



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Mark 2:13-28

Mark

“Feasting, Fasting and Sabbath Keeping”

TRANSCRIPT

Our passage this morning is Mark chapter 2, and we’ll finish the chapter, beginning with verse 13 through verse 28. So if you have your Bibles open, follow along with me as I read.

“And He went out again by the seashore; and all the multitude were coming to Him, and He was teaching them.

“As He passed by, He saw Levi the *son* of Alphaeus sitting in the tax office, and He said to him, ‘Follow Me!’ And he arose and followed Him.

“And it came about that He was reclining *at table* in his house, and many tax collectors and sinners were dining with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many of them, and they were following Him. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that He was eating with sinners and tax gatherers, they began saying to His disciples, ‘Why is He eating and drinking with tax gatherers and sinners?’ And hearing *this*, Jesus said to them, ‘*It is* not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’

“John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and they came and said to Him, ‘Why do John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?’ And Jesus said to them, ‘While the bridegroom is with them, the attendants of the bridegroom do not fast, do they? So as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day.

“ ‘No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; otherwise the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear results. No one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost and the skins *as well*; but *one puts* new wine into fresh wineskins.’

“And it came about that He was passing through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples began to make their way along while picking the heads *of grain*. The Pharisees were saying to Him, ‘See here, 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 became hungry and he and his companions; 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. Consequently, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.’ ” May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study in it together. Let’s bow now in a word of prayer.

Our gracious heavenly Father, we do thank You for bringing us together by Your providence into this place to study this particular passage at this time, and we ask that You would bless it and bless it to our thinking. Guide and direct us in our thinking as we consider the things that Mark wrote as he recorded these events in our Lord’s life. And we pray that You would enable us to apply the principles that we find here in a very appropriate way, and in so doing, prepare us for the week that lies ahead, and in so doing, make us more and more like Your Son, that we might be good and effective servants of Him. We thank You for the grace that not only has provided us with this revelation and this instruction in life and conduct, but the grace that has brought us into your family and has let us partake of the Holy Spirit and the new life in Christ, and has given us eternal life and a future in which the things that we obtain through Him can never pass away.

And so we pray that You’d give us perspective on this life in light of eternity. We pray that things we study this morning would be influential to that end. The world is passing away, Father. We see that around us, and yet it is so hard oftentimes to take the lessons of that and realize that we, too, are passing away and the day will come when we leave this world and we stand before You and give an

account. We pray that You’d impress the urgency upon all of us, young and old alike, that we might serve You, serve You with glad hearts, serve You in ways that are pleasing to You.

Father, we also thank You for the privilege we have to intercede for those in need, and there are many of our congregation in need. There are those who are sick and we remember them, pray You’d bless them with healing and encouragement. We pray that You’d give encouragement to their families and help all to look to Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith. We pray that You’d extend mercy to them, but do so in the way that is wise according to Your estimation, and we trust that You will do that. We pray for those who are in physical need with financial needs, need of employment. We live in difficult days, days in which many people are out of work. We pray that You’d provide them with employment, and in the meantime provide them with the physical means by which they can support themselves, support their families. Bless them, Father.

Pray for our nation, Lord, and we pray that in these days of decision You’d give wisdom, that the best men, the best people, will be placed in positions of authority and power. Pray particularly for this evening as these debates occur. We pray that You’d give wisdom and discernment to those who watch and listen, and pray that good choices would be formed in their thinking. We pray for our land, not just politically, but even more importantly spiritually, that the Spirit of God would move across it and awaken many to their need of a savior, sinners and self-righteous people alike. They might come to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. And we pray that for this land and pray that You might use us to that end.

Pray that You’d prepare us now as we sing our hymn and prepare for the study of the Word that our hearts would be properly in tune to what You would have us to learn from the Scriptures. And bless our time this evening as we come together again to remember the Lord, remember His death on behalf of His people, and as we are reminded that He is coming again, and pray that we would live in anticipation of that. Bless our time now, Father, that it would be a time that is edifying to each of us and a time that brings glory to You and to Your Son. We pray these things in Christ’s name, Amen.

