

**Brave Enough to Follow**  
**Part 5**  
**Sabbath Rules or Sabbath Rests**  
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**October 8, 2017**

Good Morning, Church!

Happy Thanksgiving! That just does not sound very happy. Happy Thanksgiving! We have so much to be thankful for. And even just watching that video as we gear up for DNA 2017 I love how that video concludes the very man who kicked Gurek out of his tribe for following Jesus, himself has come to faith. And it will be exciting to hear what God is doing all over our world during conference time.

If you have your Bibles you can turn to Mark 3:1. As you know since Labor Day we have been going through a series called “Brave Enough to Follow”, how Jesus took a group of common everyday fishermen, called them into ministry and is training them to be fishers of men.

And Jesus has been ministering in and around Galilee, around Capernaum. He has been doing two things with His disciples – I have said this every week for five weeks now. This is the last time you are going to have to hear this from me because I am sure you are getting the message by now.

But Jesus is doing two things with His disciples: He is revealing His power and His priorities. He is revealing His authority and His activities.

We need to have a proper understanding of who He is, and our lives should be aligned with His priorities.

And He has been preaching with authority in and around Galilee. He has displayed authority over the demonic. He has displayed authority over sickness and death. He has displayed authority to forgive sins and has claimed to be “God among us”.

Yet, at the same time, while He is doing all these extraordinary miracles, a growing resistance is forming because this One who claims to be “God among us” has gone into the home of a tax collector and has shared a meal with sinners, drawing sharp opposition to His message – we looked at that last week.

But the biggest controversy that Jesus and His disciples are starting to face is His lack of regard – or so it would appear to some – for the Sabbath laws.

Just to place Mark Chapter 3 in context, last week we looked at how Jesus called Matthew, a tax collector, to follow Him, called him into full-time ministry.

Jesus and His disciples then leave the region of Galilee and go into Jerusalem. And we read in John Chapter 5 that on the Sabbath in Jerusalem in the temple, Jesus heals a man who was crippled.

And He tells the man to pick up his mat and walk. And this is on the Sabbath and it draws Him into an opposition with the religious leaders in the temple system and with some of the Pharisees.

And Jesus returns up to Galilee and He and His disciples on another occasion are walking through some grain fields and His disciples pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hand because they are hungry, and start to eat the heads of grain, again drawing Him into opposition all around the teachings of Sabbath.

And Jesus is about to bring this Sabbath controversy to its boiling point. After multiple Sabbath controversies leading up to Mark Chapter 3, this event takes place.

Let's read Mark 3:1:

“Another time he went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there.

“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.

“Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, ‘Stand up in front of everyone.’

“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.

“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.

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

What we are going to talk about in our time together this morning is the rules of the religious, the restoration of man and the rest of God.

Note that it says in Mark 3:2,

“Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus.”

Like I mentioned already, there has been multiple Sabbath controversies before Mark Chapter 3 takes place with His disciples. There has been a growing resistance to the ministry of Jesus because He is doing things on the Sabbath that you are not supposed to do.

In order for us to understand why they are so upset we need to put ourselves in New Testament Israel at the time of Jesus. We need to have a historical understanding of what is going on and why the Pharisees are so upset with Jesus for the actions He is conducting on the Sabbath day.

Israel was a covenant nation, and being so, they are to live by the law. And I have mentioned this before that if you were a Jewish child, a Jewish boy or girl, between the ages of 5 and 10 you would go to the local synagogue in your town and you would be taught the Scriptures.

You would start to memorize the first five books of the law. You would also become familiar with the prophets – anything from Genesis through Malachi you would have studied.

And in addition to your understanding of the law, you would also be taught what was formed later in the Third Century, which is now called the Talmud. It is the oral law. It is the interpretations of the rabbis that was formed over centuries.

The rabbis would teach you the Word of God, but in addition to it, they would also teach you the oral law, the interpretations of the Word of God.

Now the Talmud today in standard print consists of 63 treaties on different topics, and in standard print is 6200 pages long.

So not only did you memorize Genesis through Malachi, not only did you have a commanding knowledge of Scripture, you also needed to know 6200 rules and regulations that governed Jewish life, because the Talmud was the collection of the interpretations of how Israel was to live.

Now why was this so important for a New Testament Israelite? Because they are a covenant people and their covenant with God is formed around the law.

And the Sabbath was one of the focal points for the Talmud. It is the day that we are to rest from work. But rabbis over the centuries started to talk about and define what did it mean to work or not work on the Sabbath?

