

Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath, Part 1

Scripture: Mark 2:23–28

Code: 41-11

Let's open the Word of God to the second chapter of the gospel of Mark, as we continue our wonderful spiritual adventure, living, as it were, with our Lord Jesus Christ, being with Him as if we were among His disciples, experiencing the things that they experienced through the eyes of Mark. Each of the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, is intended to present to us not only the events of the life of Jesus but the reality of His identity. It is not merely a story of a man and His activities, it's a story of the God-man and His ministry and His purpose.

Each of the gospel writers, all four of them, is concerned that we understand who Jesus Christ is, the ringing and repeated messages that He is God in human flesh. There's no mistaking that in the gospel of Mark. In chapter 1 in verse 1, He is introduced to us as Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In chapter 1 in verse 3, He is identified as the Lord. In chapter 1 verses 7 and 8, He is described as the coming One who is mightier than John the Baptist, and of Him, John says, "I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of His sandals."

In that same text, He is identified as the one who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. In chapter 1 in verse 11, God the Father calls Him, "My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." In chapter 1 in verse 14, He is the preacher of the gospel of God. He is the Kingdom offeror who presents the Kingdom of salvation to all who repent and believe. In chapter 1 verse 24, even the demons weigh in on His identity, referring to Him as the Holy One of God.

It is clear already from these opening two chapters that the Holy One of God, the Son of God, the Lord, is the one who has power and authority over demons, power and authority over temptation, power and authority over Satan, power and authority over disease, and even power and authority to forgive sin. How important this is if He is to be the Savior that He be able to overpower all the effects of fallenness in the world, overpowering Satan, overpowering demons, overpowering disease, even overpowering death and overpowering sin.

And so, Mark has unmistakably identified Him as God in human flesh, the true Savior and Redeemer. In our text, verses 23 to 28 which concludes chapter 2, He is identified by another title. It comes in verse 28, "So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." He has already been referred to as the Son of Man, which certainly refers to His humanity but also is a messianic title drawn from Daniel 7:13. But here I want you to look at the title, "Lord of the Sabbath," Lord of the Sabbath.

This may not seem like a significant title when given all the others that have come before, but in terms of His relationship to the Pharisees and the scribes, His archenemies and the architects of the apostate Judaism that dominated the nation, this was the most troublesome of all His claims. To call Himself "the Lord of the Sabbath" was to them an outrage beyond comprehension. They were very well aware of the fact that God had ordained the Sabbath. It is Genesis chapter 2 which begins with the statement that "Having created everything in six days, on the seventh day, God rested," and then "God ordained the Sabbath and blessed it and sanctified it."

Clearly then, from Genesis 2 in verse 3, the Sabbath was ordained by God. It is God Himself who is the Lord of the Sabbath, Lord meaning sovereign. It is God Himself who is the sovereign over the Sabbath who rules over the Sabbath, who defines the Sabbath. Furthermore, it was God who wrote with His own fiery finger in the tablets of stone in Exodus 20, verses 8 to 11, "Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy," and then went on to further designate what that Sabbath should be given to.

It was God Himself who reiterated the Sabbath in Exodus 31 verses 12 to 17, and it was God who repeated the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5 in the re-giving of the Law on the borders of the land of Canaan after the wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. It was always God who laid out the Sabbath law. To claim then to be Lord of the Sabbath was essentially to claim to be God. And anyone who does that is either God or a blasphemer of the rankest kind. And there really is no middle ground.

You cannot say of Jesus that He was a good teacher who got a little bit carried away with certain things. He is either God as He claimed to be, or He is the supreme blasphemer. You don't have any option in the middle. Now, when Jesus called Himself Lord of the Sabbath, He struck the severest blow at the Pharisaic system. Because the Pharisaic system, the system of works, merit, self-righteousness, achievement, attainment, of spiritual relationship with God through ceremony and ritual and external law-keeping, found its focal point in the Sabbath.

