

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Mark		Pastor/Teacher
Text	Mark 3:1-6		Mason Depew
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DAY OF THE NEW CREATION

1. Introduction: American Christians in general, not just the Reformed, used to see Sunday as the Christian Sabbath.¹ There used to be Blue Laws in many parts of the country that forbade most market activity on Sundays. When my family left Texas for Arizona in 2012, there was still a feeble remnant of these laws in place that made it illegal to purchase alcohol before noon on Sunday.² Over the last hundred years, American Christians have largely abandoned this conviction and now overwhelmingly consider it legalistic and unbiblical. In the last year, however, there have been some notable Christian public figures pushing back against this trend and pointing out that we may have lost something extremely valuable.
 - a. Charlie Kirk's last book, published posthumously, is called *Stop, in the Name of God: Why Honoring the Sabbath Will Transform Your Life*. It will be interesting to see what effect this book will have on the evangelical world, particularly the Calvary Chapel churches of which Kirk himself was a part.
 - i. Interestingly, Kirk said in this book that the main impetus for him to start keeping the Sabbath at all was from Dennis Prager, a popular Jewish teacher.³ Because of this, Kirk actually began practicing the Sabbath on Saturdays, not Sundays.⁴

¹ Article XIV of the 1925 version of the Baptist Faith & Message, for example, said, "The first day of the week is the Lord's day. It is a Christian institution for regular observance. It commemorates the resurrection of Christ from the dead and should be employed in exercises of worship and spiritual devotion, both public and private, and by refraining from worldly amusements, and resting from secular employments, works of necessity and mercy only excepted." That sounds an awful lot like the Westminster Confession of Faith!

² Interestingly, although J. Gresham Machen was generally in favor of expansive religious liberty, he was also very much in favor of keeping the Blue Laws and opposed their weakening in his own time. He wrote a letter to the governor of Pennsylvania in opposition to allowing the NFL to play games on Sundays. This was his conclusion: "As to the merits of the question, I could hardly find words strong enough to express what my feeling is. It does seem to me that the profoundest dangers to our entire civilization are found in the constant rush of noise and jazz and feverish activity which is one of the great faults of the American people and which is a great barrier to true efficiency as well as to the cultivation of the deeper things.

Of course, my own cultivation of a quiet Sunday is based on considerations much more fundamental than these. **I am a Christian, and it is quite clear that a commercialized Sunday is inimical to the Christian religion.** There are many other Christians in Pennsylvania, and because they are Christians they do not cease to be citizens. They have a right to be considered by their fellow-citizens and by the civil authorities. But the reason why they can with a good conscience be enthusiastic advocates of the Christian practice in the matter of Sunday is that they regard it as right, and as for the highest well-being of the entire State." - "Machen Thought Sundays Were Super," in *Presbycast Pravda*, Feb 7, 2025.

³ His dedication reads, "This book is dedicated to Dennis Prager. Your life's work brought me to honoring the Sabbath. As a result, I wrote this book. Thank you, Dennis, for all you have done for humanity. God bless you."

⁴ "The first Saturday was extremely challenging. The Bible is very clear: For six days you shall work, and on the seventh day you shall rest. Six days for work - that is it. Get everything you need in six days, because the seventh day is for God and to rest." - Introduction, pg. xvi