So just the Sabbath alone has 24 chapters dealing with and defining work for the Israelites. There were 39 prohibited activities on the Sabbath. They are going to be put on the screen there. There is going to be a test on this later, so that you understand how God's covenant people; you are to live.

Now these were the 39 topics or categories. Underneath each one of them are detailed rules and regulations for how you are to observe a day of rest from work. (Doesn't it feel restful already?)

Now I just want to apply a little bit of Talmud testing to our congregation today. Now this is going to be participatory so you need to raise your hand when I ask these questions. And so I want to see some hands raised high.

I want you to raise your hand if you drove here to church today – please raise your hand. You Sabbath breakers, you!

If you woke up this morning at some point this morning and turned on a light today, could you please raise your hand? This is the most godless congregation I have ever witnessed.

Okay, the last test. This is a Talmud test. If you went to the washroom up to this point today and you tore the toilet paper, please raise your hand. You people are so unclean!

The Talmud consisted of 39 activities, but underneath those 39 activities were thousands of rules that governed life.

Jesus isn't breaching God's law; He came to fulfill it. He is bumping up against the oral law, the teachings of men that were added to the Scriptures. He is bumping up against the Talmudic understandings, the rules and regulations that were created outside of Scripture.

And the Pharisees and the experts in the law were the guardians of the oral law. Sabbath had become a burdensome book of external rules to govern the flesh. Instead of enhancing life, it was suffocating life. And it was a religion that was cold and lifeless.

Now the average Jewish person that you know today doesn't live religiously by the 39 prohibition activities. They don't practice all this.

When I was in Israel last year many of the Jewish people that I observed were celebrating Sabbath in a beautiful way. Many women who bake the Hallah bread prepare it the day before. And they describe that when they are preparing the Hallah bread in preparation for Sabbath, they are praying blessing over their family members.

When the Sabbath begins it was remarkable to see in Jerusalem all the shops and all the industry start to close their shops as sundown approached. There was something beautiful about a rest that settled over the whole city.

Husbands oftentimes, as Sabbath begins, pronounce a blessing over their wives and their children. (Wives, wouldn't you love it if once a week your husband just spoke a blessing over you and your children?)

So there were many traditions that were observed that were a beautiful expression of Sabbath. But the Pharisees and the experts in the law had become the Talmudic police – they were the ones that were policing observants of the oral law.

And as meaningful and beautiful as some traditions originally were meant to be, when legalism gets a hold of them they actually become cold and lifeless. They become trapped by religious idolatry.

And our interpretations of God's law and our additions to His Word can actually get in the way of His plans.

Now this legalism that can set in isn't just a Pharisee problem; it is a human problem. Sadly we even as Christians have drifted sometimes over our church history into extra-biblical rules that are beyond the scope of Scripture in order to make things a little more legalistic.

Even the early church wrestled with this. We can slip into a religious rules-centered mindset and drift from a Christ-centered mindset.

Within the early church Paul writes to the Galatian church and they are slipping back into a form of Judaism – Christ plus observing the law – and Paul writes to them in Galatians 3:3:

“Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?”

This is a universal struggle for all of humanity. We oftentimes form our own version of the Christian Talmud. This is something that we can even slip into.

When you look over church history there are all kinds of expressions that existed throughout church history that were beyond the scope of the Scriptures, practices that crowded into the church of Christ that had nothing to do with the Scriptures.

The Reformation that took place 500 years ago was somewhat birthed from some of the corrupt practices that had grown into the church – teachings on indulgences and things that were beyond the scope of the authority of Scripture.

So this Talmudic tendency can creep into our lives as well if we are not careful. And it isn't just in the realm of religion that this pattern emerges.

In all of our human institutions rules are introduced to try and monitor human behaviors. My two sons have joined a new hockey league. Hockey is the greatest sport of all time, after all (just thought I would put that plug in there).

My sons have joined this new hockey league and they sent out videos for parents to watch in preparation for being in this league. Now that was new to me. I didn't know that the parents had to watch instructional videos about how parents are to conduct themselves during their child's game.

But you click on this link and it shows you a video of how parents should behave during their son's hockey game and it shows parents yelling at children on the ice, yelling obscenities at the ref or the goalie, chewing out their children on the ride home telling them that they didn't play hard enough or good enough.

It has gotten to the point where there is a hockey Talmud for parents where it is trying to regulate their behavior. And I thought to myself, if you didn't believe that mankind is fallen, all you have to do is go to an 8-year old's hockey game because literally they are building instructional videos with tests at the end because they are trying to regulate the behavior of parents.

