

SICK OF RELIGION?

Weekly Devotional

A ministry of Chapel Hill

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WEEK 5

This devotional pairs with Mark 2:23-3:6 and the sermon preached on March 23-24.



Written by Lilly Davis

Grew up at Chapel Hill. Currently working towards a Master of Divinity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Loves engaging with Scripture with both mind and heart and discussing it with others, particularly when paired with good food or coffee. Also enjoys viewing God's creation through the lens of photography.

LifeGroup Guide

Review

How has Jesus been challenging you this week? Where have you experienced transformation?

Story

Mark 2:23-3:6

Head

Read about what the Old Testament said about eating grains from the field in Deuteronomy 23:25, and rules for the Sabbath in Exodus 34:21. Use your Study Bible to understand how the Pharisees interpreted work on the Sabbath.

Read about “what David did” in 1 Samuel 21:1-6 to understand the background to Jesus’ comments on the Sabbath. How is Jesus’ interpretation of Sabbath work radical compared to the Pharisees and yet still consistent with the Scriptures?

What do Jesus’ interactions in this story say about his authority as the Son of Man?

Heart

The Pharisees are upset in this story when Jesus’ followers don’t keep to their traditions and rules, even though their behavior is in accord with Scripture. When have you judged or experienced judgement in a “Pharisaical” way?

How do you know when your interpretation of Scripture is accurate? Discuss as a group how to test and weigh your own interpretation through the lens of Scripture, wisdom and the history of interpretation by the Church through the ages.

Hands

How do you keep the Sabbath? Do you keep a Sabbath? Make a list of your traditions and motivations (current and past). Has anything changed over your life about what the Sabbath means for you?

What does this passage mean for your practical activities and motivation on the Sabbath? Is there anything you need to change about how you are keeping the Sabbath?

DAY 1 – Monday
Daily devotional

Read

Mark 2:23-24; Deuteronomy 23:25; Exodus 34:21

Ask

Read about what the Old Testament said about eating grains from the field in Deuteronomy 23:25, and rules for the Sabbath in Exodus 34:21. Use your Study Bible to understand how the Pharisees interpreted work on the Sabbath.

Reflect

“You’re not allowed to do that!” “Says whom?” Whenever we think of rules, we think of authority: Does the one telling us what we can and cannot do really have the authority to do so? As we look at Sabbath this week in Mark 2:23-3:6, we encounter the question of authority. Who has the authority to declare what we can and cannot do?

In Mark 2:23-24, we see the disciples picking grain to eat as they walk through a field, a practice allowed in Deuteronomy 23:25. This isn’t something the Pharisees could accuse the disciples of, except that it is happening on the Sabbath. The Old Testament is clear that the Sabbath is a day to cease from work (see Exodus 20:8-10; 34:21). But are the disciples really “working” as they pick grain?

The Pharisees think the answer is yes (see Mark 2:24). From the verses we read for today, however, there is no clear link between this casual, plucking of grain (Deut. 23:25) and breaking the Sabbath. The Pharisees were known for seeking a clear interpretation, even if it meant adding more rules for the sake of clarity. One of the rules they added listed the practice in Deut. 23:25 as something not permitted on the Sabbath.¹ The same is true in regards to the healing Jesus does at the beginning of Mark 3. In other words, the actions of Jesus and his disciples “did not contravene any specific text in the Old Testament, but did run counter to the current Pharisaic interpretation.”²

Here’s a question to ponder in your LifeGroup: Do you allow interpretive “additions” to have the same authority as Scripture?

¹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 94.

² Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 518.

DAY 2 – Tuesday

Daily devotional

Read

1 Samuel 21:1-6; Mark 2:23-28

Ask

Read about “what David did” in 1 Samuel 21:1-6 to understand the background to Jesus’ comments on the Sabbath. How is Jesus’ interpretation of Sabbath work radical compared to the Pharisees and yet still consistent with the Scriptures?

Reflect

Have you ever done something because you thought you could get away with it? What made you think you could get away with it? Likely you had heard of someone else doing it who didn’t suffer the consequences of their actions.

In Mark 2:23-28 when Jesus and his disciples are blamed for wrongdoing, we see Jesus point back to David, one who got away with breaking religious law. Jesus, however, does not point to David as an excuse for his own “wrongdoing.” As we look at the passages today, we need to ask two questions: Who is David? and Why is Jesus comparing himself with David?

Who is David?

