

## **Mark 2:23—3:6**

*March 4, 2018*

As far as the far reaching resources of Google can tell, the very first use of an iconic American phrase was used in April 1872. It is a phrase all of us in the room have used and heard many times. See if you can pick it out—

“The Baltimore American thinks that for the Cincinnati Convention to control the Democratic party would be the tail wagging the dog.”

Ah. Probably none of us in this room beside some history teachers have heard about what happened in Cincinnati that impacted the Democratic Party, but all of us have heard the phrase, “The tail wagging the dog.”

We dog lovers know that tails never wag dogs unless like my mom you have a dog that weighs a two pounds and when she gets her tail going her whole body feels the tremors—but normally dogs wag their tails and not vice versa.

When someone says—this is a situation where the ‘tail is wagging the dog,’ they are saying that a small item is wrongly domineering a big situation.

More than getting something backward, when the tail wags the dog a small matter is obscuring a grand matter.

Here two examples—

“But it is the tail wagging the dog; it is a clear example of why many people have become disillusioned in their political representatives. (Forbes Magazine)

“It’s the tail wagging the dog very much here in Donegal when it comes to fixtures and playing of club games,” blasted Ardara senior team manager Adrian Brennan, when contacted on the matter by the (Donegal) Democrat. (The Donegal Democrat)

When a minor matter gains an outsized influence over a whole situation—it is a case of the tail wagging the dog. Though they didn’t have the phrase, today we see a religious case of the tail wagging the dog—

When small matters gain an outsized influence in normal life, we can be miffed, but when small matters gain an outsized influence in spiritual life we can lose our way.

The best way to NOT lose our way and NOT make small things important is to keep our focus on Jesus—

Throughout Mark, we have watched him, we have listened to him, we have followed him around and he never majors on the minors. Today, Jesus is going to say to the Pharisees—I’m the point.

I’m the point of the Sabbath.  
I’m the point of Worship.  
I’m the point.

The tail wags the dog when Jesus is not the point.

Center your life and worship only on Jesus.

Anything else is the tail wagging the dog.

“One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. <sup>24</sup> And the Pharisees were saying to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” <sup>25</sup> And he said to them, “Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: <sup>26</sup> how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?” <sup>27</sup> And 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** Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. <sup>2</sup> And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. <sup>3</sup> And he said to the man with the withered hand, “Come here.” <sup>4</sup> And he said to them, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent. <sup>5</sup> And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. <sup>6</sup> The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.” Mark 2:23-3:6

**PRAY**

We overhear a question of Jesus and a question from Jesus.

## 1. Question of Jesus (Mark2:23-28)—

To understand how the emptiness of man-made religion causes the tail to wag the dog in this story we need to understand the Sabbath.

To the action—

“One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. <sup>24</sup> And the Pharisees were saying to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?”

The Sabbath is the most important day in the Jewish week. Conscientious Jews the world over still observe the Sabbath, and in that day the Sabbath was the MOST important thing about their identity.

What Jesus is about do here would be the equivalent of Jesus burning the American flag at a VA hospital.

What did he do? He dared to challenge the Pharisaical understanding of the Sabbath.

Edwards sums up the matter well,

“Most of the world’s religions venerate sacred places: Islam honors Mecca, Hinduism the Ganges River, and Shintoism the island of Japan. Judaism also venerated Jerusalem and especially the temple as sacred space, but it venerated something beyond it, and perhaps above it: *time*, the Sabbath.” James Edwards

So when in just a minute we see what Jesus says understand he is challenging these Jews at the most fundamental level. It starts out innocuously enough as Jesus traipsed through the wheat fields.

Apparently impervious to gluten, the disciples were plucking heads of grain and eating what is called the berries. Those berries when gathered in a bunch we call grain.

The disciples were not doing anything illegal by beheading a wheat stalk here and there. No land owner would take issue with what they were doing—even Moses weighed in from Deuteronomy,

“If you go into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the ears with your hand, but you shall not put a sickle to your neighbor's standing grain.” Deuteronomy 23:25

So eat a few—don't harvest.

The disciples aren't doing anything illegal but the Pharisees ask—really accuse,

“Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?”

Do you see how that is not a genuine question, but rather an accusation wrapped in a question?