- b. The former US Senator, Ben Sasse, has been giving interviews about his late-stage cancer diagnosis and impending death. In these interviews, when asked what he would go back and do differently, Sasse consistently answers that he would keep the Sabbath far better than he did. He says his life was filled with worldly ambition and he now sees how vain much of that was.
2. Refraining from constant striving and worldly ambition are certainly important parts of what the Sabbath is about. Think back in particular to what it would be like as a farmer in the ancient world, where how much food your family has is directly tied to how many days of work you put in! It would be a real test of your faith each week to put down your tools for a day.⁵ But as I said in the previous message on Mark, the Sabbath is not about simply *stopping* for the sake of bodily rest. It is about turning from the earthly to the heavenly, and this is at the center of our text this morning, in Mark 3:1-6.
- a. Recall how we have seen that Jesus is performing more healings and casting out more demons than any other prophet in the Bible. Mark's Gospel in particular makes this point clear with how quickly the narrative moves along. You get a much stronger feeling that Jesus is doing this left and right, everywhere he goes!
 - i. And yet the people constantly miss the point of these signs. They always want more, because they are missing the forest for the trees. They love the healings themselves because that makes their earthly lives much easier (who wouldn't want to be healed of these conditions?), but they don't grasp Jesus's larger mission at all.
 - ii. Christ's main mission, as he already indicated in 2:17, is to deal with *sin*, which is underlying all these other problems. People are sick and crippled because of Adam's sin, and demons are plaguing the populace because the Fall made humanity enemies of God and gave Satan power over them.⁶
 - iii. The Jews in particular are under the rule of a pagan foreign power, Rome, because they had lost their independence when their fathers broke God's covenant and were sent into the Babylonian Exile. Ever since then, their land had passed back and forth between various powers and David's throne had not been restored. So their political problems, too, were a direct result of sin in much the same way Adam's Fall had brought suffering on the whole of mankind.
 - iv. In coming to atone for our sins, then, Jesus is making the down payment for the *total renovation* of all God's creation! He really will be making *all things new*!⁷
 - v. Mark set all this up with the announcement of the Kingdom of God in 1:14-15. The Kingdom of God *is* the New Creation!⁸

⁵ And every seventh year, for a whole year (Leviticus 25:1-7)! And every fiftieth year, for a second year in a row (Leviticus 25:8-22)! That would truly require an almost perfect faith, and it's sadly no surprise that Israel never observed the Sabbath years, so the Lord made up for this with the Exile (2 Chronicles 36:21).

⁶ This power is not unlimited, as of course God still rules over all. Nonetheless, there is clearly an idea in Scripture that those who live in sin apart from God are under Satan's sway, as in Ephesians 2:2-3.

⁷ "And he who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.'" - Revelation 21:3

⁸ For a much fuller treatment of this subject, I highly recommend Steven M. Baugh's book, *The Majesty on High*. It is the best treatment of the Kingdom of God theme in Scripture that I have ever read.

- b. The Pharisees, in their pride, *hate* what they do not understand and deep down they really do not want a radically new creation. Being pleased with their status and the wealth that their position gives many of them, they like at least some parts of the status quo. This is why they hate Jesus, even though he has done nothing but bless people so far: they cannot control him, because he claims an authority outside and above their own. He has the special authority to tell his disciples *not to fast*, but to *feast*,⁹ and even to pick food to eat on the Sabbath!¹⁰
 - i. This is why they watch him, according to Mark 3:2, to see if they can accuse him when he heals this man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. They think they will have the chance to show people that Jesus has contempt for the Law of God!
 - ii. But Christ, knowing what was in their hearts, anticipates their accusation and counters it before they can open their mouths. Notice he does *not* say, “This is unlawful and I don’t care!” Or, “The hour is coming when the Sabbath Law will pass away!” But rather, the point of the question in 3:4 is that it *is* lawful to heal on the Sabbath.
 - iii. Many Christians, when reading this, take it as a kind of pragmatic concession that stopping *all* work is just not practical. When you see the Creation-New Creation pattern here, however, Jesus’s healing on the Sabbath actually *strengthens* the meaning of the Day. The Sabbath, as we saw in the previous message, was always about enjoying rest *with God* apart from the sinfulness and uncleanness of this fallen world. Jesus’s healings accomplish exactly that: bringing people *rest* from the misery of this fallen world so they may enjoy God’s presence!
 - iv. It is particularly noteworthy that this man Jesus healed had a “withered hand.” This is the kind of blemish that Leviticus said would make a priest unworthy of approaching God.¹¹ Therefore, even if this man was not himself a priest, he would be seen as especially unclean, like lepers and those possessed by a demon. By healing him this way, Jesus is removing this burden of Old Creation uncleanness off his back and opening the door for him to enjoy more intimate fellowship in his Creator’s presence. This is clearly in keeping with the purpose of the Sabbath, as it makes the Day *more holy* for the man, not less.
3. Thinking of the Sabbath in light of the Old Creation vs. the New Creation also explains why we celebrate the Lord’s Day on Sundays instead of Saturdays. Saturday marked the completion of the Old Creation; Sunday marks the beginning of the New Creation.
 - a. The Law of Moses actually commanded the Israelites to rest on a handful of Sundays throughout the year, as an extra day after the Saturday Sabbath. This is already interesting, because it implies some kind of rest not tied to the original creation in the way