David was the second anointed king of Israel. He was remembered as a good king who exercised great authority. It was well known that David was an ancestor of the coming Messiah (see 2 Sam. 7:12-13; Luke 1:32) who would restore the kingdom and establish his throne (rule) forever. As 1 Sam. 21:1-6 records, even this great David broke the religious law by eating the bread of the Presence as he and his men were tired and hungry on the run from those seeking to kill him. David, however, was not punished for this wrongdoing.

Why is Jesus comparing himself with David?

Is Jesus admitting that he was in the wrong as David was in the wrong? No. As we saw yesterday, Jesus and his disciples were likely not in the wrong for their actions. As to why Jesus refers to the story with David, James Edwards suggests that it “begins to define Jesus’ authority as the royal Son of God anticipated since the reign of David.”³ Jesus is using Scripture to show his authority, namely an authority which far surpasses even that of David who was allowed to break the ceremonial law.

³ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 96.

DAY 3 – Wednesday
Daily devotional

Read

Mark 2:27-3:6

Ask

What do Jesus' interactions in this story say about his authority as the Son of Man?

Reflect

When I was a kid, birthdays were special days. It was a day to celebrate an event that happened years ago and the enduring impacts of it. It was also a day on which I had authority to pick the day's activities. Sabbath is a little bit like a birthday. It is a day when we celebrate how God has demonstrated his power in the past and acknowledge his continuing authority.

When Sabbath was instituted back in Exodus 20:8-11, it is clearly stated that is a reflection and remembrance of God's work in creation. When the command to keep Sabbath is repeated in Deuteronomy 5:12-15, it is described as a remembrance of the Lord's saving work in bringing the Israelites out from slavery in Egypt. Within both of these passages, it is clear that Sabbath belongs to the Lord (i.e., God has authority over the Sabbath).

In the New Testament, Jesus continues to exercise the saving and redeeming power of God, even on the Sabbath as we see in today's passage with Jesus restoring the withered hand. Sabbath is intended as a celebration of the power of God in which he is free to continue demonstrating that power.

The title Son of Man is an indicator that Jesus has the power of God because he is God. Look back to the story at the beginning of Mark 2. Jesus is presented with a paralytic and the religious leaders scoffed, saying "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (v. 6). Jesus, knowing the religious leaders were questioning his authority, then heals the paralytic so that they "may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (v. 10). Here at the end of the chapter (vv. 27-28), the title Son of Man reappears. By asserting his authority over the Sabbath "Jesus puts himself squarely in the place of God."⁴

⁴James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 97.

DAY 4 – Thursday
Daily devotional

Read

Matthew 23:23-24

Ask

The Pharisees are upset in this story when Jesus' followers don't keep to their traditions and rules, even though the behavior of Jesus' disciples is in accord with Scripture. When have you judged or experienced judgment in a "Pharisaical" way?

Reflect

Before we ask the question of when we have judged or experienced judgment in a 'Pharisaical' way, it is important to ask the question why. Why are the Pharisees so obsessed with their legalism? Why do we sometimes also get caught in the same?

Mark Buchanan in his book on Sabbath entitled *The Rest of God* provides an answer that is worth quoting here at length. He writes, "the attraction of legalism is its inherent rewards. Legalism feels good, in a perverse sort of way. It strokes our egos, fills us with the pleasure of achievement, knowing we spelled all the words correctly, and in such a nice, tidy script to boot. And it's even better if we accomplish this where others have failed. It's like winning a race: it wouldn't mean half as much—indeed, it wouldn't mean anything—if our triumph didn't imply others' losses. The secret impetus behind legalism is its competitiveness."⁵

For me personally, one of the areas where I run into unhealthy competition is grades. I resonate with Buchanan's description of the reward being even better at the expense of others. The good grade feels better when it wasn't awarded to everyone in the class. But getting a good grade shouldn't be the main goal. During my orientation week at seminary, the president of the school, Dennis Hollinger, said, "You can get straight As and still fail seminary." Are you loving God with your whole being? Are you loving your neighbor? That is what really matters. Jesus calls the Pharisees out on this in Matthew 23:23-24 as they have gotten so caught up in the little things, that they forgot the big picture. Back to this week's key passage in Mark, the Pharisees were quick to point out something they thought the disciples were doing wrong, without seeing that the disciples were doing what was right in the big picture, namely following Jesus.

⁵ Mark Buchanan, *The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 108.

DAY 5 – Friday
Daily devotional

Read

Mark 3:1-5

Ask

How do you know when your interpretation of Scripture is accurate? Discuss as a group how to test and weigh your own interpretation through the lens of Scripture, wisdom and the history of interpretation by the Church through the ages.

Reflect

Have you ever walked into the middle of a conversation? We begin to hear the statements being made, but can easily misinterpret them if we don't understand the context. As one of my professors likes to say as we work on interpreting Scripture, "Christ is King, context is queen."