And I thought, really, do we really need this? And then you go to your child's hockey game and you see grown adults yelling at 8-year olds on the ice. A game that is meant to be fun and playful can be ruined because of the mindset of the parents. Fights break out at games here in Canada.

And so in all realms of life, in all human institutions, rules are introduced to try and monitor human behaviors. And the Pharisees were the enforcers of the religious rules, rules that were not even a part of Scripture.

And the Sabbath, as a result, had become a fearful state, not a restful state. The religious rules with God's name attached to them had created an environment where people were afraid to speak.

And Jesus brings this reality front and center in this account. He actually wants a direct showdown with their legalistic rules, because look at what He does in Verse 3.

“Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, ‘Stand up in front of everyone.’”

“Then Jesus asked them, ‘Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?’”

Jesus has just drawn this whole topic of Sabbath with the backdrop of the 39 prohibited activities; He has drawn this front and center. There has been a buildup to this moment and Jesus asks a very simple question in this synagogue.

This should have been a slam dunk question. This is softball – actually this isn't even softball; this is T-ball. Jesus has placed this ball for them to hit it out of the park. He has asked a very simple question.

I could go into our Sunday school; I could gather 10 children and ask them this question and everybody would pretty much know the right answer.

What is better to do on God's day of rest? Good or evil, save life or kill?

This is an easy, easy, easy question. But everyone remains silent.

Now imagine that man standing there in front of everybody with his shriveled hand – there is no life in his hand – mindful of all these Sabbath regulations that existed, this suffocating environment - and everybody is remaining silent. Why are they so silent? Because of the oppression of the legalistic Pharisee system. Because the oppressive traditions that, at the appearance of righteousness, but had nothing to do with God.

That system had become so burdensome that it suffocated all joy out of God's day of rest. And it was all done in His name.

What God had designed as a day of rest and renewal had become a day of death. And like a host of the other ways that religion had hijacked God's plans, the Sabbath was hijacked by these 39 prohibitions.

Ian Thomas makes the following statement when he says,

*“Make sure it is God’s trumpet you are blowing - if it is only yours, it won’t wake the dead, it will simply disturb the neighbors.”*

And the Pharisees are blowing a trumpet with God's name attached to it but it is not His trumpet and it doesn't wake the dead, it doesn't bring life; it simply disturbs the people.

Because look at God's response to their Talmudic trumpeting. Jesus asked a simple question and everyone remained silent, and look, Jesus is God among us, in Verse 5, look at what God among us does.

“He looked around at them in anger and deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts.”

Jesus is angry. Jesus is deeply distressed. Why? Because of their stubborn hearts.

Our religious rules, our Talmudic tendencies can actually be stubborn. It is a mystery, but in their desire to be obedient, the rabbis who had formed the 39 prohibitions; in their desire to be obedient, they are actually stubbornly refusing God. These Pharisees who are the enforcers of the rule, who think that they are doing it in God's name, are actually in direct opposition with God Himself when He stands among them.

Their worship had become burdensome and damaging to people and it results in God being angry and deeply distressed at their stubborn religion. It is a self-righteousness that gets in the way of God. It is a righteousness that is rooted in its ego. It is an idolatry of self.

And there are so many world religions that have this in their DNA – a self-imposed set of rules or rhythms of life or ways of life that seem so righteous but they lack any real value in restoring the life of God back to us.

And when we are holding onto those so tightly, Jesus Himself could be standing there making Himself known to us and we are stubbornly holding on to what has us in bondage.

And we are told in Scripture that the law is good, but its main purpose – not its only purpose, but its main purpose - was to expose sin within. We are told that in Romans Chapter 3. The law could only reveal how you fell short. It could do nothing to make you clean or change your condition. It was meant to point out the need for a Savior.

Now in Mark Chapter 2 when Jesus had picked the heads of grain in the field with His disciples – well when the disciples had picked the heads of grain and rubbed them – and He was questioned about that, Jesus, just prior to entering this synagogue, had stated that He is Lord of the Sabbath.

Now to us, we read that text and we think, that's great, He is Lord of the Sabbath, He is Lord of a lot of things. But that is an absolute monotheistic statement. After creating all of the earth and the heavens and all their glory and all their wonder on the seventh day, God rested from His work.

By Jesus claiming that He is Lord of the Sabbath, He is saying, "I am Sovereign over the Sabbath."

