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Mark 2:23-3:6
Jesus 101: An Introduction to the Depth of Jesus
Clash of the Titans

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This morning we are continuing our series titled, “Jesus 101: An Introduction to the Depth of Jesus.” In this series we are looking at some of the significant events, themes, people, and teachings from Jesus’ life, and what it all means for us. Through these facets of His life, we will see the depth of Jesus and his ministry...the depth of being in relationship with Him...including for us today. And as I said a few weeks ago: there’s no way to just play around in the shallow end of the pool when it comes to knowing and understanding Jesus. There’s nothing shallow about Him. Everything he did and said has deep meaning and significance. To be introduced to Jesus is to be introduced to His depth.

Have you ever come across a rule or a law that just didn’t make sense...maybe you even would classify it as a stupid rule or law? There are probably any number of these that we might be aware of, I suppose, and we might wonder about them – why they law is there, what led to its creation, does the law still matter and apply, and so forth. I came across a couple articles in Readers Digest that share a number of laws in different parts of the country that at a minimum seem silly or unnecessary...and perhaps just downright stupid. In Vermont, a wife must obtain permission from her husband before wearing false teeth. In California, it is illegal to build, maintain, or use, a nuclear weapon. In Massachusetts it is illegal to dance to the Star Spangled Banner. Honestly, I don’t know what a dance to our national anthem would even look like – though I’m sure that Shakira and Jennifer Lopez could come up with something that would definitely be illegal.

The odd law they highlighted for Washington? They picked one that isn’t state-wide: In 1991, Whatcom Country declared its roughly one million acres of land an official Sasquatch Protection and Refuge Area, giving our nation its first Bigfoot Sanctuary. If Bigfoot exists, lawmakers reasoned, it would be an endangered species, and therefore in need of protection. Welcome to Washington.

Last but not least – and Readers Digest had a note that these two laws were in the process of being repealed at the time the article was written – but in South Carolina it is illegal to work on Sundays. That’s the good news. The bad news is it’s also illegal to dance. So if you go to church on a Sunday, you’re guaranteed to have a frozen chosen worship experience and apparently no church staff helping to lead worship. It’s the easiest state in the nation to be a pastor in!

But a few of these laws raise some questions. For instance: Does the false teeth law mean dentures, or fake tooth implants? What if they’re medically necessary? Or what constitutes dancing – is it illegal to sway back and forth while singing the National Anthem in Massachusetts? What constitutes work in South Carolina?

And these are the kinds of questions that the Pharisees sought to answer when it came to the Sabbath. (Saturday for them, usually Sunday for us.) In an effort to help people “rest” on the Sabbath, they sought to define what work is, so people would know what to avoid. The Sabbath itself is a God-ordained thing that comes straight out of the Old Testament. It’s a day of rest, for physical, spiritual, and relational rejuvenation. In Genesis 2, after the six days of Creation, we’re told that God “rested” from his work. The word “Sabbath” is not used, but there is a kind of modeling of what it means to rest.

The Biblical rule that tells us to take a Sabbath comes from the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, where “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” is the fourth commandment. And there really isn’t a whole lot of additional instruction given in regards to it.

That got religious leaders in the centuries before Jesus’ day wondering: How do we know if we’re actually taking a Sabbath? What constitutes rest? What constitutes work? So they defined what work was, so people would know what *not* to do, and could therefore rest. The intentions at boundary-setting were good. And over time, these rules were added onto and added onto...and by the time you get to Jesus’ day, there were literally thousands of rules about what you could not do on the Sabbath.

And so as Jesus' disciples walked through the field plucking heads of grain, shucking the bad part and eating the good part, they broke four of the rules that had been developed: reaping, threshing, and winnowing the grain, and then preparing a meal.

