

# EPIC

*A journey through the Gospel of Mark*

## **WEEK 4** **STUDY GUIDE**



**CENTRAL**  
CHRISTIAN CHURCH



## MONDAY, MARCH 21, 2022

**Read:** Mark 2:23–3:6

**Scripture Verse:** *“One Sabbath day Jesus was walking with his disciples through the grainfields. The disciples began to break off some heads of grain.”* –Mark 2:23

### Today's Thought:

"You see, God, it's like this: We could attend Church more faithfully if your day came at some other time. You have chosen a day that comes at the end of a hard week, and we're all tired out. Not only that, but it's the day following Saturday night, and Saturday night is one time when we feel that we should go out and enjoy ourselves. Often it is after midnight when we reach home, and it is almost impossible to get up on Sunday morning. And you must realize that you have picked the very day on which the morning paper takes the longest to read—the day when the biggest meal of the week must be prepared. We'd like to go to Church and know that we should; but you have just chosen the wrong day."

—*Twentieth-Century Christian*

The Sabbath was a day of rest and worship every seventh day that was cherished by the Jewish people. It was a day modeled by God at creation and a gift given to the people of Israel after God led them out of Egypt. It became a sign of the covenant between God and his people. And although we find no record in scripture that God gave the Sabbath to any other nation, Christians today also follow this tradition, or do they?

Unfortunately, in today's culture, when it comes to keeping the Sabbath Day holy and setting aside time to worship God and rest, those who claim to be Christ-followers are the guiltiest of violating it. A recent Barna poll indicates that those who consider themselves regular church attenders only attend once a month. In baseball, that's only one hit every four-at-bats for a batting average of .250. Most players would not consider that a very good average and would probably admit they need to work on their hitting skills. My guess is that most would practice their hitting more often than once a month. If we want God's best for our families and lives, we must practice our Sabbath and church attendance more than once a month as well. It needs to become a family value.

As for church attendance, I think a couple of things have happened, especially over the past two years. People have gotten used to staying home and prioritizing other activities for the weekend. And because churches have made it easier to "attend" Church by hosting services online, people no longer make physical church attendance a priority. Folks can put everything else before God, because now they can "schedule" church whenever they have time if they have time at all. In Hebrews 10:24-25, the author writes, "*Let us consider how we can stir up one another to love. Let us help one another to do good works. **Let us not give up meeting together. Some are in the habit of doing this. Instead, let us cheer each other up with words of hope. Let us do it all the more as you see the day coming when Christ will return.***" If you and your family have fallen into this spiritual rut, I challenge you to take these words to heart and ask God to help you make Him your number one priority once again. Let's make meeting together with the family of God and worship of our Lord and Savior sacred again. Set Saturday or Sunday aside as your Sabbath to worship and rest. If it was important enough for God to do, it must be vital for us to do!

- What was your family's weekend like growing up?
- How did you celebrate the Sabbath?
- Why do you think God set the precedent for a day of rest?
- What are some reasons we should not give up meeting together as a church family?

**Further Reading:** Genesis 1:31-2:3

## TUESDAY, MARCH 22, 2022

**Read:** Mark 2:23-3:6

**Scripture Verse:** *“The Pharisees said to Jesus, “Look! It is against the Law to do this on the Sabbath. Why are your disciples doing it?”* - Mark 2:24

### Today's Thought:

On this particular Sabbath day, Jesus and his disciples were walking between the villages of Galilee. As they were walking, the disciples came across a grainfield, and because they had not eaten and were hungry, they broke off the heads of some of the plants and began to eat. Upon seeing this, some Pharisees criticized Jesus for allowing His disciples to work on the Sabbath. Interestingly, history tells us that the Pharisees rarely traveled far from the city, so what were these guys doing out in Galilee on a Sabbath, unless they followed Jesus. They must have been staying in a village Inn close by, or they too would have violated one of the 39 Sabbath rules for which they were accusing Jesus.

The Pharisees thought they had caught the disciples in a violation of Sabbath rules, yet this was a legal practice according to the Old Testament Law. A hungry person was allowed to eat from another's field as he passed by but could not carry anything away from the area with them. For example, you couldn't fill your backpack with grain to take on the road. It would seem to me that these religious elites just wanted to catch Jesus and his disciples breaking one of their core Sabbath regulations.

As we study the life of Jesus, we will see He had many conflicts with the religious establishment. The Religious elite had different priorities than Jesus when it came to the Law, and we are beginning to see it will be a constant battle. The problem we see here is the Sabbath had become a crushing burden and had become this irritating religious bondage to the nation of Israel. God was never angered by the human violation of a ceremonial ritual when it met a fundamental human need. People are more important to God than ritual.