Our passage this morning continues the controversy that we saw begin last week between the Lord and the scribes and Pharisees. And it’s a passage that lays bare the fundamental failures of those men and the nation as a whole, for that matter, with their self-righteousness and legalism. Those really are one and the same problem, I think, and unfortunately not a problem that’s restricted to the Jews. Christians fall into the trap of legalism, too, and so indirectly, this passage posts something of a warning to us.

Legalism appears in two forms. The first supposes that righteousness is achieved through a code, through the doing of certain rules without any reference to the motives or the purposes of the person who’s acting. Now the second supposes that a formal observance of the law is the way to salvation, that by doing it that we earn our salvation. It’s usually the first type of legalism that evangelical Christians fall into. Tight rules are made up that go beyond the Scripture, taboos about abstaining from things indifferent, with the result that those who comply with them are considered the spiritually elite, considered that by themselves, perhaps by others, considered to be better than others.

J. I. Packer has written some very insightful words on this subject in his book, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*. And there he makes the point that this type of legalism that Christians sometimes fall into is one of the pitfalls of those who make moral struggle central to their thinking about the Holy Spirit, and I think we can add to that their thinking about the Christian life and the way of sanctification. The other danger, of course, is to swing from legalism to license. And that may be even more of a problem in the church today.

Paul deals with that in Romans chapter 6. You remember in verses 1 and 2, he says, “Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase?” That was evidently the thinking of some people that since God’s grace is glorified in the way He extends it to the sinner, well, if we just sin all the more, then the grace of God will be magnified all the more. And Paul’s response to that is “May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?” Christian life, while it is a life that is freed from the law, is a life that is governed by principles of conduct and principles that are far reaching.

License, however, is not the concern of our passage. It’s legalism with its spirit of self-righteousness. And the legalism of the Pharisees was of both types. It was that in which they felt they could obtain holiness in this life and could obtain salvation by the keeping of rules. But indirectly, there is that instruction given to us, I think, that there are rules that govern our life. There are rules that govern our conduct. And, as J. I. Packer also put so well, “They are rules that we are to keep from life rather than for life. Not for gain, but out of gratitude.”

And we see an example of that in our passage. If a man who follows the Lord and begins to serve Him not in order to gain life, but out of the life that he has received and out of a sense of gratitude. Now, we’ve entitled this lesson, “Feasting, Fasting and Sabbath Keeping,” But it could just as easily have been entitled on a more positive note, “Freedom, Joy, and the Coming New Age.” Because these are the themes that we are reminded of, the joy that we are to serve the Lord in and the fact that the age from our Lord’s perspective was coming when there will be great freedom and great joy.

Well, the Lord has healed a paralytic and forgiven his sins, and He did that in a very crowded house, a house that was no doubt stuffy and uncomfortable. And so we read in verse 13 that following this incident, “He went out again by the seashore.” There He could get some fresh air with the cool breezes coming off the lake. But again, the crowds learned where He was and they quickly gathered to Him. And the Lord didn’t turn them away. He again began teaching them. And when He had finished His teaching, He resumed His walk along the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

And as He did, He passed by a man sitting in a tax office, an IRS agent named Levi. And here again, He did one of those unusual things, those socially unacceptable things that frequently are seen in His ministry, something that must have shocked all the good people that were following our Lord that day. “He said to Levi, ‘Follow me.’ And he rose and followed Him.” Levi is the same person as Matthew, the writer of the first gospel. Matthew means “gift of Jehovah,” and it may be that the Lord changed his name from Levi to Matthew after he had become His disciple, just as He had changed the name of Simon to that of Cephas, or Peter. Dual names are not uncommon in the New Testament. In fact, the writer of this gospel is

John Mark. Thomas also had the name of Didymus, and we can find other examples, as well.

