

Gospel of Mark 5 - Opposition - Jesus and the Law - Chapter 2, verse 23 to Chapter 3, verse 6:-

The text this week contains two occasions for opposition to the Lord Jesus Christ concerning Sabbath practices. In Chapter 3, verse 6 we read that the opposition was in the form of the Pharisees, the strict religious teachers, and the Herodians who were politically devoted to the Herodian family. Under normal circumstances they would not be counted as like-minded allies. In their opposition to the Lord Jesus they had found a common “enemy” and combined forces to get rid of him. - See Mark 12, verses 12 - 13 and Luke 23, verses 6 - 12. Note that the Pharisees and Sadducees were often in opposition to each other, so the Lord Jesus had the whole establishment of his day as opponents:- Pharisees – local synagogue leaders and teachers, Sadducees – included the family of the High Priest, and the Herodians supporters of King Herod and the court. These, combined with the Roman representative Pontius Pilate, were all involved in the trial, condemnation and crucifixion of Jesus.

Through the Cornfields – Chapter 2, verses 23 – 28:- As it was a Sabbath Day, Jesus and his disciples would only be going about three-quarters of a mile – a Sabbath Day’s journey. Jesus himself is on record as saying that he did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfil it. (Matthew chapter 5, verse 17). In this confrontation with the Pharisees he re-interprets the Law. Not holding to the strict legalism which had been placed on it over the years but going back to the original intention of the Lord God in the giving of the Law as a mode of living.

Note that both Matthew (chapter 12, verses 1 – 8) and Luke (chapter 6, verses 1 – 5) mention that the disciples were “*plucking and eating the ears of grain, rubbing them out in their hands.*” They were not accused of theft – see Deuteronomy chapter 23, verse 25, but of manual labour on the Sabbath, a violation of Exodus chapter 20, verse 10. In reading the reply of the Lord Jesus to the Pharisees we need to remember that both he and they knew their Old Testament history by heart. The example Jesus quotes is from 1 Samuel, chapter 21, verses 1 – 6. Jesus emphasises that David took “*the bread of the Presence*” because “*he was in need and hungry*”. The Lord Jesus Christ was saying that human need supersedes all mere ritual and ceremony.

Verses 27 – 28 are the key, not only to this episode but to the one following and to the whole of the controversy about Sabbath regulations! The Lord God intended the Sabbath to be a means of blessing to mankind. A day of rest and relaxation for man and beast both in the days of hard manual labour and today in our busyness!

Keep verse 28 in mind as we read on into chapter 3.

The man with the withered hand – Chapter 3, verses 1 – 6:- This second Sabbath controversy recorded by Mark took place in the synagogue. Probably again at Capernaum since verse 7 speaks of a withdrawal to the sea. We do not know how large the congregation was in the synagogue but the man was obvious enough to both Jesus and his critics. “*They watched him to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath so that they might accuse him.*” (verse 2). The verb “*watched*” indicates ‘a malicious lying in wait to trap a person’. The practice of medicine on the Sabbath was forbidden by rabbinic tradition unless the sick person was on the verge of death which was not true in this case. Consequently if Jesus healed the man the Pharisees were ready to accuse him as a Sabbath violator. Jesus appears to face his accusers head on! He takes the initiative, calling the man with the withered hand out to the front. He gets no answer to his question about doing good on the Sabbath. Again Mark writes of the grief and anger of the Lord Jesus Christ at the attitude of his accusers - (verse 5). The healing is quickly accomplished. No doubt the man and his family and friends rejoiced (compare chapter 2, verse 11).

The reaction of the Pharisees and Herodians seems to be extreme! They “*conferred together against him to see how they might destroy him*”. The anger was against the Lord Jesus himself and against all that he did and taught.

A few thoughts on “Days Off”:- Occasionally it is worth taking stock of our use of time. “*Six days shalt thou labour and do all that thou hast to do but the seventh is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God . . .*” Way back in the day I had to learn the Ten Commandments off by heart for Confirmation Class! What they have meant for me over the years seems to have changed a number of times. One thing was vital in intensive ministry and that was a fixed “Day Off” each week. A day without “having to do . . .”. A day for relaxation and contemplation. A day for remembering who I am and whose I am. A day for the Lord God.

How is your ‘Sabbath’? Does it honour the Lord God? Is it good for YOU and for others?

A regular ‘day off’ every seven days is an inbuilt need for human beings!

O Sabbath rest by Galilee,

O calm of hills above.

Where Jesus knelt to share with Thee

The silence of eternity

Interpreted by love.

John Greenleaf Whittier 1872