

CCH 25th Nov 2018 “The King of Love” Mark 2:23-3:6

V28

▲ Why is that we like **rules** so much? Recently I was given a “fitbit” as a gift. It tracks how many steps I take in the day. It’s set for me to do 6000 steps which is around 3 1/2m. I’ve heard of people walking up and down the stairs or around the room at the end of the day to reach their target.

I guess that we like rules because we can set the details of them (6000 steps a day, 3 cigarettes per day, or 1 chapter of the Bible to read) so that we can tick them off and feel good about ourselves.

But rules can actually turn us a little ugly. You dare not get in the way if I’m trying to keep my 6000 steps rule, or if I get in the way of your “keep the house tidy” rule by bringing in muddy shoes.

Today for our last study in Mark’s gospel we are looking at these two stories of Jesus conflict with the religious leaders. Look in 3 places and you’ll see that the issue is rule keeping- doing what is lawful.

2V24 “what is unlawful”

2v26 “which is lawful only for priests to eat”

3v4 “which is lawful on the sabbath?”

What we are going to see today takes us to the heart of Christianity because it shows us that the way to live is not through a series of tickboxes that make us feel better about ourselves (what I’m going to call “*legislation*”), but rather through letting Jesus lead us, what I’m going to call “*Lordship*”. Look again at v28.

And as we go we’ll see three wonderful things about how good life is when we let Jesus lead us, compared to when we set rules to rule us.

MAIN POINT: LET JESUS LEAD YOU IN HIS GOOD WAYS...

1) His BIBLICAL ways...

Let’s look at story 1 (in v23-28). It’s actually story 4 of 5 conflicts that are getting increasingly hostile towards Jesus.

The context is the sabbath- the Jewish Day of rest- for them Saturday. For many today, Sunday. It doesn’t really matter what the issue at hand is, we’re going to see principles that are transferrable to other areas of our lives, whether it be how we deal with stress, or how we look after our kids, or how we relate to our boss!

V23. *One Sabbath Jesus was going through the cornfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some ears of corn.*

Now to the Pharisees this is problematic in two ways.

God had said very clearly in the Old Testament that he wants his people to honour the Sabbath. In fact it’s the 4th commandment. “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy” Ex 20:8.

Now let me say right from the start that Jesus is not doing away with the 10 Commandments, as if Murder, Adultery, Swearing is now OK. Read the Sermon on the Mount and you’ll see that. But he’s helping us to see what these commands really mean.

And it’s quite different from how the Pharisees see it. You see what had happened over the years was that the Jewish leaders had taken the OT law, and listed 39 types of activity that you couldn’t do on the sabbath. In their minds, Jesus and his friends were probably in danger of a) walking too far on the sabbath (a sabbath day’s walk was stipulated at 200cubits 938m) and b) doing something that looked very much like reaping (which was certainly not allowed as it was working on the sabbath).

So v24. *The Pharisees said to him, ‘Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?’*

But the way in which Jesus responds is really fascinating... He doesn't attack the way they have added a whole load of rules, he doesn't say "look, they are not reaping they are just snacking", he turns to a very specific incident in the Bible.

He says v25, "Have you never read what David did". I bet these experts on the Bible, didn't like the suggestion that they didn't know their bibles, and especially when someone as great as King David is in view.

Jesus reminds them of a time when David and his friends ate special bread normally kept in the Temple for the priests and had a nice picnic with it. And nowhere does the Bible record him as doing wrong in this incident.

It's a clever thing to turn to, first because it shows that far from what the Pharisees were suggesting, the Bible wasn't condemning what Jesus was doing. And secondly his chosen story brought up to date places him in the seat of David, the great King sent from God. I don't think the Pharisees would have liked that.

But the point I want to draw out so far, is that Jesus' ways are completely consistent with the Bible.

Jesus is a Bible expert. He really knew his Old Testament.