Matthew was also called Levi, and as a tax collector, he was not a popular person, and I guess we can have some appreciation for that ourselves. Americans aren't particularly fond of taxes, particularly when they're the ones that are paying those taxes. And one of the first lessons of American history that you and I learned was the story of the Boston Tea Party, which was itself a tax protest. I have a suspicion – maybe it's a wild idea, but I have this suspicion that tonight at 6:00, the subject is going to come up on television, and I have a feeling that one of the candidates is going to call the other candidate a tax gatherer from Arkansas, and the other is going to call the other candidate a tax collector who broke his promise. And I don't know how they're going to address that third candidate, but we don't have much more of a favorable opinion of gathering taxes as they did in Israel.

But the Jews had a particularly strong antipathy to tax collectors because they were in the employment of Rome, their hated masters. Now, Levi was probably in the immediate service of King Herod, but indirectly he served Rome, and so in doing so he helped keep Caesar in business. That made Levi and other tax collectors traitors in the eyes of the Jews. And further, it was a very profitable business for them. Many of those who collected taxes accumulated large fortunes at the expense of their countrymen and at the expense of their reputations. The rabbis put the tax collectors in a class with murderers and robbers. So Levi was a hated man. He was a pariah. He was a social leper.

And yet, the Lord didn't hate him. Just as earlier He was willing to touch a leper, here He was glad to call Levi to Himself and associate with Him. Now, as I said, it must have been a shock to those who were gathered around the Lord. “Why Levi?” They must have asked. “Why this tax gatherer? Why do you want to associate with him and call him to this position of privilege to follow You? He's a traitor.”

I don't doubt that that thought must have entered into the minds of many of those who were with our Lord, but the answer, I think is very simple. He called him to Himself because He was pleased to do that. It pleased Him to choose this man. He is the Lord and as the Lord He has the authority to choose whomsoever He

pleases, even a tax gatherer. And be glad of that very fact because the reality is in the eyes of the Lord no one is any better than a tax gatherer and a sinner. Great reason for rejoicing that He called Levi. Because if He's called such a man as Levi, there's hope for the rest of us.

And so as an exercise of His sovereign grace, the Lord said to Levi, “Follow Me,” and Levi did. He didn't hesitate, he didn't ask for time to arrange his affairs, and he must have had many financial affairs that would have had loose ends that he could have tried to arrange. He doesn't seek time to consult with his family or anything. He simply obeys and left his business to serve the Lord.

Luke writes that he left everything behind, left a very lucrative business, which was a great step of faith on his part. Peter and the others also had left their business, you'll remember, but that business of fishing was always one that they could go back to. In fact, we find them doing that periodically in the ministry of our Lord, and we come to the end of the book of John and they're up again at the Sea of Galilee engaged in the practice of fishing.

But when Levi left the tax office, He was finished with business. And so for him, when he followed Christ, he sacrificed everything. But he didn't consider it a sacrifice. It was a privilege. He left Herod and Caesar to follow Christ, the King of kings, and you can be sure that he had far greater financial security in Christ's service than in theirs. Whatever he left would have perished anyway, while everything he gained was eternal. So in terms of eternity, he made no great sacrifice.

And that's true of each of us. The Lord usually doesn't call us into His service and call us away from our employment. But He does call each of us to serve Him and He desires that we serve Him where we are in whatever field He has called us into. Now, it's not always easy. We're busy people these days and we feel the infringement of our work on our time, and so oftentimes to serve the Lord is something of an inconvenience.

And I think that we all struggle with that. And yet I know that there are many of you that do serve the Lord. You give of your time. You give of your effort to serve Him in a variety of ways and in ways that often go unnoticed. They're always noticed by the Lord. He's aware of everything that we do. And even though there may be something of a sacrifice of our time, we can certainly be assured that reality

is that when we measure that sacrifice by the dividends that we will reap in eternity, the dividends we reap now in this present life, it's really no sacrifice at all.