⁹ Mark 2:18-22

¹⁰ Mark 2:23-28

¹¹ “For no one who has a blemish shall draw near, a man blind or lame, or one who has a mutilated face or a limb too long, or a man who has an injured foot or an **injured hand**, or a hunchback or a dwarf or a man with a defect in his sight or an itching disease or scabs or crushed testicles.” - Leviticus 21:18-20

that the Saturday Sabbath explicitly was.¹² These occasions would be the first time in history that people enjoyed a two-day weekend of rest.

- i. The first two of these Sunday Sabbaths were the Feast of Firstfruits¹³ on the Sunday after Passover, and the Feast of Weeks¹⁴ on the fiftieth day after Passover, another Sunday. Together, these two festivals marked the beginning and the end of the harvest season.¹⁵
 - ii. For farmers living under this calendar, this would be a wonderful period of rejoicing because it meant God had provided another year of food for their families. It was like a renewal of life, and they were to recognize that this renewed life was a gift of God by giving part of their harvest to him on these holidays. Also, of course, once a farmer has finished collecting his harvest, he typically gets to rest much more than he does in the other parts of the year.
- b. What happens in the New Testament on the Feast of Firstfruits, the Sunday after Passover? Christ is raised from the dead, and this is why the Apostle Paul calls him the firstfruits of the dead. He is the beginning of the harvest, which will ultimately be completed with our bodily resurrection at the end of history!¹⁶ Remember that Paul was an exceptionally devout Jew, and undoubtedly kept Moses's calendar to a tee, so he most certainly knew this Old Testament feast well.
- c. What happens in the New Testament on the Feast of Weeks, the end of the harvest season? The Apostles receive the illumination of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the Feast of Weeks, another Old Testament Sunday Sabbath. They are not raised bodily from the dead, but still, this is a key part of the New Creation. Before this, the Apostles did not look *at all* like the kind of men who would boldly go out to declare the coming of the Kingdom to the whole world. They seemed fickle at best, and cowardly and ignorant at worst, but on Pentecost the Holy Spirit changes all that. He truly makes them like new men, and Peter most clearly of all! His sermon in Acts 2 shows that he is now truly a new creation, a herald of the world to come.¹⁷

¹² "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." - Exodus 20:11

¹³ Leviticus 23:11 indicates that this was celebrated on the day after the Passover, which would make it a Sunday, and Numbers 28:26 commands them to rest on this day, as well as the weekly Saturday Sabbath.

¹⁴ "You shall count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering. You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath. Then you shall present a grain offering of new grain to the LORD. ...And you shall make a proclamation on the same day. You shall hold a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work. It is a statute forever in all your dwelling places throughout your generations." - Leviticus 23:15-16, 21

¹⁵ Note that the Israelites' harvest season was *not* in the Autumn, like the European and North American harvest seasons. Because of their climate, the dangerous season for crops was not winter (they had no snow, contrary to many Christmas carols), but summer! Therefore they harvested their crops around April-May, before the weather got too hot and wiped them out.

