

Mark 2:23-28 Lord of the Sabbath

23 And it happened 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 disciples are following Jesus as He ministers to the people and teaches them. The fields would probably be of wheat, ripe in Late March or April, or barley, ripe in April/May.

The action of plucking heads of grain as they passed through a field on the Sabbath walk provoked was legitimate, and not considered theft. The Mosaic Law said **“when you come into your neighbor’s standing grain, then you may pluck the ears with your hands, but you shall not bring a sickle into your neighbor’s standing grain”** (Deut. 23:25). The disciples’ conduct upset the Pharisees only because it occurred on the Sabbath, which is from Friday at sundown, until Saturday at sundown. The law concerning the Sabbath is included in the Ten Commandments, number 4, **8 “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 For six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God; on it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male slave or your female slave, or your cattle, or your resident who stays with you. 11 For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and everything that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; for that reason the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.**

24 The Pharisees were saying to Him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” The action of plucking grain was interpreted as reaping, an act of work in violation of the Sabbath rest. Reaping on the Sabbath was formally prohibited by the Mosaic Law Ex. 34:21 **21 “You shall work six days, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even during plowing time and harvest you shall rest,** but the disciples weren’t reaping, they were gleaning.

The Law allowed this gleaning among the standing grain precisely so that no one would go hungry! If it weren’t allowed on the Sabbath, then the effect would be to nullify God’s provision for the poor on the Sabbath. Once again, we see the Pharisees putting the letter of the law, and their interpretation of it, and tradition, ahead of what God had intended, making God’s provision of generosity to the poor of no effect, at least on the Sabbath. Jesus brings this point up to them later in Mark 7:8-13 **8 Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.” 9 He was also saying to them, “You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. 10 For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘The one who speaks evil of father or mother, is certainly to be put to death’; 11 but you say, ‘If a person says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is, given to God),’ 12 you no longer allow him to do anything for his father or his mother; 13 thereby invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.”** Well, what the Pharisees are doing in our verses today falls under the category of “many things such as that”—tradition above what God had said in the Law. And, it’s interesting that the thrust of all these things done by the Pharisees were to make God’s Law more constraining, and strict. Why is that? Because they were trying to impress each other on how much holier that they were by denying themselves even more things! In their multiplying restrictions and prohibitions, they made it more and more difficult for people to follow the Pharisees interpretation of the Law. That’s what Jesus meant when he said in Matthew 23:13 **13 “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut the kingdom of heaven in front of people; for you do not enter it yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.** Their impossible burden was too much, and people just gave up trying follow what they thought was an impossible law. But it wasn’t God that put that burden on them, it was the Pharisees. Jesus brings this up in Matthew 23:2-4 **2 saying: “The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses. 3 Therefore, whatever they tell you, do and comply**

with it all, but do not do as they do; for they say things and do not do them. 4 And they tie up heavy burdens and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as their finger. They couldn't keep their own interpretation of the law that they were telling everyone else that they had to keep in order to see God, and go to heaven. And, the Pharisees weren't even being honest about their ability to keep the law. They couldn't do it either, even though they wanted everyone else to believe that they did. Matthew 23:27-28 **27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. 28 So you too, outwardly appear righteous to people, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.** So, the people gave up. And the Pharisees had no mercy or compassion on what they were doing to the people, because to change their ways would mean to admit that they themselves were hypocrites! Which is exactly what Jesus called them in Matthew 23:23-25 **23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the Law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. 24 You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!**

²⁵ And He said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions became hungry; ²⁶ 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 answered their protest with an appeal to Scripture, answering the Pharisees just like he'd answered Satan when he was starving from fasting in the wilderness. Jesus calls the Pharisees' attention to the incident recorded in 1 Sam. 21:1-6. Jesus makes a point about priorities. The key word in what Jesus says to the Pharisees is NEED. The disciples were in need. They weren't trying to get a day's work in; they were trying to feed themselves so that they wouldn't starve. But the Pharisees didn't care about that; they just cared about their interpretation of the Law. In 1 Sam 21:1-6, David is being chased all over Israel by Saul, who is trying to kill him. When David and his men were hungry, and said to the priest Ahimelech, **3 Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever can be found."** **4 The priest answered David and said, "There is no ordinary bread on hand, but there is consecrated bread... 6 So the priest gave him consecrated bread; for there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence which was removed from its place before the Lord, in order to put hot bread in its place on the day it was taken away.**

So, like David's men, the Son of David's men, the Apostles had been consecrated to follow Jesus, the Messiah, and had given up their ordinary lives, to be at home, and enjoy the company of their wives, and family, to be consecrated before God, and to serve the Son of God. And the Pharisees, like Saul, were chasing the servants of God all around to catch them in something so that they could kill them, this time by using a mis-interpretation of God's Word. There is no mercy for these men who have given up their lives to follow Jesus, and follow God's will for their lives, just continual dogging of their steps to try to trip them up. The Pharisees were being unjust, just as Saul had been unjust.

²⁷ Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.

This is the key verse to let us know what Jesus is really getting at. Human need is more important than over-strict interpretation of the Law. God had given man the Sabbath as a gift, since most cultures of those days worked seven days a week, without ever getting a day off. It was supposed to be a day of rest to set aside the usual work, and instead focus as a family on getting closer to God. The Sabbath was made for man's benefit, and enjoyment. But, the Pharisees had turned it into worry-fest, with everyone always looking over their shoulder to see if someone was going to

attack them for committing some infraction that they may not even be aware was a violation of the Pharisees interpretation of the Sabbath. Does that sound like a rest-full day to you? The pharisees had made people slaves, when God wanted them to be free to worship Him!

²⁸ So the Son of Man is Lord, even of the Sabbath.”

And, in case they weren't offended enough, Jesus takes it even further. Jesus had the right to override the agreed conventions, in his capacity as Lord of the Sabbath. Just like the priest Ahimelech could over-ride the convention and provide a blessing to David and his men, Jesus, of course claims greater authority than that of David, or Ahimelech. He says that He is Lord of the Sabbath, and has the personal authority to decide what should and should not occur on the Sabbath, in any case. Who instituted the Sabbath? Not Moses! God! And who is standing before them? The God who instituted the Sabbath. So, Jesus saying "The Son of Man", a messianic title, at this point is reminding them that He is the one who created the Sabbath, and He is quite able to interpret what is, and is not allowed, with Justice, and Mercy