The Pharisees address their question of Sabbath violation to Jesus because teachers were held responsible for the behavior of their disciples. And it was also custom for a teacher to defend the honor of his students. Upon hearing the criticism of the religious elites, Jesus answered by reminding them of the biblical precedent for hunger found in Deuteronomy 23:25, *“When you enter your neighbor's field, you can pick heads of grain. But don't cut down his standing grain.”* Then Jesus shared the

precedent set by David and his companions when they were hungry and in need when being hunted by King Saul. David entered the tabernacle and requested the consecrated bread for him and his men. Although Mosaic Law restricted this, David took the bread and ate it with his men because they needed food.

Jesus was using this action of David, which God did not condemn, to show the religious leaders that their narrow interpretation of the Law had blurred their view of God's intentions. The spirit of the Law is human need takes priority over religious ceremonial ritual and regulation. The Sabbath was a day of rest, a pleasure for God's people, but the Pharisees wanted to make it a game of "Wipe Out," filled with legal barriers and slippery pitfalls. As long as Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath, was with them; He would show them how this day was to be enjoyed. Jesus said, *"the Sabbath was made for man, not the man for the Sabbath."* The Sabbath has always been for our benefit and refreshment; it is not meant to be a time for adhering to burdensome regulations.

- Why do you think the Pharisees were following Jesus?
- What was the legal precedent for picking grain on the Sabbath?
- Why was it not a violation for David and his men to eat the shewbread from the priest?
- What happens when we focus on the Law and take our eyes off Christ?
- What did Jesus teach his disciples and the Pharisees about the Sabbath?
- Is the Sabbath a value in your life?

**Further Reading:** 1 Samuel 21:1–5

## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 23, 2022

**Read:** Mark 2:23–3:6

**Scripture Verse:** *“Another time Jesus went into the synagogue. A man with a weak and twisted hand was there. Some Pharisees were trying to find fault with Jesus. They watched him closely. They wanted to see if he would heal the man on the Sabbath day.”* – Mark 3:1–2

### Today's Thought:

We have seen that Jesus has come into the world to do something new. He has brought a new way of doing things—a new way of looking at the world and how it operates. Jesus, as he breaks onto the world scene, has shown he is more than willing to openly violate the Sabbath traditions and religious regulations of the Temple establishment. He has healed a man who sat by the Pool of Bethesda for 38 years and allowed his disciples to glean from a grain field to eat, both on the Sabbath. However, as I mentioned before, 39 acts were strictly forbidden on the Sabbath, but Jesus has come to establish a new way.

Because the Sabbath Day had become such a heavy burden, Jesus wanted to remove the heaviness of the load and show the people that the day was made for man and not man for the day. With an 0–2 count against him with the elites, Jesus continued his Sabbath Day Tour of Defiance by heading into the local synagogue to worship. Jesus' willingness to break with the "religious traditions," and thus declare war against the religious establishment took place right in the middle of the service. This time Jesus deliberately healed a man with a withered hand. Rather than wait until the next day, Jesus again chose to challenge their legalistic traditions.

There is evidence to make us believe that the disabled man was a plant by the religious elites. If Jesus would heal him at the synagogue, they could easily accuse him of being a Sabbath-breaker. So why would Jesus heal this man during public worship, knowing the Pharisees would be keeping a close eye on Him? I believe to teach a critical lesson, Jesus confronts the Pharisees with this question: "which is lawful on the Sabbath, to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" The religious leaders remained emotionless and offered no answer. The hard-heartedness of the Pharisees angered Jesus, so He restored the man's hand. It was after this that the plotting to kill Jesus started.

- What is the “new thing” Jesus has come into the world to do?
- Why is the Sabbath important for to you?
- What is the reason for Jesus’ Sabbath Day Tour of Defiance?
- Why do you think the Pharisees refused to answer Jesus’ question?
- What is one lesson you learn from this event?

**Further Reading:** Matthew 12:10-14

## THURSDAY, MARCH 24, 2022

**Read:** Mark 2:23–3:6

**Scripture Verse:** *“Then Jesus asked them, “What does the Law say we should do on the Sabbath day? Should we do good? Or should we do evil? Should we save life? Or should we kill?” But no one answered.”* – Mark 3:4

### Today’s Thought:

“In Sardinia, Italy, Mario Mamelli went to the city hall for a new identity card. He was told that he had been officially dead for 19 years and that, by remaining alive, he was breaking the law.”

—Time

Interestingly, today’s quote from *Time* may indicate that those in the Sardinia city hall could be related to the religious elites of Jesus’ day. It may sound absurd, and it is, but doesn’t it seem to you that the definition for “dead” is wrong. I guess stranger things could happen. Yet the battle between Jesus and the Pharisees has everything to do with the definition and intention of the Sabbath.

We know that a chief characteristic of the Sabbath was no one could do any work. If that’s the case, breaking the Sabbath is only determined by defining “work.” By leaving the definition up to these religious “politicians,” the people had to abide under 39 Sabbath Day restrictions. Jesus called them “traditions of men” designed to be restrictive beyond common sense. Therefore Jesus constantly challenged any of man’s traditions that hindered the commands of God.