Every seventh day of the week was the main day for Pharisaic religion. When Jesus then ignored, disdained the Sabbath, He put Himself in direct conflict with the Jewish leaders at the most sensitive point. We're going to see that in this section at the end of chapter 2 and also in the first six verses of chapter 3. Both of these incidents are back-to-back illustrations of Jesus' utter disregard for Judaism's treatment of the Sabbath. Matthew, Mark and Luke present both of them back to back in the same way. They likely happened on sequential Sabbaths.

But before we look at verse 23 in this text, I want you to back up. I want you to back up in time to John chapter 5, John chapter 5. Before Jesus took on the Sabbath conflict in Galilee which is recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and we'll look at Mark's account of it. This is the first time Mark mentions Sabbath conflict. He had already established His attitude toward the Sabbath in Jerusalem. Chapter 5 of the gospel of John begins, "After these things there was a feast of the Jews and Jesus went up to Jerusalem." You always go up to Jerusalem even though it's down on a map, it's up geographically.

This is at some time right in the middle of His Galilean ministry, Jesus went to Jerusalem. Remember, there were some critical festivals and feasts that occurred during the year and everybody migrated, everybody did a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for those events. This is one of those feasts, very likely the Feast of Tabernacles. And so, Jesus goes to Jerusalem, leaves His Galilean ministry with everybody else, does the journey to Jerusalem to celebrate this feast which would last about a week.

Now, having arrived in Jerusalem, He heads for a showdown with the Pharisees and the scribes, with the Jewish leaders, including really the Sadducees and the whole Sanhedrin, the ruling council. From this point on, the hostility reaches a fever pitch because He takes on their Sabbath. It unfolds pretty simply. "In Jerusalem," – verse 2 says – "by the sheep gate there was a pool. In the Hebrew,

the name was Bethesda, it had five porches, or five porticos.” And sick people, blind people, lame people, and withered people were lying there.

Some old – or some texts have the next section, some leave it out. It may not have been in the original, but there was a superstition that if you could get into the water, occasionally an angel would trouble the water and if you could get into the water first you’d get healed. There’s no indication that that was reality but that was what people thought, that somehow an angel would stir the water and if you were the first one in, you would be healed. Well, verse 5, “A man was there who had been ill for 38 years.” Thirty-eight years.

Now, if you have been ill for 38 years, all your body is essentially atrophied. He’s lying there, that’s how ill he is. He had been there a long time in that condition. “He said to him, ‘Do you wish to get well?’ The sick man answered Him, ‘Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up. But while I am coming, another steps down before me.’ – I can’t ever be the first one in. I can’t make it. – “Jesus *said to him, ‘Pick up – Get up, pick up your pallet’ – or your bed – ‘and walk.’ Immediately the man became well,” – in the sense that Jesus always made people well; there’s no need for rehabilitation; there’s no need for the muscles to restrengthen. It’s total, complete, comprehensive. – “The man became well, picked up his pallet, began to walk.”

Now here’s the problem. “Now, it was the Sabbath on that day.” The Sabbath ran from sundown Friday night to sundown Saturday night. That was the sacred time, it was the Sabbath. So the Jews respond in their compassionless merciless way, verse 10. This would be the Pharisees and the scribes and those who would adhere to their views, saying to the man who was cured, “It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet.”

I mean, have you ever heard of insensitivity? Thirty-eight years the man has been ill and he finally could get up and walk and carry his bed and you make an issue out of the fact that it’s the Sabbath and you’re not supposed to be carrying something? But he answered them, “He who made me well was the one who said to me, ‘Pick up your pallet and walk.’” The point he’s making is “Look, if this man has power over disease, then he has an authority beyond yours. And when he said walk, I walked.” The man who He healed didn’t even know who He was, because Jesus slipped away while there was a crowd in that place.

