

## **Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family**

### **Title: The Importance of Sabbath**

#### **Lesson: Mark 2:23-3:6**

*<sup>23</sup> One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. <sup>24</sup> The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" <sup>25</sup> He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? <sup>26</sup> In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." <sup>27</sup> Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. <sup>28</sup> So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."*

***3** Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. <sup>2</sup> Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. <sup>3</sup> Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone." <sup>4</sup> Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent. <sup>5</sup> He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. <sup>6</sup> Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.*

Today's message is about the Sabbath. Perhaps some of you are not familiar with the term "Sabbath" because it is not commonly used in daily conversation. The Sabbath is a day created for human happiness, salvation, and to draw us closer to God. The origin of the Sabbath comes from God.

**(Slide 1)** In Genesis, God created light and darkness, the sky and the earth, trees and plants, stars and birds, all living creatures on this earth, and humans over the course of six days. Genesis 2:2-3 says: "By the seventh day, God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done."

Following God's creation, a week is composed of seven days, and one of those days is designated as the Sabbath—a day to rest from work and focus more on our relationship with God. This is the meaning of the Sabbath. The important thing here is not just to rest, but to rest in God. Jesus also said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28) This is because we find true rest when we dwell in God.

One of my most memorable experiences of rest occurred recently when our

village experienced a power outage. I had just bathed my son and put him to bed, and I was heading to my room to do some tasks when the lights flickered several times before going out completely. While the situation was a bit disconcerting, I remembered that we had an LED lantern in the house. I found the lantern and turned it on, then went to my room and turned on my laptop. However, due to the outage, my laptop battery was draining, and my phone was nearly dead. Naturally, there was no internet access.

After doing what I could in that situation, I stepped outside to check if my neighbors were also experiencing the outage. As soon as I walked out, I realized the entire village was without power because it was very dark outside. To see just how dark it was, I turned off my lantern. It was pitch black. I couldn't imagine how our ancestors lived before the invention of electric lights. I could hear the sounds of insects, and I felt a slight fear that wild animals might appear.

Then, I looked up at the night sky and saw countless stars twinkling above me. The innumerable stars were incredibly beautiful. I stood there for a long time, gazing at the night sky. Although the power outage left me unable to use any electronic devices and feeling somewhat disconnected from the world, I felt even more strongly connected to God. The inability to use any electronic devices brought me peace and a sense of freedom. I enjoyed that feeling so much that I wished I could stay in that moment forever. The feeling still lingers in my heart. Though the electricity eventually returned, and I felt gratitude for it, until it did, I rested in peace and freedom within God.

Resting in God is one of the crucial elements for maintaining a healthy life. People in Jesus' time understood the importance of the Sabbath even better than we do today, and they made great efforts to keep it holy. Nowadays, it's rare to find people who speak positively about the Pharisees, but they too diligently observed the Sabbath.

**(Slide 2)** When we think of the Pharisees, one of the associated words that comes to mind is "legalism." The reason we don't view the Pharisees positively is because they were legalists. In fact, laws themselves are not bad. On the contrary, laws are good and necessary for our lives. The laws of that time were the rules that kept society functioning. Even today, numerous laws exist. Without laws, our world would be chaotic. Laws provide us with clear standards on what we should and shouldn't do, thus bringing freedom to our lives.

However, there is a difference between law and legalism. Legalism places the law as the highest value in life and judges people based on the law. Legalism lacks love and mercy. The only concern for legalists is whether or not the law has been

kept. This is what led to the debate between Jesus and the Pharisees in today's message.

Mark 2 states: "One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields." There is no problem with Jesus walking through the grainfields on the Sabbath. However, the actions of the disciples mentioned in the next sentence upset the Pharisees. It says, "and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain." The Pharisees were disturbed by the disciples picking grain because this act was considered work.

Immediately, the Pharisees protested to Jesus, asking why they were doing what was unlawful on the Sabbath. Jesus responded by referring to the example of David. According to the law, twelve consecrated loaves of bread were to be placed in the sanctuary every Sabbath, and after offering them to God, the priests were to eat the bread in a holy place. David and his men, while fleeing from Saul, took refuge in the sanctuary. They were so hungry that they ate the bread that was meant only for the priests. Although David did not keep the law, God, in His mercy and boundless love, did not make it a significant issue.

**(Slide 3)** Jesus then said to the Pharisees, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

Jesus emphasized the importance of the Sabbath but made it clear that the Sabbath was not more important than human life. After this, He entered the synagogue and healed a man with a shriveled hand.

How did you perceive today's story? Jesus prioritized human life over the law.

However, one thing not to misunderstand is that this story is not saying that the law is unimportant or that the Sabbath is unimportant.

As Jesus said, the Sabbath was made for man. It was created to bring happiness, salvation, and a closer relationship with God. Therefore, Jesus criticized legalism that judges and condemns people based on whether they observe the Sabbath, but He never said that observing the Sabbath is unimportant.

**(Slide 4)** There is a very famous story related to the Sabbath in Jewish history. Even today, Jews meticulously observe the Sabbath, and they tell this story: "We thought we were keeping the Sabbath, but the Sabbath kept us."

Around A.D. 70, Jerusalem was utterly destroyed, and with the collapse of their nation, the Israelites were scattered across the world, wandering without a country for 1,800 years. Without a nation to protect them, they faced discrimination and numerous tragedies. The most infamous of these tragedies, which most of us

know, is the Holocaust, where over six million Jews were killed.

Despite these hardships, the Jews observed the Sabbath wherever they lived for 1,800 years. Although they had no country, by keeping the Sabbath, they preserved their faith and their identity. For them, observing the Sabbath was as precious as their lives. Initially, they thought they were observing the Sabbath as a law. However, over time, they realized that the Sabbath, as a day to experience God and His word, had protected them, preserving their faith, culture, and identity.

God gave us the law and created the Sabbath not to oppress or condemn us, but to make us happy, to save us, and to help us find true freedom in Him. Therefore, I can say that the Sabbath has kept us, and for you, since the Sabbath is Sunday, I can tell you that observing Sunday as a holy day in God will keep your faith and your life healthy.

Friends, as we walk our faith journey, we must keep the core teaching of the Bible in our hearts: people are precious. We must speak words that give life and show respect to others. Growing in faith means becoming warmer, uplifting others, and developing a mature character that embraces people.

As I conclude, let me ask you: What plans do you have for the week? Who will you meet this week? I hope you can approach the people you will meet with warm affection, take time to pray for them, and treat them with kindness. Amen.