

MARK 2:23-28

OBSERVE A TRUE SABBATH

²³ One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. ²⁴ The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" ²⁵ He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? ²⁶ 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." ²⁷ Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

It would be interesting to perform a search on the Gospels in order to determine how many times a disagreement between the religious authorities and Jesus broke out on the Sabbath. In some sense it is reasonable that problems would arise on the Sabbath since everyone was focused on God (or at least on proper ritualistic observance) on that day, the adherence to regulations was quite visible and non-adherence even more obvious, and it would be a time of heightened scrutiny of the people, especially would-be messiahs, by the religious authorities. In addition, proper adherence to the Sabbath regulations was the outward proclamation of one's obedience to God and membership in Israel. So, it is easy to see how the observance became a strait jacket and the source of endless regulations to ensure guiltless adherence.

Jesus' argument regarding the Sabbath attacks their misunderstanding on two fronts. First, that the Sabbath was instituted so that man would remember God, stay connected with God and look forward to being with God. The regulations were to help clear the calendar and allow time for God. But the endless laws that grew up around the Sabbath caused the focus to be taken off God and placed on getting the ritualistic observance correct. Man became a slave to the Sabbath observance. Second, as the Messiah, the Lord, Jesus has authority over all things in creation, of which the Sabbath is one. God knows why he instituted the Sabbath, and therefore, knows how he wants it to be observed.

How can the Sabbath be a liberating experience for you, rather than an onerous burden? In addition to Sunday School and worship, how can you better observe the Sabbath as an opportunity to grow in your relationship with God?

Father, you instituted the Sabbath so that I might be reminded of your place in my life and grow in my relationship with you. Help me to use the Sabbath for your purposes. Direct my steps according to your will. Amen.