Now go down to verse 16. Here’s the problem. “For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus because He was doing these things on the Sabbath.” Wow! How horrible to heal somebody on the Sabbath. Sabbatarian tradition was their domain and they were fanatical, I mean fanatical about it, way beyond Scripture. Scripture gives no restrictions for the Sabbath other than you don’t work, and that was a mercy. But they invented endless, impossible rules, restraints, restrictions for Sabbath conduct, and they made every one of those rules as restrictive as possible.

And the idea was that the more deprivations you have, the more holy you become. And then they guarded their rules fiercely, demanding that every person in the whole nation observe them all. This is the hill they would die on. Even the Sadducees who were their theological enemies and adversaries, generally – really, they hated each other – but the Sadducees yielded to the Pharisees on the Sabbath issues. They did it because they just couldn’t take the heat and they did it for the sake of peace and to maintain and safeguard their reputation as spiritual men.

They complied. Even the Sadducee high priest complied. Everybody complied with the forced restraints of Sabbatarianism. So ultra-activists, Sabbatarian legalism became the defining religious emblem of spiritual virtue in Israel. And Jesus rejected it all. He would never conform to the traditions of men, to manmade rules that had replaced the Law of God. He says that to them in Matthew 15. "You have substituted traditions of men for the Law of God." So this event, John 5, hits the Pharisees and scribes at the heart of their system. They're callous, they're compassionless, they are brutal, they are merciless toward people suffering. They are fanatical about their self-righteous rules.

This is what Jesus had in mind, by the way, when He said in Matthew 11:28 and following, He said this, "Come unto Me all you who labor and who are heavy laden." He wasn't talking about people who were doing physical labor. He was talking about people who were under the burden of an oppressive, restrictive, Sabbatarian legalism from which you could get no relief, from which you never were delivered from a guilty conscience. "Come unto Me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you" – What? – "rest. Take My yoke, learn of Me. My yoke is easy, My burden is light." Massive difference between grace and the legalistic system.

Matthew 23, He says, "You bind heavy burdens on people and never lift a finger to help them carry them." They lived under fanatical, fanatical need to adhere to endless rules down to the minutia, which they never could do and thus they were never free from the burden of their own guilt and lack of achievement. So Jesus defied their Sabbath manmade rules and because of this, verse 16 says, "the Jews were persecuting Jesus since He was doing these things on the Sabbath." And this is what He said in response, "Sorry, guys, please forgive Me." Is that what He said? No, "My Father is working until now and I Myself am working." God and I, we decide what to do on the Sabbath, not you."

Well, that was an outrage beyond the prior outrage. Verse 18 says, "For this reason, therefore, the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him." They had already been seeking to kill Him. Now they were seeking all the more to kill Him because He not only was breaking the Sabbath but also was calling God His own Father making Himself equal with God. When He gets back to Galilee after the week in Jerusalem and the travel back, He then claims to be God again by saying, "I am Lord of the Sabbath." I mean this was an absolute confrontation of their entire religious system which found its focal point in Sabbath observance.

Now John 5 is the first Sabbath confrontation, and the Lord does not back down. In fact, in verse 18 it says they "were seeking all the more to kill Him because He was making Himself equal with God." You know what He then does in verse 19 clear to the end of the chapter? He affirms that He is God. He doesn't do any bridge building, He doesn't look for common ground with false religion. Back in verse 34 it says, "The testimony which I receive is not from man, but I say these things that you may be saved." He acknowledges that they are religious but unsaved, like all people in false religions.

Well, after that short festival visit to Jerusalem, He returns to Galilee. So let's return with Him back to Mark chapter 2. He goes back to Galilee. Believe me, what happened on that Sabbath in Jerusalem had traveled back with Him, probably got back before Him. And He's going to confront that same issue in Galilee. Verse 23, "It happened that He was passing through the grain fields on the Sabbath, and His disciples began to make their way along while picking the heads of grain.

"The Pharisees were saying 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 was in need and he and his

companions became hungry; how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests, and he also gave it to those who were with him?' Jesus said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.'"