And so should we! Not because we have to pass an exam on it. Nor because it is a rule book, but because as we dig deep into the Bible we meet with God. WE meet with Jesus there. We discover what he wants us to live.

And like these guys, we will constantly find ourselves challenged and corrected to live a positive life, a wholesome life, a holy life.

I hope you do try to read the Bible regularly- perhaps at a time that suits your day. Just a few moments of delighting in what God is saying there can make such a difference to the day.

Let Jesus lead you in his biblical ways.

2) Let Jesus lead you in his RESTORATIVE ways

Before we move to the second story, just look carefully at v27-28. *Then he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.'*

What had the Pharisees done with the Sabbath? They'd turned it into a new set of tickboxes. "You can do *this* on the sabbath, you can't do *that* on the sabbath". Some of you grew up with that- a list of dos and don'ts about what was permissible on Sundays.

Going for a walk- OK

Shopping- definitely not.

Watching telly- Hmmm.

Now I think society would be a much happier place if we didn't have Sunday Trading- everyone would get a proper rest, and there'd probably be more time for the family.

But it's possible to miss the point.

Right at the start God who made the world created the world in 6 days and then he rested. He didn't need to rest, and there's a sense in which if he completely rested, the whole universe would fall apart. But after he created the world which was so good (this was before sin came along and spoiled it) he began the sabbath day- a day of relationship, a day of re-creation, a day of rest.

There's enjoyment here, there's re-creation. The sabbath is a blessing not a burden.

We are not machines to keep going non-stop (when societies have tried to do away with a 7 day week, including a day of rest, they have actually found it less productive- there's a clue there about how God's ways are good).

But nor does life consist in rule keeping. Look closely at v27 again. “The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath” God is a good God who wants to bless us and give us the wonderful gift of rest. Rest which is ultimately found in relationship with Him.

But by adding all these rules to the sabbath, they had turned a gift into drudgery, a happy thing into a heavy thing.

It would be like saying- here’s a pillow for Christmas. “Oh no, do I have it round this way, or this way, do I put this pillowcase on it, or that, can I put my pyjamas under it or not”. I think I’d say, chill out, you’ve missed the point, it’s to help you sleep- enjoy it.

The pharisees had got the wrong end of the stick. But Jesus goes even further in verse 28. “So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath”. Jesus is telling us about rest and sabbath, but he’s telling us about himself too.

Again and again, he raises the stakes so that we understand how important and majestic he is. LORD OF THE SABBATH!

He’s the King who is telling us how to live.

He gets to call the shots.

He’s to be the boss, the Lord, the King.

The Son of Man- the Daniel 7 divine human King.

Let him lead you in his ways.

Have you ever talked to Jesus about your pattern of rest during the week? Have you ever looked carefully at the Bible and prayed about whether you are taking enough rest?

I can tell you how we try and do rest during the week- Tuesday evenings, Saturdays as a family, Martha time Monday morning.

Do you see how Jesus’ ways are so good. So restorative. He doesn’t want us frazzled. He doesn’t want us burdened with rules. He wants us to enjoy the good gifts that God gives us.

Let Jesus lead you in his ways and you will find them biblical (he won’t ever go against God’s ways, because he is God), and secondly restorative (because he wants to bless us with good things, like a stroll in the fields with friends, not a list of dos and don’ts).

But it’s the final story that’s takes it even further...

3) Let Jesus lead you in his LIFE GIVING ways.

Let’s move onto the next story.

3V1 we’re in the synagogue (the local Jewish religious meeting place) and there’s a man with a shrivelled hand. Poor guy, he may have been born with a disability, the muscles may have wasted away, or he may have had some kind of accident at work.

But the atmosphere is electric, because everyone is looking to see if Jesus is going to do something unlawful on the sabbath, and break the rules. You can see they are already there to try and catch him out and demonstrate he doesn’t do religion properly V2.

Rather than dispelling the tension, Jesus raises the stakes again. He brings the man right into the middle and all eyes are on Jesus. What’s he going to do?