Jim Elliot, the American missionary who, along with four other missionaries was killed in 1956 in the jungles of Ecuador trying to take the gospel to the Auca Indians who were a very savage group of people, he understood that. He understood the life of Levi. And I don't know that he made a special study of Levi, but we see in, I think, that man's life something we see reflected in Levi. And he expressed it very well in a well-known line that he wrote. “He is no fool who gives up that which he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.” That's an excellent statement. Do you believe it?

You young people, do you believe that? When he wrote that statement, he was a young man, and I think his life proved that. Not to the world, not from its standpoint, but he was – because he was cut off at a very young age. He left the things of this world to go down and seek to spread the gospel and before the gospel seems to have been spread, his life ended. And yet, I can assure you that his life is not wasted. No life is ever wasted that is given to the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. And whatever you do, whether you're young, whether you're old, if you live your life to the glory of the Lord, it will not be a wasted life, even if that life is cut short.

It's not the message that we hear today from the world. The message we hear is very much different. The message we hear today is live for the present. Live for this age. Seek possessions. Seek prestige. Seek power. But the message of Christ is very simple. It's follow Me. And He promises that everyone who does will not be disappointed.

Levi understood something of that and he joined himself to the Lord joyfully, gratefully, and out of gratitude for the Lord, he gave Him a feast, a large feast in his house. And not only to honor the Lord, but also to introduce his friends to Him, and his friends were fellow outcasts. Verse 15 states that “many tax gatherers and sinners were dining with Jesus and the disciples; for there were many of them, and they were following Him.” That word “sinners” is a term that included those who didn't live according to the rules and the traditions of the Pharisees, who didn't follow their traditions and observe their taboos. They were rejected by the respected

people of the day. It’s a rather broad term, broad enough to include more serious sinners than what we would think tax collectors were, people such as prostitutes. And we know the Lord had contact with them as well as tax collectors because in Luke chapter 7 we have that beautiful account of the sinful woman who came to the Lord when He was dining in the house of a Pharisee and out of gratitude for the forgiveness that she had received weeps over His feet and washes His feet with her tears and her hair.

So it would have included those kinds of people as well as a broader, more general type of person that the Pharisees referred to by the expression “the people of the land.” That was a disparaging expression that they had referring to the peasants, many of which lived in Galilee in this same region in which this is taking place, those who were not well educated, men such as farmers and shepherds, who weren’t careful to wash and to observe all of the rites of ceremonial purity that the Pharisees held in such high regard so that these were truly the great unwashed for whom the Pharisees had nothing but contempt. These were the very people that they sought to avoid.

So when they learned that the Lord attended a party with sinners, it was too much for them. They didn’t see it as an act of compassion on the part of our Lord, nor did they consider the reasons or motives behind His actions. It was a violation of what they considered to be proper, and so they were offended by it and they took up the matter with the disciples. Standing outside of Levi’s house – because they certainly wouldn’t have entered the house of a tax collector filled with sinners – standing outside of the house, they said to the disciples, “Why is He eating and drinking with tax gatherers and sinners?”

Now you notice they don’t address their question to the Lord. They didn’t have the courage to address Him directly. They probably had enough of his withering gaze that could search their hearts and ferret out the secrets of those hearts and make public display of them. And so rather than face Him, they went after His disciples. But if they thought they could escape the Lord, they were mistaken. He learned of the exchange and went out to speak to them and answer their criticism. And His answer is almost parabolic.

