

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Mark 02: 23-28

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord! It's time to read the Bible again. Today, we will continue to read from Mark chapter 2, verses 23 to 28.

The Gospel of Mark records that Jesus, while carrying out His ministry on earth, was a faithful and hardworking servant, bringing the gospel to those in need. During His humble service, the scribes and Pharisees of the Jewish upper class began to notice Jesus, scrutinize Jesus, criticize Jesus, and condemn Jesus, ultimately deciding to put Jesus to death. Their reasoning was that Jesus violated the ceremonial law, especially breaking the Sabbath rules. Today's passage is about the Pharisees condemning Jesus' disciples for violating the Sabbath rules. Before we delve into the text, we need to first look at how these Sabbath rules came about.

Following the historical context, we will look at it in four parts: first, the origin of the Sabbath and God's original intention in setting this day; second, how it became the Sabbath law; third, the decline and restoration of the Sabbath; fourth, the development of Sabbath regulations during the intertestamental period.

First, let us look at the origin of the Sabbath, which is recorded in Genesis 2:1-3, "Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made." In this passage, the term "Sabbath" is not mentioned. It states that God created the universe in six days and rested on the seventh day, blessing and sanctifying it as a holy day.

In Genesis 1, we see that God created the heavens and the earth and all their contents in six days. Proverbs 8:22-31 clearly tells us that the second person of the Holy Trinity, the Son of God, was the craftsman at creation. He executed the

Father's creative plan, completing creation in six days and resting on the seventh day. For men, this day is set as a day of rest because God rested from all His work. Man, created at the end of the sixth day, was made in God's image and likeness. God's intention was for man to represent Him and manage His creation. Thus, the first day man experienced was the seventh day, a day of rest. God's intention for man was to rest first and then start working on the eighth day. The original meaning of the Sabbath was that God wanted man to rest. The word "Sabbath" had not yet appeared.

Next, we look at how the Sabbath law came about. The word "Sabbath" first appears in Exodus 16 when Moses led two million Israelites out of Egypt into the wilderness, where they had no food. God provided manna from heaven to feed them for 40 years in the wilderness. When manna first descended, God established the rule for gathering it. Exodus 16:26 states, "Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none." On the sixth day, they were to gather double portions and prepare food for the Sabbath, as they could not go out to gather on the seventh day and had to eat what was prepared on the sixth day. The word "Sabbath" formally appears in the context of God's gracious provision of manna to the Israelites, indicating that on the Sabbath, they did not need to gather food as God provided double portions the day before, allowing them to rest completely on this day.

In Exodus 20:8-11, Moses clearly recorded God's Ten Commandments and taught the Israelites, with the Sabbath being the fourth commandment: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it, you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates." Here it is clearly stipulated that no work is to be done on the Sabbath. But what exactly is work? God did not clearly define it. When Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land, it is noteworthy that after entering the land, there are very few mentions of the Sabbath. In the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 Samuel, and 2 Samuel, and all the way to 1 Kings, the word "Sabbath" does not appear at all. It appears six times in 2 Kings,

but these mentions are not significant. If you add up all the passages from Joshua to 2 Kings, there are a total of 151 chapters, and the Sabbath is mentioned only six times in 2 Kings. This indicates that after the Israelites entered the Promised Land, they generally did not follow God's commands and thus there are not many records of keeping the Sabbath.

Following the destruction of Israel, the northern kingdom of Israel was conquered by the Assyrian Empire, and the southern kingdom of Israel by the Babylonian Empire. After the Babylonian Empire came the Persian Empire, during which God raised up Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, who returned to the Holy Land, rebuilt the temple, and reconstructed the city of Jerusalem. After Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, he asked the scribe Ezra to restore the law among the Israelites. Remarkably, concerning the Sabbath, in the book of Nehemiah, which has only 13 chapters, the Sabbath is mentioned 14 times. Nehemiah formally instructed the Israelites to keep the Sabbath and not to work on the Sabbath. Therefore, we can say that the Sabbath was not emphasized during the period of the judges and the kings. It was not until after the exile, under the teaching of Nehemiah and Ezra, that the Sabbath was once again respected.