But v4 is vintage Jesus. He gets to the nub of the issue and shows just how far the Pharisees religion has taken them away from decency.

V4 “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?”

“You and your rule books? You’ve wandered so far away from the intention of the good laws in Scripture. Let me give you some basic categories to think about what’s the right and wrong thing to do on the Sabbath. How about doing good vs . How about saving life vs killing.

Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?"

They are silent because they are hardly going to say "do evil" and admit their own cruelty, but they are not going to say "do good" and admit that he's got it right.

Having come to trap Jesus, as is so often the way, they are trapped. Jesus is brilliant. Put him in the ring and throw any punch at him, and you'll find you are the one doing yourself an injury.

Tim Keller in his excellent book on Mark "Kings Cross" says that these men's hearts were as shrivelled as that man's hand.

Then Jesus heals the man. V5. He looks around a few times in Mark's gospel, I would have loved to have seen that look. But it's an angry look. And it's an angry look at us, when we get ourselves trapped in to do lists that fail to actually love other people.

V5. "Stretch out your hand"

He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.

No more muscle wastage, no more crookedness in the bones, no more carrying around a useless limb, a miracle of new creation happens and it's as good as new.

Do you see how life giving Jesus is?

He hasn't come to make life grim. As if we should all grin and bear it. He's come to bring us life to the full. He's come to bless,

It's so sad when people turn Christianity into a rule book. It was never meant to be that. Lordship not legislation, relationship not rules. And you want to see where legislation ends up?

Let's read the final verse.

V6. Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

If you are a rule book person, you are not going to appreciate the free

It's like you spend all your time queueing and then someone tells you that queueing isn't needed, there's another door around the corner.

This is extraordinary for two reasons. First because we see here two natural enemies coming together- the conservative Pharisees who prided themselves on separation coming together with the progressive liberals who had muscled in with the oppressive Roman regime.

But also because of the irony in this section.

Jesus has just challenged them about the sabbath in very strong terms. Which is lawful to do on the sabbath- to save life or to kill?"

Well obviously while Jesus spends his sabbath helping people and bringing life, they are now spending theirs plotting a murder. The word in v6 is literally "how they might **destroy** him".

Let's bring this all together. What a wonderful Saviour Jesus is. His approach is biblical, restorative, life-giving.

I'm so sad when people reject Christianity, saying it's just a bunch of rules. It is so far from that. It's having a King in charge of your life, leading you, like a Shepherd leading his sheep to green pastures.

It's not that following Jesus gives you an excuse to live an immoral life. Far from it. You actually want to start to live a new life.

Christianity is Relationship not Religion. Religion says I want to live a good life so I can be accepted. Relationship says I am already accepted so I want to live a good life.

We've seen this term that Jesus is the radical king, the doctor King, the powerful King, the radical King.

But I've titled this sermon "the King of Love". Because he hasn't come to burden us, but to bless us.

▲ Earlier this year at our Church in Cambridge I helped run a new course for the first time called "Life Explored". It was beautifully presented with 7 short films, and 7 teaching videos. We might do it here sometime.

Around our table there were people from all over the world: the Netherlands, China, Zambia, Brazil and good old Great Britain. Here's a [photo](#) of some of them.

As we looked into the Bible's teaching on Jesus Christ, we discovered how GOOD God is, and how he is a God who has come to bless us and take our burden of sin from us, not to weigh us down with more rules.

Several of the people around the table had come from very traditional (mainly catholic) backgrounds. And one by one they discovered what we are discovering here- that Christianity is not about rules, it's about relationship with our maker, who blesses us ultimately with a relationship of forgiveness that we don't deserve.

And a number of them put their trust in Jesus for the first time.

I'll never forget their comments "why wasn't I taught this in my church". Christianity had been reduced to rules.

As we finish this series, do you see how good Jesus is? And also how controversial he is?

Will you trust him?

Let's pray.