Why was He associating with sinners? Because, as He says, “*It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick;*” In other words, our Lord wasn’t keeping company with sinners because He enjoyed their society, their taste, their entertainment. He wasn’t socializing or hobnobbing. He was there as a physician to treat the sick. And then with biting irony, perhaps some sarcasm, He says, “I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” In other words, “You say you’re well and you don’t need Me, so I’ve gone to those who do need Me.” And these sinners, they knew that they needed the Lord. They made no pretense about being righteous. They knew exactly where they stood in regard to the law and God’s standard of holiness. They realized their hopelessness. And so when the Lord came with words of grace, words of salvation, words of hope, Mark writes, “they were following Him.”

These were people of deep gratitude toward the Lord, whereas the self-righteous as we see in these Pharisees, they had no sense of gratitude. They couldn’t see their need. And when a person doesn’t see his or her need, then the gospel will mean nothing and have no effect upon them. They won’t receive it. Now the Pharisee who knows that he’s a sinner, the self-righteous man or woman who comes to realize that he or she is just that, a self-righteous sinner, well that person is welcomed to the Lord, just as these tax collectors and sinners were. And the Lord’s words may have awakened some of these Pharisees to the realization of their self-righteousness.

But for the most part, these Pharisees only increased in their hostility toward the Lord. They found that He not only had an attitude toward sinners that was different from theirs, but a different attitude toward religion. He didn’t observe the practice of fasting as they did and as did the disciples of John the Baptist. And so they came to Him and they asked His disciples why they didn’t fast. According to Matthew it was the disciples of John who came to our Lord, but Mark suggests that the representatives of the Pharisees may also have been in this group, and I think that’s probably how we’re to understand that. This mixed group of men come to Him with this question.

Fasting was an important practice for the Pharisees. The Old Testament prescribed only one day for fasting, and that was the day of atonement. The nation

was to mourn over their sins. They were to afflict themselves. So fasting on that day was very appropriate. As time went on, however, fasting became more and more common, so that by our Lord’s day, the Pharisees voluntarily fasted every Monday and Thursday. It was a prominent form of piety in Jewish life and so when these people saw that Jesus and His disciples did not fast, that they did not practice that form of piety, they wanted to know why.

So in verses 19 through 22 the Lord answers them with three illustrations. The first in verse 19 is taken from the custom of the Jewish wedding, which was a very festive occasion. It involved an elaborate wedding procession and a wedding feast that would take place, a very joyful occasion, sometimes would last for days. And so He draws upon this image of the wedding, and in it He likens Himself to the bridegroom and His disciples to the bridegroom’s attendants. That was a particularly appropriate response to these disciples of John the Baptist, because when John’s disciples had come to Him earlier, when so many people were leaving John and going to our Lord and they informed Him of this, John told His disciples in John 3:29 that he was the friend of the bridegroom and “rejoiced greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice.”

So the Lord takes that same illustration and uses it with them again, only this time He is the bridegroom and He uses this illustration to explain that with His coming, He was bringing a new age that was very much like a wedding, a joyful age. And just as a wedding feast, and just as at a wedding feast, the bridegroom and his attendants don’t fast because it’s not a time of mourning. It’s a time of joy. So it was with the Lord’s disciples. They were with the Lord. They weren’t sad. And so there was no point in performing an outward sign that had no meaning, had no meaning, no relevance to their situation. In fact, that sign would have been an inappropriate one for the situation they were in. It would have been nothing more than formalism, ritualism, and that’s never pleasing to God.

But, He adds in verse 20, a time was coming when fasting would be appropriate for them. A time was coming when they would mourn. A time when the bridegroom would be taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day. Reference, of course, is to the cross and that expression “taken away” suggests the violence of it. Then they’d mourn. They wouldn’t mourn because, well, it’s time to

perform this religious duty, and so we must fast. That’s the proper thing to do. They would fast because their mourning was so great they could not eat. They could not generate the interest in food in a situation like that.