The Sabbath was the day instituted at creation for mankind to rest one in seven days. God instituted the

Sabbath at creation and at the creation of Israel. The OT called for a day of rest.

NT—No Sabbath today because we look back not to creation but to an empty tomb. Sunday is the day for Christians.

Because the nation of Israel was commanded not to work on Sabbath a group called the Pharisees decided to define exactly what work was. What might have started with good intentions devolved into absurdity:

- You could not carry anything heavier than a fig.
- You could not throw something in the air and catch it with the other hand.
- You could not examine your clothing just in case you had lice or some other bug and had to do the work of killing it.
- You could not buy or sell anything.
- You could not light a fire
- You could not bathe, because water might hit the floor and that is cleaning.
- You could not leave a radish in salt because it would pickle.
- You could not write more than one letter. That is one letter of the alphabet.
- You COULD pick up your child—as long as you checked make sure they weren't holding anything.

Absurd.

THAT is the tail wagging the dog.

Do you see how those regulations necessarily focused on what you could or could not do and not on GOD?

Tail, dog.

So, these Pharisees are all lathered up because as the disciples were plucking grain—they were reaping. Threshing. Doing work.

Jesus has no time for absurdity.

And Jesus response was priceless—

Vs 25,

**<sup>25</sup> And he said to them, “Have you never read what David did....**

Of course they read it. They know the story that Jesus is about to say. The irony is that the Pharisees had read the story but they didn't understand it.

They are the OT experts and for Jesus to say—have you never read? Would be like you and I talking to Tom Brady and saying, “Can you throw?”

**“Have you never read what David did when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: <sup>26</sup> how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?”**

What is he saying?

Jesus hits the way back machine and joins David in the time he is running from Saul for his life. David is wandering in the desert starving and stumbles on the tabernacle and eats what is called the bread of Presence.

This bread was holy bread. There is no such thing as holy bread anymore. But then, each week the priests would bake 12 loaves of bread and set them out on the golden table. The bread symbolized the 12 tribes and their need to be with God. At the end of that week, the priests and the priests only could eat that bread.

But David comes in and the priest gave him the bread—what gives? Why would the priest allow David to do something that was unlawful?

David was an outlaw from Saul he and his men were desperate, dying for food.

But David and his men were going to die and it made complete sense to set aside the law for a moment to spare lives. David didn't care what the bread symbolized, he was more worried about what the bread could do for him and his road-weary men.

And they ate it. And lived.

The point of the story might be a bit opaque at first, but Jesus makes clear—

**<sup>27</sup> And he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.**



I can tell you what the Sabbath is about—the Sabbath was my idea. The Sabbath rest was the oldest and most ancient of religious activities in the history of mankind. And Jesus says—how dare you tell me what the Sabbath is about?

I was at that Trinitarian planning meeting. Where were you? Me. Not you. You have no idea. The Sabbath is made to bless man NOT the other way around.

The Sabbath was instituted to bless mankind with weekly rest from work. He commanded that the nation observe a rest—one day in seven—to remember and represent the restoration of God's salvation.

It seems strange to say that God commanded something that would be a blessing. But that is how he works. Even the commands he gives us are to bless us.

- Love the Lord your God—loving something else that can't love you back will wreck your life. He gives the blessing of love to and for us.
- Don't worship Idols—worshipping, serving something that cannot do anything for you is no blessing—it will wreck your life. So, he gives the blessing of himself and he is no mute idol. He is a blessing.
- Don't commit Adultery—that will wreck your life.
- Don't steal—that will wreck your life.

And the Sabbath was to function in the same way—because mankind doesn't know what it is good for him—God had to command rest. Because we would work ourselves or leisure ourselves to death.

And so—the Lord says with the Sabbath—rest. Enjoy the rest your God has given you. Jesus changed Sabbath rest radically and we will see that as the book of Mark unfolds. But to put ever so briefly, Jesus centers worship on him thereby changing the Day of Rest to marking the Day of Resurrection.

So, instead of enjoying the rest—the Pharisees asked the wrong question—they asked, “What is work?”

And the tail wagged the dog.

All of a sudden instead of enjoying rest and enjoying the blessings of God—people were worried about rules.