After the last Old Testament prophet, Malachi, there was a period of silence from God lasting 400 years. This period is known as the intertestamental period, the time between the Old and New Testaments. During this time, the Pharisees arose and promoted the observance of the Mosaic Law, especially the Sabbath. To prevent people from breaking the Sabbath, they detailed what constituted work very specifically. They identified 39 categories of activities that were prohibited on the Sabbath. Interested individuals can google "Melakhot" to find these 39 categories of forbidden Sabbath work. Upon closer inspection, these categories cover almost every aspect of daily life, with very detailed regulations.

On the Sabbath, almost nothing can be done. A prominent example is seen today in Israel, where, in hotels, there is usually a Sabbath elevator that stops at every floor and opens the door automatically. According to Melakhot, pressing a button is considered work, so on the Sabbath, one cannot press elevator buttons. Hence, the Sabbath elevator is pre-set to stop and open on each floor. It was in this context

that, by the time of Jesus, the Pharisees prided themselves as the guardians of the Mosaic Law, especially the Sabbath. They defined what constituted work and strictly enforced these regulations against doing work on the Sabbath.

Verses 23-24: "Now it happened that He went through the grainfields on the Sabbath; and as they went, His disciples began to pluck the heads of grain. And the Pharisees said to Him, 'Look, why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?'"

We need to understand that at this time, Jesus had already gained some fame. Although Jesus repeatedly asked people not to spread His name, wherever He went, there were people following, hoping to be healed and to hear His teachings. Therefore, wherever Jesus went was also a place where the Pharisees paid special attention. One day, it happened to be the Sabbath, and the Lord and His disciples were passing through the grainfields. The Pharisees had also set rules for the distance one could walk on the Sabbath. They based this on Joshua 3:4, where it is recorded that the people had to keep a distance of 2,000 cubits from the Ark of the Covenant. They then determined that the distance one could walk on the Sabbath was 2,000 cubits. We know that one cubit is one and a half feet, so 2,000 cubits is 3,000 feet, which is about less than one kilometer. Walking within this distance was not considered work, but exceeding this distance was considered work. Jesus and His disciples were passing through the grainfields, and their destination must have been a town or someone's home, thus this distance should have exceeded one kilometer. As they passed through the grainfields, the disciples were hungry and began to pluck heads of grain to eat.

In Israel, it was permitted by God to pluck heads of grain from someone else's field if you were hungry. In Deuteronomy 23:25, it says, "When you come into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor's standing grain." So, we see that God's law for Israel was very humane. If you were in a grainfield and hungry, you could pluck some heads of grain with your hand to eat, but you could not use a sickle to cut the

grain, as that would be reaping a large amount and would be considered stealing. Therefore, the issue here was not about plucking heads of grain to eat, but that it happened to be the Sabbath, and this action of "plucking" was defined as work. Here, we see that the disciples, following Jesus, were quite free; they were hungry and naturally plucked heads of grain to eat. Jesus did not stop them, but this action was seen as a significant issue in the eyes of the Pharisees.

They immediately approached Jesus and condemned His disciples. They said to Jesus, "Look, why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" They wanted an explanation from Jesus, saying, "You are their teacher, why do you permit them to do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" Of course, Jesus could answer that God established the Sabbath for people to find rest, and if a person is hungry, they cannot rest. Plucking heads of grain to eat is a natural human reaction and is permitted by the law. To strictly define this as work, preventing people from plucking heads of grain in the field and making them go hungry, thereby not finding rest, is to violate the original intention of God for the Sabbath. This answer is absolutely correct, but Jesus also knew that the Pharisees would not accept this answer; instead, they would question how He knew this was God's original intention. Therefore, Jesus chose to answer in another way and indirectly revealed who He was.

Verses 25-26: "But He said to them, 'Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry, he and those with him: how he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the showbread, which is not lawful to eat except for the priests, and also gave some to those who were with him?'"