And I think generally that’s the reason for fasting. A person is so weighed down by a particular issue that he or she can’t eat and so they fast. It’s not a routine that one goes through and then becomes a kind of a ritual. That’s not pleasing to the Lord. That’s empty of any meaning. No. They’d fast but it would be for proper reasons. They’d fast because they were mourning, but their mourning would only be temporary. And following His resurrection, their joy would be restored to them and it would be restored in a far greater way because they would enter into the age of fulfillment, the age of forgiveness, into the age of the new covenant.

And so in verses 21 and 22, He gives a pair of illustrations to show that inevitable change must come with His coming. The first illustration is taken from the practice of patching clothes and the second from that of filling wine bottles. Both illustrate the difference between the old dispensation and the new dispensation and show that the dawning of the new covenant brings an end to the old covenant age. We read in verse 21, “No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; otherwise the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear results.” Trying to combine the practices of the old covenant life with the new covenant life is as impossible as trying to patch an old garment with a new piece of cloth. The new piece of cloth which is unshrunk is of greater strength than that older piece of cloth and when it begins to shrink it will tear away from the old, making an even worse tear than the one that was mended. And so, too, the old age and the new age can’t be combined.

He adds to this that second illustration in verse 22, “No one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost and the skins *as well*; but *one puts* new wine into fresh wineskins.” The container for liquids in that day and age was often made of animal skins which were sewn together with the fur on the outside. In time, however, those skins would become hard and brittle. If new wine which was still fermenting was put into them, then the pressure produced by this fermenting wine would break the bottle, causing the wine to spill, ruining both the bottle and the wine. So it was necessary to put new wine into new

wineskins, which were elastic, which were pliable, and able to accommodate the pressure.

And so, too, of the new age and the new life that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. The age of the Mosaic law was not adequate for giving expression to this new life that Christ was introducing, no more than old wineskins could accommodate new wine. The Lord had not come to patch up Judaism. He’d not come to add something to it. He’d come to replace it all together with something new. A new covenant and its new life call for new forms of worship, a system and forms that were adequate for the new age of the Holy Spirit.

Now that’s what I think our Lord is saying in these parables, but we can find this in other places, as well. Paul wrote a book for the most part with that purpose in mind, to prove the very point that our Lord is illustrating here. It’s the book of Galatians, and in that book he uses different illustrations to basically explain the same point. And that is that by putting ourselves back under the law, by going back under the old covenant way of life, by leaving the freedom that we have in Christ to go into the bondage of the law, we are in effect leaving our freedom and going back into slavery. Or we are like a person who would leave the maturity of adulthood to go back to the immaturity of childhood. You can’t have both. You can’t combine them. It’s the rule of the excluded middle. It’s one or the other. And He has come to introduce a new age.

All of this had direct bearing on the next controversy recorded in verses 23 through 27, which concern the Sabbath, Israel’s day of rest. The Sabbath has been called the cornerstone of Judaism. It was one of the chief expressions of Israel’s faith. We see that and the importance of it in Exodus 31, for example, where the Lord declares that the Sabbath would be the sign between Him and the nation and the fourth commandment states that Israel was to “remember the Sabbath to keep it holy.” And they did that by ceasing from the labor on which they were engaged throughout the six days of the week, and on that seventh day, the last day, they rested from their labors. And those who profaned it, those who engage in labors on that day would be put to death.

So a serious penalty was attached to a very serious law. And as time went on, to ensure that that command was observed properly and to prevent any unwitting

violation of it, the rabbis formulated rules by carefully defining what constituted work and what didn't. And so to do that, they made up 39 categories of work, subdividing each on into six categories. And in this way, they tried to build a fence around the law to protect it. The result was, however, as William Hendrickson points out in his commentary, that the real law of God was buried under the mountain of manmade traditions. And it was these rules and these traditions that our Lord came in conflict with.

