on the Sabbath. This was petty legalism on the part of the Pharisees. The Pharisees should have invited Jesus and his disciples for breakfast instead of criticizing them.

Jesus also restored to the people the true meaning of the Sabbath. Look at verse 27. “Then he said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.’” In the clutter of detailed rules derived by the Pharisees, the original purpose and meaning of the Sabbath had been lost. God did not give the Sabbath to burden man. God gave the Sabbath to bless man. The Sabbath is a gift from God, a day of rest to restore his body, mind and spirit after a week of hard work. God wanted man to have this real rest. The Sabbath was meant to be a day to look forward to. But, when the law is interpreted too legalistically, then the Sabbath becomes a burden. For instance, modern orthodox Jews are still very careful about keeping the Sabbath. They will not drive a car, or take a bus. Modern technology required many new rules. Is it lawful to take an elevator on the Sabbath? They decided that it was lawful to ride in an elevator, but it would be work to push the elevator button. Therefore, on the Sabbath, elevators in Israel automatically run all day Saturday, stopping on every floor. Can you imagine it, and empty elevator, all day long going up, up, up and down, down, down. Or a man who wants to go to the 25th floor, waiting while the elevator stops on 1,2,3,4,5,6, even though there is no one else on the elevator. They work so hard at not working! Can this be what God meant by not working on the Sabbath? Obviously not! Since the Jews turned away from God, they have been living without God, follow an empty, meaningless, and even abolished law. In this way, the law becomes a burden. In this way, they will look forward to the sunset on the Sabbath so that elevators run normally.

Look at verse 28. “So the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” As the Lord of mankind, Jesus is also the Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus can use the Sabbath as he sees fit. After his resurrection, Jesus appeared on the first day of the week, “the Lord’s day,” and established Sunday for Christian worship. We do not call Sunday “the Sabbath,” but “the Lord’s day”; yet it functions similarly. It is the day to worship Jesus and find rest. The Old Testament Sabbath law was described many times as a sign to the Israelites. Exodus 31:13 says, “You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generation to come, so you may know that I am the Lord, who makes you holy.” Worshiping God on Sunday together is a sign that we are God’s people. By keeping the Sabbath holy, we are declaring ourselves as God’s people. This glorifies God. Eric Liddell was a world class sprinter who represented Scotland in the 1924 Paris Olympics. He was a favorite to win 100-meter race. But the first qualifying heat was on a Sunday. Eric believed that it would dishonor the Lord for him to run on a Sunday. So he made a costly decision to forfeit the race. He seemed to give up a gold medal. But to him, it was more important to honor Jesus as Lord. God used his decision of faith to inspire many to honor the Lord on Sunday. God blessed his decision, and helped him to compete in 400-meter race. Just before the race began, a fellow Christian handed him a note, quoting 1 Samuel 2:30, “Those who honor me I will honor…” Eric won the gold medal. Jesus is Lord the Sabbath. Let’s do our best to honor Jesus by honoring the Lord’s day.

**Second**, stretch out your hand (3:1-6). Jesus not only declared, but demonstrated with power that he is Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. His situation was pitiable. He had been born with a grotesque deformity, one of his hands was normal, but the other hand was twisted and useless. He probably hid it in his pocket. Imagine having such a hand. I mean, for something as simple as if the barber gives us a bad haircut, we are embarrassed and wear a ball cap until it grows out. But more difficult for the man was his physical difficulties. So many things that we do require two hands. This man could hit a hammer, he could hold a nail. But he could not hold a nail while hitting a hammer. So he could not be a carpenter. He could not play piano. There were many things he could not do. So he was probably poor, and probably felt inferior and ashamed. He must have sat in the back of the synagogue almost unnoticed. But this time, the Pharisees took great interest in him and escorted him to the front. The Pharisees watched carefully to see if Jesus would heal the man. If so, they would immediately charge Jesus with breaking the Sabbath. Notice what they knew about Jesus. They knew that Jesus had the power to heal. They knew that Jesus cared for the sick. Therefore, they decided to accuse Jesus, based on his power and his compassion. What an evil heart! If they know that Jesus has the power to heal, then why don’t they believe him? How can they have such stubborn hearts to not make the connection? It is because they are the old wineskins and simply cannot stretch their minds even an inch.

Jesus knew this. Jesus could have avoided the controversy by healing him later. However, Jesus wanted to make a point: Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus told the man with the shriveled hand, “Stand up in front of everyone.” The atmosphere grew tense. The man must have felt somewhat helpless, caught in a struggle bigger than himself. He had to make a decision to stand up or not. Something about Jesus’ words moved his heart. He felt the love of Jesus and holiness of God in Jesus. He knew it was right for him to stand with Jesus.

Look at verse 4. “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.” Jesus’ question made the issue simple and clear. It was really all about motive. They claimed that they were keeping the Sabbath and that Jesus was a Sabbath breaker, but here was Jesus saving lives, and here they were having murderous thoughts on the Sabbath. Look at verse 5. “He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, ‘Stretch out you hand.’ He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.” We are always surprised when we find Jesus angry in the Bible. Often we picture Jesus with an angelic peaceful face. But what has made Jesus so angry, and so deeply distressed? It is their stubborn hearts. What is a stubborn heart? Stubborn is when you know what you should do, but you refuse to do it, because you just don’t want to submit. The Pharisees were stubborn, because they knew the answer to Jesus’ question, but they stubbornly refused to say it. They knew that it was wrong to kill, but they were going to kill Jesus anyway.

Look at verse 5b. “He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.” Why did Jesus make such a public spectacle of this man? Forcing the man to stand up in front of everyone, and forcing the man to pull his ugly, shameful hand out his pocket and hold it up for everyone to see. It looks very insensitive of Jesus. It probably hurts the man’s feelings. It took faith, for the man to overcome his shame and reveal his hand for everyone to see. He might have worried that the children would look at him as a monster, and then everyone would think he was ugly. But by faith, he stretched out his hand for all to see. And miraculously, when he did so, his hand was not ugly anymore. Once he held it up his hand was restored. The key word of verse 5 is the word “restored.” Jesus had him hold up his hand, not to be ridiculed but to be restored, even though the Pharisees were watching. Jesus wanted this man to be restored into normal society and not to be ashamed to stand in front of people. He wanted this man to have a clear testimony of his healing.

At Bible conferences, we hear many life testimonies. Often, when people share their testimonies, they bring out ugly, dirty sins. Sometimes it is too ugly to hear. Why then do we share testimonies? The answer is found here. It is to get healing from Jesus. When we hold up our sins before God, suddenly our lives are restored and our sins are forgiven. At the Well conference last December, John Martin testified that he lived with shame because he was sexually molested by an older man. But when he shared his testimony before God and others, God took away his shame and guilt and healed him and made him whole. James 5:16 says, “Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” Sin is like carrying a block of lead with you all day, and confessing your sin is like being set free from your heavy burden. But when we have a sin problem, the natural instinct is to hide it, keep it in, don’t let anyone see it, like this man with his shriveled hand. Then sin becomes a barrier between us and God and between us and each other. But 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

In this passage, we learn that Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath. We must come to Jesus on the Lord’s day. We must recognize him as Lord and honor him and worship him with all our hearts. Let’s stretch out our shriveled hands to Jesus so that he may heal them.