Jesus here references the example from 1 Samuel 21:1-6. At that time, David had already been anointed by Samuel as king of Israel, but the current king, Saul, began to pursue David to kill him. David, being a man after God's own heart, chose to wait for God's timing rather than using his own methods or abilities to replace Saul. Therefore, David was fleeing from place to place, and during this time, he and his

men came to the city of Nob. They were hungry and had nothing to eat, so they went to the priest in Nob to ask for food. The priest had no other food but the showbread that had been taken from before the Lord. He gave this bread to David and his men. This bread was originally only for the priests to eat, but now David and those with him ate it.

Jesus uses this Scripture to directly answer the Pharisees. He asks them, "Have you never read?" The Pharisees' condemnation of Jesus' disciples was based on the interpretations and definitions of work derived by the rabbis, which often did not align with God's original intent. However, Jesus uses the Bible, specifically the account of David, who ate the bread that was only lawful for priests to eat. Since David and those with him could eat the showbread, and Jesus Himself is a descendant of David, the true David, and the real King, why then could they not pluck heads of grain to eat? By citing the example of David, Jesus is actually referring to a shift in times. With David becoming king, the era of Israel shifted from the time of the priests to the time of the kings. As a king, David could eat the showbread that was meant only for priests. Similarly, Jesus' coming marks a significant shift in times, from the era of the Old Testament law to the era of New Testament grace. This grace is based on the covenant of promise that God made with Abraham.

Paul clearly explains in Galatians 3:17 that "the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ," which is the covenant of promise that God made with Abraham, "that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul." This law refers to the Ten Commandments given by God through Moses. Grace is God's original intent, greater than the law, and preceding the law. Some might ask why the law was necessary then. This is explained in Galatians 3:23-25, "But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore, the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor." Grace is God's original intent, and the law was added later. Therefore, Jesus uses this example to lead people to understand God's original intention for the Sabbath.

Verse 27: "And He said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.'"

God's original intention was that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. God created man first, then established the Sabbath, so the Sabbath was meant for the benefit of man, allowing him to find rest on that day. Man should not become a slave to the Sabbath. Especially during the intertestamental period, many definitions of work were added, making Sabbath observance a great and difficult burden. People could not find rest, as they were constantly at risk of violating the rules set by the rabbis, which completely went against God's original purpose for the Sabbath.

Verse 28: "Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath."

Here, Jesus brings out a conclusion: the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. The Son of Man is the name Jesus used for Himself on earth. Since He is the Lord of the Sabbath, He has the authority to decide how it is to be observed. There is no longer a need to adhere to the various rules of Sabbath observance because Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was a shadow, a prefiguration of Jesus. Now that Jesus has come, the shadow no longer needs to exist.

Not only on the Sabbath day, but Christ gives us true rest. In Hebrews 4:9-10, we see that Jesus has done further work for us: "There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His." This tells us that the Sabbath is no longer just a day; rest has become a domain, a special Sabbath rest reserved for the people of God. It is not tied to a specific day but a specific realm. Whenever you enter into Christ, you find rest. Because Jesus Christ is not only the Lord of the Sabbath, He Himself is our rest. Whenever you come to Jesus Christ, you find rest. So in Matthew 11:28, Jesus declares, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." God's people no longer need to wait for a special day. Whenever you feel weary and burdened, you only need to come to Jesus Christ, and you will find rest, which is true rest.

Let's pray together: Lord, thank You! Through Your coming, You brought about a change of eras, from the Old Testament era of law to the New Testament era of grace. You are the Lord of the Sabbath. You allow us to find true rest, helping us to be freed from the various ceremonial laws, so we can simply enjoy the rest and freedom in Christ Jesus. Help us lay down our burdens and come to the fountain of grace according to Your promise, to enjoy the rest You have prepared for us. In my daily life, help me come before You often, to draw grace and enjoy rest. Through this rest, may we renew our strength, mount up with wings like eagles, and may my daily living be filled with freedom, peace, and joy, beyond earthly constraints. I pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.