

# Made for Us

June 2, 2024

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Mark 2:23-3:6

We're not far into the Gospel of Mark, and Jesus has run into trouble. Things went so well in chapter one. Jesus' success in healing people actually began to overwhelm him, so that he stayed out in the country where there was more room.

In chapter two, Mark began to describe the theological debates. It's one thing to heal the body, said some critics, but how can you forgive sin? Others asked about Jesus' habit of eating with tax collectors and sinners – he even summoned a tax collector to join him in his travels. They wanted him and his disciples to be ascetics, to leave aside even such comfort as regular meals. And they wanted him to adhere to a rigid standard of sabbath observance.

Plucking grain on the sabbath? No good. If you hadn't taken care of it the day before, you need to wait until you get somewhere that somebody who had properly prepared can give you food. Although it's funny: the fourth century Talmud actually includes guidance that plucking and eating grain was fine as long as you did it without a utensil.

Healing on the sabbath? Well, that's a fuzzier question. Midwives could assist with births on the Sabbath, according to the third century collection of rabbinic wisdom called the Mishnah. You could wash an injury "in the usual way" and "if he is healed, he is healed." In this case from Mark, Jesus didn't do any of the things that would normally be inappropriate to the Sabbath. He didn't put oil on the man's hand. He didn't touch him. He didn't even gesture to him. Jesus didn't do any of the things that would constitute work on the Sabbath.

But he also didn't fit the image of some of his contemporaries in religious leadership who knew what a teacher and healer should be like.

Jesus frequently didn't fit the image of what a teacher and healer should be like.

But he did know his Bible.

The Sabbath commandment is distinct among the Ten Commandments. Unlike most of the others, it was explained. God didn't bother justifying the commandments against murder or theft or false witness. The Sabbath, though, got a long explanation. You just heard it read from the fifth chapter of Deuteronomy.

Just to keep you on your toes, there's a different explanation in Exodus twenty, which also lists the Ten Commandments. There, the reason for the Sabbath is to imitate God, who rested after six days creating. Here in Deuteronomy five, the reason is to celebrate the freedom God had won for the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt.

Slaves don't get days off. Slaves don't rest. Free people do.

Jesus probably drew on both these texts to inform his theology of Sabbath. He believed that the power of God was present and accessible to human beings. He believed that his followers could preach and teach and comfort and heal. He promised them the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit when he was no longer at arm's reach. Like God, you can do great things. Like God, you can rest.

Jesus also declared a new freedom to his followers. Though some were definitely hoping he would free them from Roman domination, he made it clear that they could also find freedom from the burdens of ritual impurity, shame, and sin. "Which is easier," he asked people earlier in chapter two: "to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk?'"

Forgiveness, he said, should be easy, both to offer and to receive.

That's what it means for the Sabbath to be made for human beings: that in it we find the freedom to live well with God, and to bring God's grace to those around us. D. Mark Davis writes at his blog, [LeftBehindAndLovingIt](#), "The idea that 'humanity was made for the Sabbath' continues to be a wildly popular theology that God created the law and humanity needs to live up to it or else we are lost. In that theology, God is chiefly known as holy, and humans have to achieve a certain level of holiness – through following laws or practicing purity rituals - to be acceptable to God.

"The alternative theology, which Jesus poses here, is that 'the Sabbath was made for humanity.' In that sense, God is chiefly known as love and the laws and purity rituals are for humanity's own good. Or, even better, they offer ways that humanity can respond to God's grace with gratitude."

It is tempting to take Jesus' opponents here and have them represent all first century Pharisees, or even worse, all first century Jews, or worst of all, all Jews. They didn't. They don't. Jesus had good relationships with some Pharisees clear to the end of his earthly ministry. They kept inviting him to dinner.

And that keeps us from something far more important. As Debie Thomas writes at [JourneyWithJesus.net](#), "The question this story asks is not, 'What was wrong with 1st century Judaism?' but rather, 'What have we — here and now — ossified at our peril? What mortal, broken thing have we deified instead of love? Who or what have we stopped seeing because our eyes have been blinded by our own best intentions?"

“What are we clinging to that is not God?”

We live in a society obsessed with productivity. Later this year our ballot choices will be substantially guided by our notion of which candidate will get more accomplished while in office. Who will lower inflation? Who will increase Gross Domestic Product? Who will perform the economic gymnastic trick of getting employment, compensation levels, and interest rates just right?

The answer to that one, by the way, is nobody, because no one person in any one office can do all that.

Who will tell us, though, that outproducing other nations increases the rate at which we run through our resources? Who will tell us that more is not always better? Who will tell us that in Christ there is freedom from that productivity race as well as from sin, and death, and political oppression?

Who will tell us that if you build your nest all night with materials you can't identify pushed into places you can't be certain of, your nest won't hold up?

We weren't made to run an eternal treadmill. No were we made to follow arbitrary guidelines of what rest is, when it should be, or what it shouldn't be. We weren't made for the Sabbath.

The Sabbath was made for us, for our rest, for our well-being, for our freedom.

The Sabbath was made for us.

Amen.

*by Eric Anderson*