

Lord of the Sabbath

Program #3

Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath

LawstSheep Ministries

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A most happy Sabbath to you today! I feel so good, it may be illegal!

In our first program, we looked through a Johari Window at mankind to see how many people accept Jesus as Lord of the Sabbath AND keep the Sabbath holy like He and His disciples did. I wondered out loud whether Jesus looks down from heaven through such a window to assess who is truly loving and following Him?

What we discovered is that only a tiny fraction of the world's six billion people accept Jesus as Lord and keep holy the day He said he was Lord of, the day He kept Himself, and the day which He said was made for man.

In our second program, we focused on Jesus' claim that the Sabbath was made for man. Hopefully, we can plainly see from Scripture, in the Old and New Testaments, that the Sabbath was not made ONLY for Israel. It was made at creation for all mankind, including for all Jews and Gentiles who come to accept Jesus as their Lord.

In this third program, we will focus on the statement by Jesus that He was Lord of the Sabbath. How could Jesus make this claim? Why did He make this claim? Why did His claim so upset the Pharisees, the religious leaders of His day?

To gain insight into the answers to these questions, we need to look at the context of what was taking place when Jesus made this claim. Three different Gospel accounts report this incident in the ministry of Jesus. This should assuage any doubt that the Apostles, the Holy Spirit, God our Father, and Jesus Himself placed much importance on this claim.

Let's start with the account in the Gospel of Mark (using the New King James Version) in Chapter 2, verse 23:

Now, it happened that He [referring to Jesus] went through the grain fields 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?"

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?"

And, He said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath."

Now, let's explore this incident and try to get the whole picture of what is going on. We find Jesus and His disciples walking through a grain field. As implied in Mark 3: 1, they were apparently on their way to the local synagogue for a holy convocation on the Sabbath day. Once off the main roads in Israel, there were typically walking paths through pastures or grain fields leading to popular destinations. I remember as a boy in the city of Milwaukee, Wisconsin taking a worn path as a diagonal short-cut through a vacant lot on my way to school rather than remaining on the rectangular sidewalk.

As Jesus' disciples traversed the field, they began plucking the heads of the grain. When the Pharisees (perhaps also on their way to the synagogue) saw this, they queried Jesus as to why his disciples would do what was not lawful on the Sabbath.

Were the Pharisees accusing His disciples of stealing grain from the field owner? This was not too likely as the Mosaic Law allowed travelers to pick or glean grain which was to be purposely left on the edge of the field by the owner for those without food. Plus, stealing would be unlawful any day, not just on the Sabbath.

So, it appears more likely that the Pharisees were accusing Jesus' disciples of threshing or harvesting grain on the Sabbath. Harvesting grain on the Sabbath day, certainly as a farmer would normally do during the week to accumulate a crop for future use, sale and even profit, would clearly be against the Mosaic Law as found in Exodus 34: 21. In this case, the disciples were only removing the husks with their hands in order to personally eat the heads of grain. I think you would agree that this is somewhat stretching the restriction against harvesting grain on the Sabbath?

Why would the Pharisees be so hyper-critical of what Jesus allowed His disciples to do on the Sabbath day? Well, as we see starting in Mark Chapter 2, this is the fourth conflict that Jesus had with the Pharisees:

- 1) Jesus healed a paralytic after forgiving his sins which the Pharisees said only God, not any man, could do. This was blasphemy in their eyes. It was Jesus demonstration that He was God, or the Son of God, and could do what God His Father allowed Him to do.
- 2) To the dismay of the scribes and Pharisees, they had complained to Jesus' disciples that Jesus sat with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus had already called Levi, the son of Alpheus, a publican and tax collector for the Romans, to follow Him as His disciple. We know this Levi better as the Gospel writer Matthew. After hearing of their criticism, Jesus gave the well-known answer that those who were well do not need a physician. And, metaphorically, those who were not sinners did not need to be called to repentance.
- 3) The Pharisees were fasting, as well as the disciples of John the Baptist. They questioned Jesus why His disciples do not fast. Jesus answered that they could not fast while their bridegroom was with them, but would after He was taken away. Jesus likened the Pharisees type of ritual fasting with examples of practical foolishness. One example of foolishness was mending old cloth with new cloth that had not been previously shrunk.

The other was not putting new wine into old wineskins.

In these prior conflicts, Jesus is gradually revealing to the Pharisees a knowledge and ability that only God would supposedly possess. Jesus was perceived by them as challenging their knowledge and even threatening their authority over the people of Israel. It understandably angered them.

As revealed in the next incident in Mark 3: 1-6, where Jesus heals a man with a withered hand in the synagogue (apparently on the next Sabbath), the Pharisees are still looking for reasons to accuse Him of breaking the Sabbath commandment.

Here, Jesus asks the Pharisees if it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath or to do evil? They kept silent. This angered Jesus. The Bible says Jesus was grieved by the hardness of their hearts. This was a frequent observation about Israel, the chosen people and nation of God.

The Pharisees, and even the orthodox rabbis of this day, would see breaking the Sabbath as blameless by doing work in order to save someone's life. But, here, Jesus merely healed a man's withered hand. Jesus showed by His example that doing good works for others was appropriate on the Sabbath, even if it involved breaking other normal prohibitive Mosaic laws.

A more severe conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees occurred in the temple. It is described in the eighth chapter of the gospel of John when the Jews claimed that Abraham was their father. The account ends in Verse 58 with Jesus saying, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." This claimed pre-existence and preeminence so infuriated the Jews, that they took up stones to throw at Jesus. They might have stoned Him to death had Jesus not left the temple.

How could Jesus, the Son of Man, have existed before Abraham? How could Jesus refer to Himself as the "I AM," a reference to their God Elijah or "Yahweh?"