When something becomes a value to us, we hold it in high esteem and faithfully participate in it. In our day, attending church on Saturday or Sunday is what sets us apart from those in our pagan world. The Sabbath was a Jewish value that set them apart from all other people. But not wanting to leave anything to the chance of violation, they established the 39 Sabbath restrictions. Instead of debating the issue with them, Jesus swept it to the side and placed the case under the rubric of His authority stating to them, “the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

Unfortunately, like the Pharisees, many today fail to understand the true meaning of the Sabbath. So, what is the real issue here? Was it that Jesus and his disciples hadn’t adopted the restrictions of oral tradition or that the Pharisees wanted to create a protective barrier around the Sabbath to protect the Jews from unknown violations? Regardless, from

Jesus' perspective, these restrictions took away from the real purpose of the day. God had not established the Sabbath for the "not to do's," but for man to abide in Him for rest. Are you faithfully practicing the Sabbath?

- What was the chief characteristic of the Sabbath?
- Why is the definition of 'work' so important to the discussion?
- What happened when the religious guys wrote the definition?
- Why do you think so many even today fail to understand the meaning of Sabbath?

**Further Reading:** Luke 6:6-11

## FRIDAY, MARCH 25, 2022

**Read:** Mark 2:23–3:6

**Scripture Verse:** *“Jesus looked around at them in anger. He was very upset because their hearts were stubborn. Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was as good as new. Then the Pharisees went out and began to make plans with the Herodians. They wanted to kill Jesus.”* – Mark 3:5–6

### Today’s Thought:

"The obvious symptoms of sudden anger are often red face, swollen neck veins, clenched fists, and stumbling for words. The angry person's vision may also be blurred because anger clouds the brain's visual centers. Dr. Walter Cannon, pioneer researcher in psychosomatic medicine at Harvard University, describes the symptoms more precisely: "Respiration deepens; the heart beats more rapidly; the arterial pressure rises; the blood is shifted from the stomach and intestines to the heart, central nervous system, and the muscles; the processes of the alimentary canal cease; sugar is freed from the reserves in the liver; the spleen contracts and discharges its contents of concentrated corpuscles, and adrenalin is secreted." —James C. Hefley

Have you ever got angry and experienced any of these symptoms? I must admit, I have. Although, as I grow older and only by God's help, have those fits of anger come far less frequently than when I was younger. I think it's safe to say that we've all dealt with feelings of anger at some point in our life. Understanding what happens to us physically when we become enraged with anger can help explain the irrational things we sometimes say and do in those moments. Anger is a very human characteristic inherited from the infamous sin gene. In God's Word, we are told anger will come, but in that anger, do not sin. And as I read today's passage from Mark, I couldn't help but notice that Jesus got angry.

Mark provides us an inside look regarding Jesus, and the emotional overtones felt in the synagogue that morning. Jesus has already had multiple run-ins with these religious guys concerning His Sabbath activities. Jesus, sensing what was in their hearts and knowing they watched His every move, asked the man with the crippled hand to stand before the entire congregation at the synagogue. He wanted the people to

see the man's shriveled hand. Upon hearing Jesus' command with no indication of hesitation, the man stood up before the crowd. As he did what Jesus asked him to do, his hand became instantly restored as he stretched it out before them.

Jesus healed this man on the Sabbath but showed no visible signs of doing any work. The healing took place by Jesus' word, not by any physical action. Yet the Pharisees were still upset. Mark writes that Jesus became enraged with anger by the stubborn heartlessness of these so-called religious leaders. Their sin angered Jesus. Jesus never became angry with tax collectors and sinners but expressed it toward these self-righteous Pharisees because they would rather protect some rule or tradition than see a person healed. Unfortunately, it still happens in our churches today.

Furthermore, the cause of Jesus' anger linked directly to their stubborn hearts was also used throughout the New Testament to depict the Jewish nation's blindness to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. Mark used this concept to help us understand and grasp why the disciples couldn't understand Jesus' miracle of feeding the crowds. Stubborn hearts also describe our hearts when it comes to overcoming sin. And there may be times when we feel momentary anger when those we love and share Christ with refuse Him. But we shouldn't pour out our distress on the person but over the impact of the choice on their eternity. The only answer for overcoming our sin problem is by the divine transformation provided by Jesus on the cross. Then pray for those with stubborn hearts.

- When have you experienced some of the physical symptoms of your anger?
- Why do you think Mark describes this moment of Jesus' anger? How does it help us?
- What was Jesus angry about?
- Why were the Pharisees watching Jesus so closely? What was their main concern?
- What other times does Mark mention people had stubborn hearts? What were the results?
- How do we overcome sin and stubborn hearts?

**Further Reading:** James 1:19-27

# NOTES







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