You see, Jesus was always choosing people – always forcing people to choose between His gospel of humility, repentance, grace and faith and the damning religion of Judaism, full of pride, self-righteousness, merit and works. Choose Judaism or choose the gospel, there's no common ground. Choose the old wineskins, the old worn-out cloth, or the new wine and the new material. The choice is still the same, still the same.

Now you need to know a little bit about how fanatical they were about the Sabbath so that you can understand this. The word "Sabbath" comes from sabbaton. Its root is the verb "to cease." The double beta like the double "B" in Sabbath is an intensified form, so it's a complete cessation. It was God who defined Sabbath in Genesis 2:3. He ceased completely from the work of creation. And so, Sabbath came to refer to that day when people ceased working. That's all the Old Testament says. It simply says you're not to work. It doesn't give any particular detailed minute prescriptions. You're not to work, you're to rest. It's to be a day of joy. It's made for man, a day of rest, recuperation, restoration, worship.

But the hypocritical Pharisees and scribes had developed all kinds of things to make Sabbath worse than every other day because of its unbelievable restraints. Edersheim, in his classic work, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, has done some marvelous work in researching this and going back and digging it out of the Talmud. The Talmud comes after Christ some time but picks up and codifies all the laws that have long existed in Judaism.

For example, you couldn't travel more than three thousand feet. Some say you can't go more than nineteen hundred and ninety-nine steps. If you take the two thousandth step, you've violated Sabbath. Now, this would be from Friday when the sun goes down till Saturday when it goes down. The only way you can go further than that is if you put some food nineteen hundred and ninety-nine steps away on Friday before Sabbath, and once you got to the food, you'll get another nineteen hundred and ninety-nine steps, either go further or to come back.

Now, wherever there were narrow streets, according to the Talmud, you could lay a piece of wood or a piece of rope over the entrance to the street between the dwellings on each side, and you could make the street like the entrance to a house so you could go another three thousand feet or nineteen hundred and ninety-nine steps beyond that.

By the way, in the Talmud there are 24 chapters of Sabbath laws. There are 24 chapters of Sabbath laws and one rabbi said he spent two and a half years studying one chapter to figure out all the minutia. Things like you could lift something up and put something down, but only from certain places to certain places. You could lift it up in a public place and put it down in a private place, or you could lift it up in a private place and put it down in a public place, or you could lift it up in a wide place and put it in a legally free place and on and on and on. No burden could be carried that weighed more than a dried fig, or half a fig carried two times.

If – if you put an olive in your mouth and rejected it because it was bad, you couldn't put a whole one

in the next time because the palate had tasted the flavor of a whole olive. If you threw an object in the air and caught it with the other hand, it was a sin. If you caught it in the same hand, it wasn't. If a person was in one place and he reached out his arm for food and the Sabbath overtook him, he would have to drop the food and not return his arm, or he would be carrying a burden and that would be sin.

A tailor couldn't carry his needle. The scribe couldn't carry his pen. A pupil couldn't carry his books. No clothing could be examined lest somehow you find a lice and inadvertently kill it. Wool couldn't be dyed. Nothing could be sold. Nothing could be bought. Nothing could be washed. A letter could not be sent even if it was sent via a heathen. No fire could be lit. Cold water could be poured on warm, but warm couldn't be poured on cold. An egg could not be boiled even if all you did was put it in the sand. If you've been to Israel, you know there are times in the year when the sand is so hot you could boil an egg. That was not allowed.

You could not bathe for fear when the water fell off of you it might wash the floor. If a candle was lit, you couldn't put it out. If it wasn't lit, you couldn't light it. Chairs couldn't be moved because they might make a rut. Women couldn't look in a glass or they might find a white hair and be tempted to pull it out. Women couldn't wear jewelry because jewelry weighs more than a dried fig. A radish couldn't be left in salt because it would make it a pickle and that's work. No more grain could be pickled than you could put in a lamb's mouth.