It happened on a Sabbath day while He and His disciples were walking through grainfields, as they walked they were picking the heads of grain. Well, some Pharisees happened to be walking suspiciously nearby. Evidently, they were playing private eye and they were keeping close tabs on what our Lord was doing, watching His every move. And so when they saw His disciples picking and eating grain, they quickly moved in and they asked the accusing question, “Why do you do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” Well, was that not lawful? According to Deuteronomy 23:25, travelers were permitted to go into grainfields that were not theirs and to pick grains. They couldn't use a sickle, but they could pick grains and eat it in order to satisfy their hunger.

And that's what our Lord and His disciples were doing. But the Pharisees objected to their doing that on this day, on the Sabbath, because they considered their actions to be work. Evidently, they construed the picking of grain and the eating of it as reaping and preparing a meal. But the Sabbath law commanded rest from regular work. That is rest from a person's occupation, the thing that they did six days out of the week. The disciples weren't farmers. They weren't housewives. They were ex-fishermen, ex-businessmen who had become preachers, so they weren't working. And even if they had been farmers or housewives and weren't using a sickle, they weren't seeking to reap and do the work that they had done throughout the week.

As far as preparing a meal, it was already prepared for them by God in the process of nature. They simply picked what had already been prepared. The only rules they violated were the rules of the rabbis. So the Lord responds with a question of His own. This was evidently a rabbinic practice, a question they would put to one rabbi, that rabbi would respond with another question, and He does that here. He

responds to that question with a question, and in so doing, He brings their traditions under the scrutiny of Scripture.

We read this in verses 25 and 26. “And He said to them, “Have you never read what David did when he was in need and became hungry, he and his companions; 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 gave it also to those who were with him?” The reference is to the incident that is recorded in 1 Samuel 21 in which David was fleeing from Saul, fleeing for his life, and he went south of Jerusalem to Nob, where the tabernacle was located. In need of food, both David and his companions entered into the tabernacle and with the permission of the high priest, they ate the 12 loaves of bread that were placed on the table in the holy place.

This was the show bread. It was holy bread. At the end of the week on the Sabbath, the old loaves were replaced by new loaves and those old loaves were eaten by the priests and only the priests. It was priestly food. But here, non-priestly individuals ate it, which was normally unlawful. And yet, the Scriptures don’t condemn David and his companions for doing that. And the high priest and the other priests that were gathered there agreed with his actions.

The point our Lord was making by citing this particular passage of Scripture was no ceremonial provision of the law was to stand in the way of providing for the essential needs of life. The Pharisees were too rigid in their interpretation of the Sabbath and they had established standards and rules that were contrary to the Scripture, contrary to the very spirit of the Sabbath. The moral aspects of the law were inflexible, but the ceremonial aspects were not. There were higher principles that could override them, and we see that here.

Now, if the ceremonial law could be suspended for the physical well being of David and his companions, then certainly our Lord and His disciples were correct to set aside the Pharisees’ rules and regulations for their physical well being, since those rules were not even Scriptural. The problem that we have here is not that the rabbis were scrupulous about keeping the Sabbath. It’s good to be scrupulous about obedience to the Lord. The problem is they had forgotten the purpose of the Sabbath

and with their emphasis upon traditions and rule keeping, they had smothered the very spirit of that law.

And so in verse 27, the Lord brings everything into perspective by stating the purpose of the Sabbath. “The Sabbath was made for man, –” He says “ – and not man for the Sabbath.” The Sabbath had been instituted in order to be a blessing for Israel. It provided the people physical rest. More importantly, it gave them opportunity for reflection upon the Lord and upon His goodness and upon His redemption of them. On that day, they were to remember that they had been redeemed out of slavery in Egypt. And it was a day that pictured the future salvation, a day that should have filled the people with anticipation for the kingdom that was coming. Should have been a day of great joy for them. But with the rules that the rabbis and the Pharisees had placed upon them, they had turned it into a burden rather than a blessing, and really that’s the inevitable legacy of legalism. It robs people of joy. It robs them of their freedom.