Man-made religion always asks the wrong question. Instead of asking, “What does honoring God look like?” Man-made religion asks, “What am I supposed to do?”

A sure sign of man-made religion is the tendency to boil worship down to mere rules. What do I have to do? What cannot I NOT do?

Tail, dog.

Those are never the right questions—ask: How can I focus on Jesus?

Jesus is saying—look at me. I’m the point. I am the one you are to focus on. Not stupid Sabbath rules, but me.

And he makes that explicit with some fighting words in verse 28,

**28 So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”**

In other words, the Sabbath is MINE not YOURS. I wrote the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment and I know what it is all about.

These are fighting words to the Pharisees because they fancied themselves as lords of the Sabbath. People in town came to them to ask their Sabbath questions.

And Jesus says—I define worship—not you.

Man-made religion wields a heavy-handed and coercive authority. It is full of threats and motivates by fear and not love. Man-made religion does not bless people it aims to control its power and keep people in line.

That is why it is so important to center our lives and worship on Jesus Christ. Anything else is the tail wagging the dog.

We’ve heard the question OF Jesus, now we transition to a question from Jesus.

### ***2.A Question from Jesus (Mark 3:1-6)—***

The Lord of the Sabbath was not going to remain in the wheat fields during the Sabbath. He headed into town to get to synagogue. Like all Jews, he was going to church.

And the eyes of the Pharisees are upon him—

**Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. 2 And they watched Jesus, to see whether**

he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him.

They watched what Jesus would do on the Sabbath. It was a set-up. Would Jesus heal?

Because you know, healing is work. It would be wrong to heal someone with a withered hand. Obviously.

Right? Wrong.

Tail wagging the dog.

Another sign of man-made religion the burdens they lay on people and the blessings they erase.

Jesus sees their eyes and we hear the question FROM Jesus—

**3 And he said to the man with the withered hand, “Come here.” 4 And he said to them, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent.**

Surely the man with a withered hand did not want to be noticed but here he was right in the middle of everything at the synagogue. He probably went to Jesus not really knowing why he was being singled out. And yet when he heard, “Come here,” he went to Jesus.

Meanwhile, the Pharisees kept their distance from Jesus and did not answer him.

It should have been an easy answer—the Sabbath is for doing good—not doing harm!

But they said nothing.

**5 And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.**

I want you to notice something here. Man-made religion places burdens on already burdened people—this poor man was burdened by a withered hand.

Man-made religion says—you better not work on the Sabbath—do you see what Jesus says?

“Stretch out your hand.”

What was the one thing that this man could not do when he woke up that Sabbath morning? He could not stretch out his hand. His hand was useless, but then he meets Jesus.

It seems cruel for Jesus to tell him to stretch out his hand—but Jesus is never cruel and he would never ask the man to do something he would not empower him to do.

This is Jesus—the great physician, the resurrection, the life, the good shepherd, the I AM, the Word—and when he speaks he speaks as the one who has all authority. Stretch out your hand—became a command that promised blessing.

And his hand was restored.

And there is a picture of the difference between Jesus and man-made religion. Jesus heals and restores the broken. Man-made religion infects and further breaks down the already broken.

Tail. Dog.

This is why it is so very important that we center our life and worship on Jesus Christ.

This is the difference between Jesus and Man-made religion. It is not just that Jesus is able to heal OR that he is determined to do the right thing BUT ALSO—we see that Jesus is the one who can make the broken whole.

We can see this in the differences between what Jesus and the Pharisees could offer the man with the shriveled hand.

Pharisees: Man-made religion—

The Pharisees could offer this man a list of things that he could not do on the Sabbath. They could point out with precision where he was falling short. They could threaten him and tell him he better fall in line.

Jesus: The one we MUST center our life and worship on—

Jesus can say to the man with the shriveled hand, “Stretch out your hand,” and make him the man with the shriveled hand no longer. Do you think it was any hardship for the man formerly known as the man with the shriveled hand to follow Jesus? No.

With a word from Jesus, he was made whole.

Man-made religion always burdens people. Jesus never does. What Jesus did for this man is a picture of what he does for all who follow him.

You might have gone to Jesus not quite sure why you were being singled out. And yet when you went to him when you heard, “Come here,” He made your shriveled heart new. As you centered your life and worship on Jesus he made you new. He did not ask you to clean yourself up or be a better you. He said, “Come here.” And he made you new.

