

RECREATING WORSHIP, Mk2:23-3:7

Stop the World I wanna get Off #3

◆**Intro:** Blue laws are laws designed to restrict certain activities on Sundays (or other specific days) for religious reasons in order to observe a day of worship or rest. In colonial America it was illegal to kiss a child or to shave on Sunday.

◆Blue Laws have been declared constitutional by the US Supreme Court on multiple occasions, and even today 28 states have them. In most counties of Arkansas, for example, alcohol and liquor sales are not allowed on Sundays and that's statewide Christmas Day. In Maine it is illegal for almost all businesses to be open on Thanksgiving. Hunting is illegal on Sundays. In MI since 1953, it is prohibited to buy, sell, or participate in a trade of motor vehicles on Sunday. In Maryland professional sports cannot play games before 1pm on Sundays. In Indiana, it's illegal to ride a horse faster than 10 miles per hour. In Kentucky, a woman is not allowed marry more than three times. In New Jersey, it's against the law to wear a bullet-proof vests while committing a crime. But those last three aren't really blue laws because they are not Sunday restrictions. I just thought they were interesting.

◆In Jesus' day the **Pharisee** had 1521 prohibitions for the Sabbath. 156 double pages in the Talmud. For example, nose-rings were not allowed on the sabbath. In our day, did you know you can buy a sabbath-ready refrigerator? That's right. In Exodus 35 God told the Israelites that no fire may be kindled on the Sabbath. Over time the people extended that to "no lighting

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of lamps". When electricity became common it translated into "no turning on the lights." That became "no lights were to go on." Well, you know how the light automatically comes on when you open your fridge door...? Uh-uh-ah! Now today many refrigerators now come with a sabbath-mode. They can be set so that the light inside there won't come on during the hours of the sabbath! (Turns out to be convenient for the salad! That way no one sees the salad dressing! -yeah, I know, Dad joke.)

◆**1.** What I've been describing so far is what we call legalism.

Last week we saw how busyness can kill the sabbath principle of having one day of rest out of seven. Legalism can kill it too.

Legalism is keeping the letter of the law without keeping the spirit of the law. **The problem with legalism and observing a day of rest each week, is that legalism destroys the human spirit!** Rather than restore a person, legalism depletes a person.

This is a problem as Jesus points out in 2:27 "Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." Mark 2:27, NIV. See, the sabbath is FOR you. FOR your benefit. Legalism does the opposite.

◆**A.** Did you notice in our text that Jesus did something good (healed the man's hand) and it's considered bad. And then, while the Pharisees are upset that Jesus *cures* a man on the Sabbath day, *they* plan to murder a man on the sabbath day, so now a bad thing is being considered good! And that's not all. The text says the Pharisees go link up with the Herodians to knock Jesus off.

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These two groups hated each other! Hello! That'd be like Pelosi and Trump agreeing to take out a terrorist together! These folks didn't get along! Herodians were Idumean converts to Judaism, not of Hebrew descent. They cooperated with Rome's army which currently occupied the land of Israel. Herod was the puppet king under Roman control. But hey, if they'll help us kill a guy whose healing our sick people, then we'll put up with them! Talk about confusion! That's what legalism does. They know the laws, but are lawless. They are conscious of the code but they have no conscience.

◆**B.** Lets pause a moment to think about why legalism is so easy to adopt. How is it we get some of the strange rules we live by and why does it destroy people? Legalism is attractive because it's easy and mindless. You set up your rules, and you never have to think, struggle, or agonize over what is right or appropriate again. Just follow the code. It might start with some good rules but after a while the rules are not serving to help us, it is the rules we are serving. In legalism there is no room for grace, understanding. We just get angrier and angrier as we constantly compare our achievement to everyone else. Like this:

- ◆ You adopt a practice (lets say you decide to give up Harlequin novels because you notice that you are more and more dissatisfied with your spouse after reading one).
- ◆ Then you chase yourself to keep away from them. You pride yourself when you succeed. But you castigate yourself

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when you fail (there's one in the doctors office and you pick it up).

◆Next you actually get mad at people for creating a world where you find it hard to uphold your rules (that immoral doctor! He has no business leaving novels lying around like that. I'll bet he's from Vegas!)

◆Finally, you start to look down on people who don't keep *your* practice, or share *your* rules. (Nobody should be reading or even having these things!)

◆The result? You find it very difficult to actually like, or befriend or welcome anyone who isn't exactly like you. Take it down the road further, if you're a church-goer, you end up disliking non=church-goers because they don't live like you live. Rather than see someone who needs the love of God, or healing in their life, you see a bad influence that endangers you!