¹⁶ "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the **firstfruits** of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the **firstfruits**, then at his coming those who belong to Christ." - 1 Corinthians 15:20-23

¹⁷ This is the main point of 2 Peter, in fact. Consider how he draws the whole letter to a close: "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But **according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.**" - 2 Peter 3:10-13

- d. Together these two holidays represent the first “harvest” of the New Creation. That is to say, the first ingathering of a resurrected human person with his own **renewed body** (Christ himself) and the first ingathering of **renewed souls** to the life of the Church (Pentecost).¹⁸ Christ himself paid for both of these events with his atoning sacrifice on the Cross, finishing the *work* necessary to earn this *rest*.
- e. Geerhardus Vos, the great Princeton father of Biblical Theology, also saw great significance in changing the pattern from work-then-rest (Saturday) to rest-then-work (Sunday). He summarized the change from Old to New Testament in this way:

“Inasmuch as the Old Covenant was still looking forward to the performance of the Messianic work, naturally the days of labour to it come first, the day of rest falls at the end of the week. We, under the New Covenant, look back upon the accomplished work of Christ. We, therefore, first celebrate the rest in principle procured by Christ, although the Sabbath also still remains a sign looking forward to the final eschatological rest. The Old Testament people of God had to typify in their life the future developments of redemption. Consequently the precedence of labour and the consequence of rest had to find expression in their calendar. The New Testament Church has no such typical function to perform, for the types have been fulfilled. But it has a great historic event to commemorate, the performance of the work by Christ and the entrance of Him and of His people through Him upon the state of never-ending rest. We do not sufficiently realize the profound sense the early Church had of the epoch-making significance of the appearance, and especially of the resurrection of the Messiah. **The latter was to them nothing less than the bringing in of a new, the second, creation.**”¹⁹

4. It would be a travesty against the Gospel to turn the Sabbath into merely a list of things *not* to do. It is so much more than that! Therefore, when asking whether you should do something on Sunday you should really not be thinking about lists of rules so much as asking whether what you want to do fits the purpose of the Sabbath.
 - a. Works of mercy and necessity, such as Christ healing this man’s withered hand, or feeding your own family, do fit this purpose. Serving and building one another up out of gratitude for God’s grace is the furthest thing from unlawful! On the contrary, it fits the Sabbath beautifully to serve one another because it contributes in some small way to the life of the Kingdom. If it models the love of Christ for us, and blesses others with rest, there is nothing wrong with doing it on the Lord’s Day.
 - b. Putting others in a position to *serve you*, however, is in the opposite spirit. That is how we expect people to act in the world, not in Christ’s Kingdom. Reflect on this when you notice your brothers and sisters volunteering in the nursery and in the kitchen. Are you unintentionally keeping people out of worship by letting others finish your potluck dish or watch your kids week after week, when you are unwilling to serve others yourself?
 - c. Furthermore, reflect on the fact that how you treat Sunday will affect the way your children treat the Lord. Do you tell them they can sleep in on Sundays because they get up so early the other days of the week? Are you teaching them that getting up early for an athletic college scholarship is more important than spending time with their Creator and Savior? Do you want your children to devote themselves to gaining the world, with no thought for their souls?

¹⁸ “So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.” - Acts 2:41

¹⁹ *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2003), 141–42.

- d. When we realize that we have been breaking the Sabbath, we should never respond by despairing. Rather, we should turn again, as always, to the one who kept the Law on our behalf and earned our ultimate rest through his awful work. He does not threaten to cast us out of the Kingdom because we neglected his fellowship for a time. He invites us to confess our sins, return again to him for healing, and enjoy the sweet joy of total peace and reconciliation with our Creator. There is no greater rest in this life than knowing Christ has fully atoned for all of your sins. We would be fools to turn down the opportunity to revel in this rest together.
- e. As the famous hymn, It Is Well with My Soul, expresses this rest,
“My sin oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
my sin, not in part, but the whole,
is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more;
praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!