It goes on and on. Laws about wine, honey, milk, spitting, writing, getting dirt off your clothes. You could use only enough ink for two letters. Not two written letters, two alphabetic letters. You could have a wad in your ear but you wouldn't put false teeth in your mouth. What was forbidden? Sowing, plowing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, sifting, grinding, kneading, baking, washing wool, beating wool, dying wool, spinning wool, putting on a weaver's beam, making threads, weaving threads, separating threads, making a knot, untying a knot, sewing two stitches. On and on and on. You talk about heavy laden. The system was oppressive and it was all unscriptural and horribly ungodly and brutally unkind.

Now, with that in the background, let's look at the story, the Sabbath incident. "It happened that He was passing through the grain fields on the Sabbath and His disciples began to make their way along while picking the heads of grain." Huh! That's the key, it's a Sabbath incident. By the way, the Pharisees are following Him, so they don't make an issue about Him walking beyond three thousand feet, or nineteen hundred and ninety-nine steps because they're there too. So they were dogging His steps everywhere He went. They conveniently don't mention this because they would have been in violation of it as well. But then again, they knew they were in violation of a whole lot of things. What they do focus on is, by their own standards, a severe violation.

They were going through sown fields. Literally, sown fields is what Luke calls them, maybe wheat or barley. The grain is ripe, which makes it presumably spring or summer. In the Jordan Valley, grain ripens in the Valley from April to August. Harvest may have been very near. The fields are laid out in strips with paths crisscrossing the strips. The roads are not distinguishable from the paths through the field. There aren't thoroughfares, highways, big roads. Everybody goes through the land walking through the fields and that's the way it's always been.

And so, in Deuteronomy 23:25, God makes a wonderful – wonderful provision for travelers. When you enter your neighbor's standing grain, then you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall

not put a sickle in your neighbor's standing grain. Obviously, you can't just harvest the grain and haul it off, but when you're traveling through his fields, have at it. Take what's there. This would be true of – of any kind of food in a reasonable, sensible way. To stave off your hunger, you're welcome to what is there. So the Old Testament provides for that and it doesn't restrict it to six days a week, it simply says you can do it.

The Old Testament never restricts how far a person can walk, how far they can go, how heavy the burden they can carry. It simply calls them to stop working and rest and spend the day worshiping God with no other narrowing restrictions. So His disciples are doing exactly what the Old Testament allowed them to do. His disciples making their way along while picking the heads of grain. Luke adds they were then rubbing them in their hands. They pick off the heads of grain, rub the heads of grain so they could get the inside fruit out from the husk and the shell. Matthew adds they did it because they were hungry.

This, of course, was perfectly within the purposes of God and the revelation of God in the Old Testament, but in direct violation of the religious rules manmade which dominated that legalistic culture. So you have then the Sabbath incident. It leads to the scornful indictment in verse 24.

The Pharisees now always dogging His steps, always there, “were saying to Him, ‘Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?’” They were saying repeatedly – they were – they were haranguing Jesus and His disciples. It wasn't just one statement, it was a repeated charge. And, in fact, Luke tells us they said, “And why do you do it also?” There they were ready to protect their hypocritical external religion with no thought for the provision of the Old Testament, no thought for the hunger of the followers of Jesus.

They're scrutinizing Jesus. They're wanting to indict Him because of His violation of their ridiculous manmade rules. Now this is what the Talmud said. If you roll wheat in your hands to remove the husks, it is sifting and that is forbidden. If you rub the heads of wheat, it is threshing and it is forbidden. If you clean off the shell, it is sifting and that is forbidden. If you throw the chaff into the air, that is winnowing. It is forbidden. So just in picking and rolling and rubbing and discarding, they had been reaping, threshing, sifting, grinding, winnowing and preparing food.

And their real question, the real underlying question is, why do You and Your disciples live in such overt, open defiance of our religion? Why do You challenge our religion? Why do You challenge our authority? It is an implied threat. It is not a legitimate question, they don't want an answer. It is a scornful indictment, implying a threat. Jesus responds with a scriptural illustration in verse 25. “He said to them,” – He said this a lot. I think He really – He said this to dig in to them – “Have you never read” – that must have just galled them. There was nothing in the Old Testament they hadn't read, nothing. But He says that a lot. You'll find that through the synoptic gospels where He says, “Have you never read? Do you not know the scriptures?” I mean, this was galling to them.