All four of these things were prohibited by these laws they had drawn up over the centuries. And Jesus defends his disciples' action, and makes some important points in doing so. In a bit of a sarcastic tone to the Pharisees, He refers to an event in the Old Testament where David fed himself and some companions the bread that was on the temple altar, which was unlawful for them to do. And what Jesus is saying is that the Sabbath law was set up to bless people, not the other way around. It was so people could have rest, and enjoy fellowship, and take time to worship and connect with God.

It's a recognition that the rest of the week is really full...and as much as we might commit to daily Scripture reading or prayer or dinner together with our families, and so forth: sometimes in the midst of the chaos of life, those things just don't happen. My family had dinner together last night – all six of us gathered around the same table – for the first time since the Saturday night a week before. Now, that's not typical. Hailey and I were in Texas at our denomination's annual conference...so we were gone the entire week. The reality is, it's too easy to let a few days of missing that kind of rest and rejuvenation and connection with God and people stretch into a week, and then a few weeks, and even longer.

So the Sabbath is a benefit to people. And **Jesus is reminding them of this point: That the Sabbath is for us, not us for the Sabbath.** We don't serve the Sabbath...it's there to serve us. But the Pharisees had really turned it around the other way. And if we're so busy worrying about whether or not we're breaking a rule, we will never actually rest. It would be like walking around on pins and needles. There's nothing restful about that. The giving of the Sabbath is an act of grace by God. It's a great example of a biblical law actually being an extension of God's grace. We have a hard time recognizing that in the Old Testament sometimes. But the Laws of the Old Testament really are an aspect of the grace of God – and the commandment to take a

Sabbath is a reminder of this.

For those of you who have jobs, or maybe used to be in the workforce: Can you imagine if your boss said to you today, “I know tomorrow is Monday, but don’t come to work, and don’t work from home. I’m commanding you not to work tomorrow.” You’d probably have suspicions of what’s going on! That’s an act of grace in the form of a commandment. So God tells us to take a rest, and it’s given as a commandment for a reason, because it’s easy to forget it in the midst of the rest of life. And so **Jesus is correcting their understanding of the Sabbath and reinstating its purpose – that it’s an extension of God’s grace that is a benefit to them, and to all people to stay grounded in their relationship with God.**

And it’s really similar with the healing of the guy in the second half of this passage, but here rather than an emphasis on God’s grace toward us, it’s God’s mercy. Jesus is communicating here that mercy is more important than made up rules about the Sabbath. Mercy pleases God. Mercy is a good thing that God desires us to show to other people in need. And this man is in need; he is suffering. He’s got this shriveled hand – most scholars believe it was probably paralyzed and the muscles had atrophied through a lack of use. Regardless, it’s not the way it’s meant to be.

And: **Just as there were added on rules about working on the Sabbath – including working in the kitchen – there were rules about what kind of medical care could be provided on the Sabbath.** Basically, unless you had a life-threatening injury, you couldn’t be helped by a doctor or anyone else, because that help was considered work. So it would have to wait until the next day.

So Jesus sees this guy, and he wants to be healed, but the religious leaders are there, just waiting for Jesus to heal him. You almost wonder if they’d brought the guy there intentionally, as a trap, to watch and see what Jesus would do. **Then Jesus asks them a couple questions: “Which is better, to do good or evil? To save life or kill?”** Obviously, they’re rhetorical questions. Jesus never asks a question because he actually needs to know the answer. He already knows. For instance, Jesus never asks directions. You could argue

that just makes him a typical guy...but more logically, Jesus always knows the answer to his questions. And most of the time, the people he's talking to know as well. Most of his questions are rhetorical, and the answer is obvious. That's the case here: Doing good and saving life are better than the other options given.

But to actually speak those answers puts them at odds with their tiny little theological box about the Sabbath. The tension here would be thick. This is a serious stand-off between Jesus and these religious leaders. There may not be a physical altercation but it's a total clash of the titans as they square off. And by the way, today's passage contains the 3rd and 4th such conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees here in chapter 2, and all four come about after Jesus healed a guy and told him not to tell people about it, but he did anyway. And one author I read this week suggested that these four altercations with the Pharisees may very well have come about because that guy went behind Jesus' back and did what Jesus told him not to do. If that's true, the fruit of it is the rising up of the Pharisees against Jesus, making ministry more difficult for him.