Only God could make a statement like that. So that caught the attention of the Pharisees. He is claiming sovereignty over a day that only God could. And the Lord of the Sabbath has come to set the captives free. Jesus came to restore those trapped under the law.

Jesus has this man stand center stage and He restores him completely. Jesus brings life to a part of his body that was lifeless and dead. Jesus restored what was broken. Jesus restored what was lifeless.

The law was powerless to restore life. It could only point out death. But what the law was powerless to do, Jesus, because He is Creator God, did Himself.

Let me just ask you this morning, maybe you are here and there is a part of your life that you need restored. Maybe there is a part of your life that has become cold and lifeless and unable to have any experience of fruitfulness and life within it. Is there a part of your life that you are asking Jesus to restore today?

When we focus on the law and the rules, we feel burdened and suffocated; but when we focus on Christ we feel joy and happiness. When we focus on Christ He restores what is dead and lifeless. He is the One who brings life and healing to the broken areas of our lives. He is the healer, He is the restorer.

When we are focused on Christ, instead of being focused on the religious rules, we are dependent upon Him for our daily living.

When we are living in relational dependence upon Christ, holiness is made manifest in our lives.

Galatians teaches "Live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature."

So as I focus on Christ, as I have my eyes fixed on Him, as my mind and my heart are set on things above, holiness is made evident in my life.

Paul goes on in the book of Galatians to say the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Notice what Paul writes. He doesn't say, "The fruit of the believer is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control"; he says it's the fruit of the Spirit.



The fruit of Brett McBride is not love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness – ask my wife. It might have the appearance of fruitfulness but I guarantee you there are bruises on it, there are worms with it.

And no matter how hard I try, no matter how much Talmud I apply to my life, no matter how many externals, rules and regulations that I try to apply in my life, when I focus on the rules and when I am just consumed with all the external regulations, it doesn't produce life. It is just shriveled and dead.

But when I focus on Christ, when I am fixed on the things of the Holy Spirit, because the Spirit is holy, holiness starts to manifest in my life. We need to be consumed with who Christ is, His power at work in our lives, because it is the fruit of the Spirit that is made manifest in our lives when we do so.

Ian Thomas, again, puts it this way:

*“Godliness is not the consequence of your capacity to imitate God, but the consequence of His capacity to reproduce Himself in you. It is not self-righteousness but Christ-righteousness, the righteousness that is by faith - a faith that by renewed dependence upon God releases His divine action to restore the marred image of the invisible God.”*

So what I am trying to say is this: when we have Christ as our focus, when our eyes are fixed on Him, what is cold and lifeless, life is brought back to it. Holiness and righteousness is made manifest in our lives by us focusing on Him, not on external rules and regulations.

As Paul says, “Live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”

John Piper writes it this way:

*“God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.”*

Isn't that a beautiful statement?

God is most glorified in us, He is most evident in our lives when we are fully satisfied in who He is.

And Jesus is revealing to the Pharisees, to the people of His day, this reality that He is the only One who can restore life to what is lifeless. No amount of rules and regulations can bring about life; it can only create more death.

And I believe all the Sabbath controversies are meant to be a signpost to point people to Jesus. Jesus is doing this on the Sabbath to reveal what the Sabbath was always meant to be.

Let me do a short biblical overview in the few moments that we have left. I am going to go from Genesis to Hebrews in about 5, 6 minutes to display what Sabbath rest was meant to be.

In the Genesis account in Chapters 1 and 2 we read about Sabbath in creation. In Genesis 1 we are given the account where God creates the sun, the moon, land, plants, animal life. And we are told on the sixth day He makes man. God brings forth man on the sixth day.

And then we are told on the seventh day God rested. He ceased from His work - He sabbathed. He didn't rest because He was tired; He rested because He was finished.

So it is crucial to note that mankind's first day in the created order, the first full day that we have in creation, because we were created on the sixth day; the first full day we have in creation we are resting with God in His finished work.

The next real movement forward about Sabbath, pertaining to Sabbath, is in the book of Exodus. And in Exodus we read about Sabbath in God's liberation.

So there is Sabbath in God's creation; now in Exodus we see Sabbath in God's liberation.

God's covenant people are in bondage to Pharaoh. God sends Moses as the deliverer and they are brought out of their bondage in Egypt and provided with bread from heaven. And in Exodus 16 they are commanded to rest in God's provision of bread from heaven.