But they did read it but without any understanding. Their interpretations were esoteric, mystical, convoluted, allegorical, like rabbinic interpretations of the Old Testament have always been through history and they still are today. If you want to get a convoluted confused interpretation of the Old Testament, listen to a rabbi. You – you never do get it, do you? It's a biting indictment to suggest to them that they don't know what Scripture means. But they don't.

“Didn’t you ever read the story about David and what he did when he was in need when he was hungry and he and his companions,” – The story is in 1 Samuel 21. We don’t have time to go to it but you can read it yourself. David was fleeing south from Gibeah because Saul was after him. Saul wanted to kill him. He came, according to 1 Samuel 21:1 to Nob, NOB. That’s about a mile north of Jerusalem. That’s where the tabernacle was located. And he had no food and he was hungry.

There he met the priest named Ahimelech and he asks the priest for food. Fleeing for his life – those who were with him, they were all hungry and he asks him for food. He asked him for at least five loaves of bread but was told by the priest that none was available. Verse 4 of 1 Samuel 21 says, “And the priest answered David and said, “There’s no common bread on hand.” Don’t – I don’t have any bread. “But he said, interestingly, this priest, Ahimelech, “There is holy bread,” – Holy bread? What is holy bread? And then he said – “if only the young men have kept themselves from women.”

In other words, I’m willing to let you have the holy bread if your men have been holy. David confirmed, in verse 5, they were holy. In that sense they were clean. Verse 6, “The priest gave him consecrated bread for there was no bread there but the bread of presence. It’s called the bread of the presence, presence meaning God, the ever-present One, which was removed from before the Lord in order to put hot bread in its place.” Let me tell you how that worked. Every Sabbath – every Sabbath, hot bread was brought inside the tabernacle to a golden table. Twelve loaves of hot bread were placed on a golden table inside the tabernacle in the presence of God, symbolizing the need for the twelve tribes to have fellowship with God.

The following Sabbath, the bread that had sat there for a week would be removed and more hot bread would be brought in to keep that symbol fresh. According to Leviticus 24, verses 5 to 9, this is called the bread of the presence. There were two rows, two piles of these twelve loaves. The old bread on the Sabbath when it was removed, was to be eaten by priests only. Now that was the provision that God had made. Verse 26 tells us what happened from Mark’s record of what Jesus said. David and his companions show up, as 1 Samuel 21 says. They “entered the house of God” – the tabernacle – “in the time of Abiathar the high priest.”

The actual priest at the time was Ahimelech, but he was soon replaced and Abiathar had a lengthy priesthood during the time of David. And so he is the one whose priesthood dominates that era. And they ate the consecrated bread, which it is not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests, and he also gave it to those who were with him. The priest was very, very wise. He understood that no ceremony should survive while some person dies. Ceremony is ceremony, ritual is symbolic. You don’t save a ceremony and lose a person. It has its place, but mercy triumphs over ritual and ceremony.

This priest understood what anybody would understand. That’s common sense. Nothing is as valuable as a life. It, perhaps, was actually a Sabbath when the old bread was coming out, and that’s why he could say, “I could give this to you.” So here on a Sabbath, not only were they eating bread but they were eating the bread that was symbolic of the twelve tribes before God and it was to be eaten only by priests. But all symbols are done away with when it comes to human need. Necessity always overrules ritual.

By the way, David was the king in exile. He was the true king. The nation had rejected him. If he had been in his rightful place as king, he and his men wouldn’t have needed to eat this bread. And Jesus, the great Son of David, had been rejected by His nation. And if they had received Him and He had

been properly acknowledged as King, He wouldn't be eating grain in a field like a poor traveler, either. Ceremony, ritual, tradition never stands in the way of mercy, kindness, goodness, necessity.