Now, the Lord says all this to these men and the men that He’s speaking to are the authorities on the law. And you can see by the way He addresses them an example of what those people had said earlier in chapter 1 when they described His ministry, that He teaches as One having authority. He taught with great authority here, but we might ask by what authority does He speak to these men, these religious leaders in that way? And by what authority could He condone the action of His disciples when all of that contradicted the standard rule of life of these people?

Well, He gives that in verse 28 and authority is found in the statement that He is Lord of the Sabbath. And as His identity is increasingly revealed in this gospel, it is seen that He is the One who created all things and He is the One who established the Sabbath. And so as Lord of the Sabbath, He is above all men and has authority to interpret the Sabbath by His words and by His actions, and to interpret it in a way that cannot be challenged by others. He’s the Lord of the Sabbath, the One who established it, the only One who can be the proper interpreter of it.

Now, to these scribes and Pharisees, he wasn’t that. He was an iconoclast. He was one who was breaking all of the old forms and all of the traditions. The reality is, though, He never did break one of the rules of the Sabbath. He obeyed the Sabbath perfectly. He didn’t obey their traditions, but He obeyed the Scriptural form

of the Sabbath in both spirit and in letter. He was perfectly obedient. But in His statement that He is Lord of the Sabbath, there are far reaching implications about the future of the Sabbath.

Because He is the One who has authority to interpret it, because He is the Lord of it, He has the authority to change it, and the changing of the Sabbath – which I think we see later in the writing of the epistles – is something that fits well with his parable about the new wine and old wineskins, and the new age that comes, and the new forms that would come. You can’t mix the two. With new wine comes new wineskins. With the new covenant comes new forms and new meaning. That’s the new age and we are living in that new age of the new covenant, an age of freedom from the law of Moses, freedom in an age that Christ established through His death on the cross. Now, that doesn’t mean as we pointed out earlier that we don’t have rules and principles that govern our lives. We do.

And they’re clearly set forth in the New Testament. For example, Paul writes in Romans 13:8, “Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled *the* law.” But still, the error of the Pharisees is a pitfall for us. It’s easy out of good concern for morality to draw up rules and taboos that go beyond the requirements of Scripture. And again, Dr. Packer states that doing this curtails Christian liberty by group pressure, and that never really achieves what it seeks to achieve. We never achieve holiness in that way. Holiness comes as we act out of love for the Lord and love for others. That’s got to be the motivation. It’s then that we properly obey the principles of conduct that are laid out in Scripture.

That’s what we’re to do. Take the lesson from Levi. Serve the Lord out of gratitude. Be willing to do whatever the Lord calls us to do, not with a sense of sacrifice, but with a sense of gratitude. It’s obedience and gratitude that is pleasing to the Lord, and that’s true obedience. But it may be that there are some here who don’t know the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, you can never fulfill the law through love until you first escape the law of sin and death through Christ Jesus. He is the one who died in the place of sinners, bore the penalty of the broken law, and all without exception are guilty of breaking God’s law. But through faith in Christ, through faith in the work that He accomplished on the cross, we are delivered from that

condemnation, forgiven of sins, and we, through faith alone, receive the right to become children of God.

So as we conclude, let me say that if there are any in here who don't know Christ as savior, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and enter into the great privilege of serving Him. Receive from Him the right to become a child of God with all that that involves: eternal life, the forgiveness of sins, freedom from the law, true freedom, and life everlasting. May the Lord help you to do that. Shall we stand now for the benediction?

Gracious heavenly Father, we do thank You for those things which we have studied this morning. Thank You for the freedom that is ours in Christ, freedom from the law, freedom from the law of sin and death. Not freedom from principles of conduct. You set forth Your rules and laws for us very clearly, but in this new covenant age in which we live by the blood of Jesus Christ, we have new power to do that which You would have us to do and to do it with joy. Help us, Father, to reflect upon what You have given us. Create within us hearts that are grateful, that we might act out of gratitude and be good and faithful servants for the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray these things in His name, Amen.