In Exodus 20 as part of the 10 Commands, they are given the Sabbath law. And it was a day that they were to do no work, a day that they would reflect and remember the first command: "I am the Lord who brought you out of Egypt."

The Israelites did nothing to contribute to their salvation from Pharaoh; it was a work of God. They simply rested in His provision of salvation.

The whole purpose of Sabbath as outlined in Exodus was that we rest in God's finished work of salvation, we rest in His provision of bread from heaven, we rest in His deliverance that He brought about by His sovereign work.

He has delivered us from bondage, He has brought us out of slavery, He has provided the bread from heaven and we live by His provision of bread from heaven.

The Sabbath was good, life-giving and meant to save life and give life.

When we look at both the creation and liberation accounts of Genesis and Exodus, a pattern emerges: the Sabbath is our being invited to God's finished work.

And Jesus is using this instance to point to the true purpose of Sabbath. Sabbath was designed for man to rest in His finished work. The Sabbath was made for man.

Just as man's first day on earth was to rest in God's finished work of creation, the Sabbath rest of God is about us resting in Christ's finished work of salvation.

Let me put it this way. The law brought the rules of God; Christ brought the rest of God. The law brought condemnation; Christ brought salvation.

Paul in Colossians 2:13 says this about our relationship to the law:

“He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.”

The Sabbath rest of God is us being welcomed into resting in His finished work.

Jesus said, “Come to Me all you who are weary and heavy laden. Come to Me all you who are trying to live by the 39 prohibited activities. Come to Me all you who are tired of this legalistic righteousness. Come to Me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.”

In Hebrews Chapter 4 the reality of this rest that we are invited into is unpacked a little further. Let me just read a few verses from Hebrews Chapter 4. The author of Hebrews is writing to believers who are slipping back into a form of works based righteousness, who are trying to be justified before God by the law.

And Hebrews 4:1 says this:

“Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.”

Verse 3 of Hebrews 4 says this:

“Now we who have believed enter that rest.”

When we put our faith in Christ, we enter into His finished work on our behalf.

In Verse 10 we read this:

“Anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their work, just as God did from his.”

And finally in Verse 11 of Hebrews 4, it says this:

“Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.”

The author of Hebrews is writing to this group of Christians who are slipping back into a legalistic, rules based relationship and standing with God, and he is saying, “You are falling away from the rest of God.

What Jesus is revealing through these Sabbath controversies is that as we surrender our lives to Him and enter into a relationship, we are invited to rest in His finished work for our salvation.

That doesn't mean His work is finished in our sanctification because He comes into our lives and begins to change us from the inside out.

But the Lord of the Sabbath is offering people rest – rest from legalistic righteousness, rest from self-salvation, rest from trying to please God by our own merits, rest from a law that condemns us.

And that is the single greatest thanksgiving reality you could ever celebrate this Thanksgiving.

In 2 Corinthians 5:17 we are told that

“If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

When we place our faith in who Jesus is and what He has done on our behalf, we rest in the new creation, we rest in His finished work. It is not our legalistic righteousness that earns us favor with God; it is resting in His finished work.

Isn't that good news?

My question for you this morning is, are you enjoying Sabbath rest? Or are you trying to live by Sabbath rules?

Are you enjoying the fullness of resting in Christ's finished work and allowing His holiness to be made manifest in your life? Or are you focusing on all the rules and regulations and trying to achieve them, but you know it is rooted in your flesh? Because we can slip back and drift away just as the Hebrews did.

And Jesus, who is displaying His power to restore, Jesus who is doing this on the Sabbath, Jesus who is directly confronting their Talmudic righteousness, their Talmudic tendencies, the Author of life, the One who is offering us rest, in response to this rest that can only be found in Jesus Christ, what did the Pharisees do?

Well we read in Verse 6, Jesus makes the man well and then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

Do you see what our self-centered righteousness does when faced with God's rest? Jesus, who asked a simple question – is it better to do good or evil, save life or destroy it – demonstrates that it is better to save life, better to do good, and it results in the religious wanting to kill Him, the Author of life.

The danger of bad theology is that Christ Himself could be speaking to you and you are holding on to a righteousness that is rooted in self and denying the very rest that He offers you.

Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for the rest that You offer us. Lord, we have so much to be thankful for, and we can rest from our own efforts. We thank You that it is a finished work that we enter into when we place our faith in You.

Lord, if there is anyone here this morning that is experiencing a cold and lifeless religious experience, that they would exchange it for Your rest that You offer that restores life to the parts of our lives that are dead and broken.