But the Pharisees didn't care about that. They bound people with burdens and did nothing to relieve them. They were furious that Jesus healed a man who had been sick for 38 years. They violated love, they violated mercy, they violated compassion. They had no concept of grace. And when Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy," He set Himself directly against them.

Here's the point. If David could be allowed by a priest to violate a divine symbol, perhaps on a Sabbath, then the disciples could be allowed by the Son of God to violate an unbiblical regulation on a Sabbath. It's that greater to lesser. If they could violate a divine prescription, certainly I can violate a human tradition. Their whole system is unbiblical, it is ungodly. And then in verse 27 you have the sovereign interpreter of the Sabbath. "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath."

The Sabbath was made for rest and blessing and joy and mercy and compassion and the meeting of needs. There wouldn't be a better day in the week to heal somebody. There wouldn't be a better day in the week to provide food than the Sabbath. And then Jesus dropped the bomb of all bombs on their self-righteous minds in verse 28. "So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." I am, He says, the sovereign ruler over the Sabbath. The Son of Man, again the messianic title, the Lord of the Sabbath, a stinging, impossible blasphemy to them.

But He is the Lord of the Sabbath because He is God. I am the sovereign of this day. I designed this day. I am the Creator. Doesn't John say that at the beginning of his gospel? "Everything made was made by Him, and without Him was not anything made." So it was He who ceased to work, it was He who rested. It was He who ordained this day to be blessed and separated from work.

I am the sovereign of this day. I am the interpreter of the will of God for this day. You do not rule the Sabbath. You do not set the standards of behavior for the Sabbath, I do. I interpret God's will and God's Word. Yes Jesus is the interpreter of God's will. He is the interpreter of God's Word. He is the interpreter of God's Law, not men. That is why, dear friends, we relentlessly follow the teaching revealed in Scripture and do not go beyond it. Jesus is narrow, narrow, narrow.

I very often am accused of that and I am very grateful for that accusation. I'm so thankful that people see me as narrow. I just hope they see Jesus as narrow. I'm following Him. I just read over the weekend a new book I wrote called The Jesus You Can't Ignore. It's not quite out yet, it will be out in a few weeks. The Jesus you can't ignore is this narrow confrontational Jesus who attacks false religious leaders, doesn't build bridges to them. He assaults them and their corrupt systems.

The gospel of grace, the gospel of Jesus Christ, the gospel of God is something completely distinct from and separate from all offerings of false religion. He is Lord of the Sabbath. That claim over their pinnacle day which was the most defining feature of their religious system, set Him in a place where they could not be satisfied until He was murdered. He dispenses grace and they dispensed brutal, merciless law. Hebrews 4:16 says, "Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Our Lord, we come this morning to You, so grateful for that grace, so grateful for that mercy, grateful for the gentleness and meekness and tenderness and kindness and love which You show toward us

as unworthy sinners and by which You forgive us of our sins and make us Your children.

We thank You that we're not bound up, caught up in some obsessively, relentlessly, brutal legalistic system trying to earn our way to heaven, but we have been delivered from that and we have found a yoke that is easy and a burden that is light in our Savior. We thank You that salvation comes by faith, grace. This is the ringing, repeated, constant message of the New Testament unmistakably. This is the good news to weary, burdened, guilty sinners.

Stop all the self-effort, come to the cross, embrace grace, the gift of salvation comes if you repent and believe in Christ. May we proclaim it far and wide, even as our Lord did. May we have the strength and the courage to confront the error, never build a bridge to error, never look for common ground with those who preach a damning and deadly message.

May we be as narrow as Jesus and just as loving. Help us to find that beautiful balance of meekness and gentleness and compassion and mercy and tenderness that flows right from Your heart, Oh God, through Your Son, through Your Spirit, through us and at the same time hold tenaciously and even fight for the truthfulness of the gospel that alone can save. We thank You again for another glimpse of the glory of Christ. We pray in His name. Amen.

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