

Greetings to you! The theme for this morning is 'The spiritual freedom which we have in Christ.' Mark records for us that on a Sabbath day Jesus and his disciples were going through the grain fields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to Jesus, 'Why are your disciples doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?' Jesus answered them, 'Have you ever heard when David and his companions were hungry and they entered the house of God in the days of Abiathar, the High Priest and ate the consecrated bread which was only lawful for the priest to eat. He not only ate it but he also gave it to those who were with him. According to 1 Samuel 21:1, David goes to Ahimelech when he was chased by Saul and asked him for bread. The priest informed David that he had only consecrated bread that they could consume it provided the men had kept themselves away from women. David replied in the affirmative and took the consecrated bread and consumed it. After citing this incident Jesus tells the Pharisees that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath, and that the Son of Man was Lord even of a Sabbath.

In a second incident Mark records for us that Jesus again went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day. In the synagogue there was a man with a shriveled hand and the people watched to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath or not. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus and so observed him closely. Jesus said to the man with a shriveled hand to stand up in front of everyone. Then Jesus asked the people in the synagogue, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath; to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" but they remained silent. Jesus looked around them in anger and was deeply distressed because of their stubborn hearts. They knew fully well that if they said that it was not right to heal on the Sabbath, they would not be popular among the people, and if they said it was okay to heal on the Sabbath they would be antagonizing the Pharisees and would be seen as those who broke the Sabbath law. Jesus however was angry because they were not willing to accept the healing of a man who desperately needed God's healing touch. He tells the man with a shriveled hand, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched out his hand and was completely healed. At this the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

In both incidents Jesus shows that he is indeed the Lord of the Sabbath. He teaches that the Sabbath was created for the sake of human beings. The point was to observe the Sabbath day as a day of rest and to keep it holy. So the Sabbath was meant to be a day of worship and a day of rest. However the Pharisees had made up numerous laws according to their traditions in order to keep the Sabbath law. Jesus on the other hand was announcing the coming of God sovereign rule in history. He was not only healing a man with a shriveled hand but he was bringing closeness and a new life with relationship to God. By healing the man on the Sabbath Jesus was declaring that God's redemptive work knew no constraints, not even the Sabbath law.

In these two incidents Mark highlights for us the spiritual freedom we have in Christ. Very often our worship and the keeping of the commandments becomes one of legalism and slavish obedience to the Law. Jesus shows us how important human beings were to him and how he desires the healing and the wholeness of every single individual. We too are called to enjoy the spiritual freedom as the followers of Christ.

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