Regardless, here he is with them again. Jesus looks around at them in anger. He can't believe their hard-heartedness and their unwillingness to support the right thing being done. It's obvious that doing good and saving life is the right thing to do, but they won't say it. And so with the man standing there in front of them all Jesus asks him to stretch out his arm...and it's healed. Technically, Jesus didn't do anything...but the Pharisees know exactly who healed this guy: that Jesus did this.

And so: **They run off in their anger to plot with the Herodians how to kill Jesus.** This is how angry they are. They go to the Herodians, a particular segment of Israelites who who believed the best way to gain freedom from the Roman occupation was to get cozy with the Roman government. It's a complete opposite approach to the Pharisees. They are in two different camps, almost "enemies" of one another. It's amazing how the positive ministry of Jesus can bring out the worst in people and cause people to unite against Him and what He is doing. These two groups of people don't even like each other, but here they are united by the threat they perceive Jesus to

be to their power and position.

So we've already talked about the Sabbath and what it's for. And I hope you are finding a way to take a Sabbath rest each week that lets you rest, connect with God and with people. But I want to close with a couple of additional brief points that we see here. **The first is that following Jesus is not about human regulations and rules; rather, following Jesus is first about grace and mercy.** This is not to say that there are no rules or that truth isn't important. John 1:10 says that Jesus was full of grace and truth. Jesus affirms the truth of the Sabbath. Jesus affirms Biblical rules and regulations, usually called the Biblical Law, such as the Ten Commandments. In fact, he raises the bar on them. But when we start adding onto them, we become like the Pharisees. When we start adding onto things and creating hoops for people to jump through in regards to what it means to follow Jesus, then we are adding onto God's Word. We don't want to do that: His word is enough. So, first and foremost, Jesus is about grace and mercy. When we say this series is about the depth of Jesus, grace and mercy cannot be overstated as deep and significant facets of who he is and what it means to follow Him. We see it here and we see it here in this passage and throughout his ministry.

The second thing I want to highlight for us here is that: **Secondly: People matter to God, so people matter to us.** Jesus makes this clear here as well as in his famous teaching that after loving God with all you've got, the next most important thing is to love your neighbor as yourself. All people are created in God's image. Not just people who like you or think like you or vote like you or look like you. All people matter to God, and so they ought to matter to us as well. At our staff meetings lately, one of the topics we've been discussing is how Rose Hill can be more hospitable and accessible to the people around us who come from other countries. How can we help them encounter Jesus here at Rose Hill and know about His saving love? Jesus tells us (Matthew 28) to go to all the nations and make disciples...but here we are with the nations coming to us. Do you know that there are 102 different languages spoken within the boundaries of the Lake Washington School District? How can we be a part of what God is doing in our community to reach those people for Christ? This kind of thing ought to be of great concern to us, because God all people are created in God's image.

Heaven is not going to be filled only with people who are like you. It's going to be the greatest cultural melting pot ever. And if we really mean the Lord's prayer when we pray, "Thy kingdom come, they will be done, on earth as it is in heaven..." then we've got some work to loving people the way God does.

So in this clash between Jesus and the Pharisees, we see the Sabbath affirmed by Jesus. **How's your own Sabbath-keeping going?** Do you have a day of rest that focuses on spiritual and relational rejuvenation? I hope so. You don't need to be legalistic about what you do and don't do on that day, but make sure you've got a Sabbath day. It's an act of grace that God commands us to take a Sabbath day. And as we see with Jesus, it can be a day of ministry, a day of extending mercy to people, loving them, discipling them, and introducing them to the depth of Jesus' grace and mercy. There are no Sabbath laws against any of that, so let's live into it as God intends. Let's pray...Amen.