This is one of the reasons we are watching, listening and following Jesus around the book of Mark—why—so we can be reminded again and again why it is so much better to center our lives and worship on him. So much better.

And we are reminded how dangerous man-made religion is as we see how the Pharisees responded to Jesus.

How did the Pharisees respond to Jesus?

**“The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.”**

They joined forces with their political enemies to try and destroy Jesus.

You know what is scary about the Pharisees? They didn’t believe things so different than we Christians.

- They believed the Bible was the word of God.

- They believed there was one God who created all things.
- They believed mankind was in need of a savior.
- They believed God would judge humanity.

They just rejected Jesus as God the Son savior of mankind. Notice the subtlety. They were fine with Jesus as teacher, miracle worker (not on Sabbath), roving preacher—but not as savior.

They did not want to accept Jesus for on his terms. They were happy to add Jesus to the mix of things that they already believed, but they were unwilling to center their lives and worship on Jesus.

And that is so very dangerous. You can believe all the right things about the Bible and God and yet be far from Jesus because you don't center your life and worship on him. This is a danger for everyone, but it might be a special danger for kids who grow up in and around church.

You might think that the message of the church is to obey your parents, listen to the right music, don't mess around with drugs, don't look at porn, don't smoke, don't use cuss words and be an overall good person.

You might be doing all those things and yet be far from Jesus. And you could be a Pharisee—looking good on the outside but far from Jesus.

Is that you?

The message of Jesus is not a message of obedience but of grace. Is he saying to you, "Come here?" Now?



Jesus is not going to call you close and then say—here is a list of rules and regulations that you need to follow. No. He is going to say—Trust me.

Center your life and worship on me.

Jesus restores shriveled hearts of even the most Pharisaical kids who have grown up in church. How? Any who come to him and admit sin and ask for salvation without conditions—he saves.

Christians—

We see this picture here and sometimes if we are honest, we need reasons WHY Jesus is worth continuing to follow.

Sometimes life gets so hard. Sometimes your heart feels like it is so heavy as trouble weighs you down. You wonder—Why—why is it so difficult to follow Jesus? It should be easier.

And you are tempted to go another way. Part of the reason we are watching Jesus, listening to Jesus and following Jesus around is to remind why it is worth CONTINUING to center our life and worship on Jesus—

Why CONTINUE to center our lives and worship on Jesus?

- Jesus takes burdens from us—he never gives them to us.

Never. Even in healing the man with the shriveled hand he absorbed the ire and wrath of the Pharisees. He did not care what they would do to him, but was bent on blessing on the Sabbath.

Jesus does not lay the burden of earning his love and acceptance on his people. He freely offers himself to absorb our burdens. Just as he put himself in the firing line of the Pharisees and Herodians—absorbing their wrath, he will later put himself in the firing line of God—absorbing his wrath for us.

He takes the burden of the guilt, shame, punishment of our sins AND freely gives the blessing of eternal life today. You don't have to measure up because he has taken your place.

Man-made religion shows us where we have fallen short and constantly says—you are not good enough. Jesus knows keenly where we have fallen short and freely forgives us.

Jesus takes burdens that man-made religion cannot.

- Jesus never does anything but bless his people.

We need to remember this. I'm not saying that everything in our life is a blessing—it is not. But I am saying Jesus ONLY blesses his people.

Consider—

In this moment he is praying for you by name. He promises never to leave you though you sin and sin

grievously. He upholds you by his Holy Spirit. He does not treat you as your sins deserve.

He works all things—not just some things—but all things together for your good. He is eager to bless and not punish. He is never punitive toward you.

Jesus lives to bless his people.

Maybe you live thinking that God is somehow angry with you and is glowering at you, simmering waiting for an excuse to smite you. No. He looks NOT for reasons to punish but is eager to bless.

That is a lie of Satan. Satan is the accuser of the brothers and sisters, Jesus is the one that blesses the brothers and sisters.

Jesus loves you, in fact there was never a time that he did not love you. He loved you before time—he loves you today—he will love you forever.

Man-made religion burdens, Jesus blesses. Anything aside from centering your life and worship on Jesus is the tail wagging the dog.