◆An older lady came to very quiet old fashioned church. As the pastor preached the woman, shouted "Amen"! One of the ushers came up and said, "I'm sorry ma'am, we don't do that at our Church." She apologized and said she would try to be quiet, but a couple minutes later the pastor said something wonderful, and she shouted "Amen", again. This time the usher gave her a dirty look, and she shrank into her pew a little. Lo and behold the pastor said something else inspiring, and old lady shouted "Glory to Jesus". At this point the pastor looked at the Ushers, and four of them preceded

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to carry her out of the Church while the lady shouted;
"Praise God, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on one, and I'm
being carry out by four of them!"

◆ This is the oddity that legalism leads to, isn't it? The focus of the Lord's day is not on the right tradition or rule being kept. That does not build people up. This is something we want to be careful of!

◆ *"Jesus replied, "And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them."
Luke 11:46, NIV.*

◆ **2.** Earlier I said that the sabbath was FOR you. But there's another piece. **The sabbath is for man, but the sabbath is TO God. The real focus of a sabbath day of rest is on knowing and being happy in God.** We use other words for that, like worshiping God. Like adoring God, or marveling at and thanking God. This is why the worship service has become an integrated part of Christian practice. When we go to worship we go looking for God, we want to hear from him through his Word, or through his people. We want to find his goodness, and feel his love and hope. We want to celebrate his resurrection and our future resurrection, and remember that there is a God, and my life has a purpose, and someone is going to be loving me to infinity and beyond!

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◆**A.** Sabbath is about enjoying God! The Westminster Confession first question goes like this:

◆ "What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy him forever!"

◆ When you enjoy God you are glorifying him! Merely stopping and doing nothing is not the sabbath principle at all. Let's check out the original commandment.

◆ "Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates." Exodus 20:9, 10, NIV.

◆ Did you notice that little phrase *to the Lord*? Exodus 16 call the day of rest a *holy Sabbath to the LORD*. Chapter 31 says *the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD*. The book of Leviticus says it that way. The Book of Deuteronomy says it that way. I think we can see then that *a sabbath day, is a worship day. God's day off is so we can notice how good God and his creation (the 6days of work) is!* Now suppose I don't work and I just watch Steven King movies all day? Well I've stopped but I'm not noticing much of goodness of God, am I?

◆**B.** But be careful! As Lynne Baab writes:

◆ "For many christians, attending a worship service is the only activity that marks the sabbath and a special day. Sunday afternoon errands begin, the family scatters, and the pace of living never slows. Viewing a worship service as the sole

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expression of Christian sabbath causes us to miss out on much more. "

◆Worship should be a spark that lights a fire so you can see God better on the day of rest. The Jewish tradition emphasized that Sabbath was for 1)worship, 2)delight and 3)rest. It is God's gift to us! We need to use it in ways that brighten us. Don't tell anyone I told you this but, orthodox Jews encouraged married couples to make love on Friday nights (their sabbath). They prayed only prayers of thankfulness on the sabbath because intercessory prayers were viewed as too much work. I'm not saying that we all need to follow these rules. I'm merely showing you that God's people had good sense of how his day of rest was supposed to be special, and restorative. It is a sin to be bored and unhappy on the sabbath!

◆**C.** Look for delight and then live in thankfulness to God. There is an old jewish sabbath prayer that goes like this: "Days pass. Years vanish. And we walk sightless among miracles." God's day of rest is so that we don't walk sightless among miracles. So what shall we do, you ask. Well, "The only thing you must do is not do the things you must." (Batterson) Embrace whatever gives life and whatever does good (the obvious answer to 3:4). Use candles, have festive meals, get out the good dishes, pray prayers, go on walks, play special games. If out on the water is where you feel most at peace, get out on the water on your sabbath! If the hot tub makes you relax, grab the bubble bath

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and go! Does laying on warm sand make you smile? The beach is a great place to thank God on your rest day. Just don't "walk sightless among miracles."

◆**Conclusion:** Does it promise rest? Does it bring delight? Does it make you notice God? Now remember, if any of the things that you set up as a practice ever becomes another thing you have to get done, or a burden to carry, God's gift of sabbath keeping has been violated and you'll need to change it to something else. For then your efforts to honor God and enjoy him have become legalism that destroys you. Sabbath rest is FOR people but TO God!

◆Don't ignore God's gift in your busyness, but neither miss him by making your sabbath into a burden with legalism. Jesus came to set you and me free from the laws we could not keep. But he did so by keeping them perfectly, and taking our punishment anyway! All of which tells us that everything God instructs is to our benefit and to his glory.