This week we have looked at the Pharisees interpretation of Scripture, particularly the Scripture regarding Sabbath. We saw that the Pharisees were trying to clarify Scripture by adding specificity, such as by specifying that work included picking heads of grain. The Pharisees were eager to be clear on the details, but due to their focus on the details, it seems they lost sight of the bigger picture, i.e., the context. As we see at the beginning of Mark 3, the Pharisees had become so caught up in their traditions and rituals surrounding Sabbath that they forgot the reason behind it all, namely God's redeeming work.

How can we know when our interpretation of Scripture is on the right track? I would like to give you two c-words to practice as you interpret Scripture: context and community. Concerning context, there are several questions you could ask of a passage or verse: How does it fit into the chapter? How does it fit into the book as a whole? What is the historical context? What else does Scripture say on this topic? Part of answering these questions is simply continuing to read through Scripture to see the big-picture. You can also look into resources (sermons, commentaries, devotionals, pastors, mentors, etc.) to help you gain a better understanding. Be prepared to share in your LifeGroup some of the resources you find helpful. While you can do a lot on your own, there is something special about reading and studying Scripture in community. As we read Scripture in community, there is much we can agree on, but acknowledge there will also be some points where we hold different views. Remember the motto of our denomination (The Evangelical Presbyterian Church) as well when it comes to interpreting Scripture: *In essentials—unity, In non-essentials—liberty, In all things—charity.*

DAY 6 – Saturday
Daily devotional

Read

Ezekiel 20:19-20; Exodus 20:8-11

Ask

How do you keep the Sabbath? Do you keep a Sabbath? Make a list of your traditions and motivations (current and past). Has anything changed over your life about what the Sabbath means for you?

Reflect

When I was in college, I had a friend who would regularly keep the Sabbath. She would take a day of the week and refrain from doing her homework. My other friends and I would marvel at how she was able to do this in the midst of busy college years. As I came to seminary, I discovered a repeated emphasis on keeping the Sabbath. Without Sabbath, people visibly burned out faster and had a harder time seeing the joy in their work.

Despite the good readily apparent in keeping a Sabbath, the instruction to maintain a Sabbath needs to be repeated again and again. I think this relates to two sermons at Chapel Hill this year. Pastor Megan shared in her online sermon after the snowstorm that “most of my sin is culturally acceptable in the U.S.” With a culture that celebrates busyness and being in control, ignoring Sabbath is perfectly acceptable in our culture. We need Christians who help us see that it is not acceptable long-term to be working all day everyday instead of taking time to find delight in God (Ex. 20:8-11).

Back in mid-January, Pastor Ellis raised the question “Who are you?” in reference to our need to let God be God instead of trying to be our own saviors. Keeping Sabbath is one way that we acknowledge God is God and we are not (Ezek. 20:19-20). As life begins to feel overwhelming though, it is easy to panic and try to become our own saviors. When I have a major assignment due next week at school, it is tempting to just keep working and not take a Sabbath. This, however, leads to a skewed identity over time. It is not our own work by which we are ultimately defined. We are defined as those created and redeemed by God. Sabbath is a time to celebrate that identity and praise God for who he is. Don’t be like the Pharisees and be quick to approach Sabbath with a view of legalism. Let it instead be a celebration.

DAY 7 – Sunday
Daily devotional

Read

Mark 2:23-3:6

Ask

What does this passage mean for your practical activities and motivation on the Sabbath? Is there anything you need to change about how you are keeping the Sabbath?

Reflect

If you had to pick out a keyword from the question above, which word would it be? I think the keyword might be you/your. Take a minute to read through this week's passage again. Are the Pharisees concerned with how they are keeping the Sabbath? No! They are critiquing Jesus and the disciples for what they are doing on the Sabbath. The Pharisees are looking at the speck in the disciples' eye when they collect grain on the Sabbath instead of addressing the plank in their own of not showing mercy and grace on the Sabbath.

As we looked at on Day 4, it is easy to turn religious practices into competition. It is easy to point out what someone else needs to change about their Sabbath practice, rather than addressing our own. As we close out this week on the Sabbath, I invite *you* to reflect on a few questions:

- What was the original intention of Sabbath? (See Ex. 20:8-11; Deut. 5:12-15; Day 3 of this week)
 - Does this intention of celebrating God's power and placing trust in him match your current motivation for keeping the Sabbath? If so, how do your practices align with this motivation?
 - Are you willing to have your Sabbath practices interrupted in order to "do good" (Mark 3:4)?
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