Well, my friends, our Bible gives us the answer. It is found in the Gospel of John who also relayed this incident with the Pharisees. In verses 1-3 we read:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

And, a bit later in the text, in Verse 14, we read:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

When the Word became flesh, John and the other Apostles and disciples beheld Jesus as the only begotten Son of God.

Do you see what I see, my friends? Do you understand that Jesus had previously existed as the Word of God and was God. Further, it was this Word of God which spoke the world and all things into existence. The Word was there during the six days of creation. The Word was there and rested on the seventh day. It was the Word of God which deemed His creation, including His last and greatest creation of man, to be very good. The Word was the God who made, blessed and sanctified the seventh day of the week. It was truthfully Jesus' day. Jesus is properly called, and truthfully is, and always will be, the Lord of the Sabbath! The seventh-day of the week was, and always will be, His day of the week.

Naturally, the scribes and Pharisees and religious rulers of Jesus time believed in the Sabbath. But, they DID NOT accept Jesus as Lord of the Sabbath, as the promised Messiah sent by God as Savior and Lord and the Word of God. And, those of the Jewish faith who keep the Sabbath today, still cannot see or accept Jesus as Lord of that Sabbath. Jesus forgave those who did not accept Him, and called for His crucifixion on the cross, for not knowing what they did to Him; and so do I. Their day will come.

Some Sabbath keeping people are today being called by the God of Abraham, God our Father, and the Father of all, to His only begotten Son. Are you one of them? As you listen to the written word of God, do you want to get to know the One who most of Israel rejected as the promised Messiah? These people saw Jesus in the flesh, but were blind to His Lordship of even the Sabbath.

Do you know the story of "Doubting" Thomas? The man called Thomas was one of the hand-chosen Apostles of Jesus. Thomas was most likely not his Hebrew name. As in the case of Peter, his Hebrew name was Simon. For that matter, no one would have called the Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus. It is not a Hebrew name either. It is a transliteration into an English name.

Thomas was with Jesus for three years of ministry. Jesus did many incredible miracles before the eyes of Thomas, including healing on the Sabbath and walking on the water. But, now Jesus had been crucified, had died and was buried like an ordinary criminal. I think we can all understand the heart-breaking disappointment Thomas must have endured as his dreams were shattered. The man who appeared to be the Messiah and who was prophesied to return the Kingdom to Israel, was now supposedly in the grave like all the Patriarchs used by God in the past.

For some reason, when the risen Jesus first appeared to His Apostles, Thomas was not present. The other disciples told Thomas that they had seen Him. Thomas doubted this was possible. Thomas retorted in John 20: 25 that "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

The next several verses in John 20: 26-28 are a powerful example and lesson to all who do not believe that Jesus was the Son of God and Messiah who was raised from the dead.

And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, “Peace to you!” Then He said to Thomas, “Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.”

And Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”

This statement has no peer in the entire New Testament. While Jesus is consistently called Lord by the Apostles, and the Son of God, no other Apostle is recorded as calling Jesus their God!

What Jesus then replied to Thomas in Verse 29 is every bit as remarkable:

Jesus said to him, “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Jesus might have just as much been talking to each one of us; for none of us have seen Him and yet we have believed. Praise God!

Now, if the Word was God, and the Word became Jesus, then, at least in that sense Jesus was God! Some additional evidence of His preexistence is that Jesus returned to heaven from where He claimed He came according to John 3: 13.

I recognize that the nature of God and the divine nature of Jesus is a complicated and a subject difficult to comprehend. Our Sabbath keeping Jewish friends will most likely claim there is only one God, so Jesus could not be God. Our Christian friends will most likely claim that God is a trinity of three persons or three beings in one God “essence.” Other Unitarians will claim that there is one God-being possibly with three essences. Still others claim that God is a binity, or two beings in one God family.

Believe it or not, I have still another concept of the nature of God. Who is right? Each version has some pretty convincing evidence from the Bible. However, a discussion of the divine and eternal nature of God and Jesus is beyond the scope of this program. What I hope we have reached together is a unified understanding that when Jesus claimed He was Lord of the Sabbath, He was telling the truth, and that this must have been important. If, before coming to the earth, Jesus was at one time the Word of God, and with God in heaven, and who was “In the beginning” at the creation of all things, then Jesus had the right to that claim the title of Lord of the Sabbath which was also made at creation for all mankind.

There are certainly Sabbath keeping Jews who have come to belief in Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ. They are often referred to as Messianic Jews. They are part of that little flock that accepts Jesus as Lord of the Sabbath AND keeps the Sabbaths of the LORD holy.

If you are one, I call you brother and friend. I have held holy convocations with such believers on Sabbath days. Their Sabbath customs are somewhat different than mine, but they are loving and edifying in their own way. Shepherds or elders from such groups are welcome to contact me and I would happily include them in a future broadcast.

For my Christian brethren and friends, you already accept Jesus as Savior and Lord and probably as God in the flesh. But, have you ever called Him the Lord of the Sabbath? Have you ever before considered why He called Himself Lord of the Sabbath? Have you ever wondered what this should mean to you in your life and walk with Jesus?

It amazed me, when I first studied this issue, that this claim, repeated in three different Gospels, is in red letters! They are indicated as words from His own mouth. Jesus claimed Lordship over the Sabbath day. His Lordship of the Sabbath is not some term a gospel or epistle writer used in describing the authority of Jesus or as a casual title.

I did a check in my concordance to see what else Jesus claimed Lordship over. Guess what? There is no other instance where Jesus called Himself the Lord of anything else! Are you as surprised at that as I was?

There is one case recorded in Matt. 9: 38 where Jesus says, "Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." But, it appears Jesus is speaking about His Father rather than about Himself.

In Acts 9: 36, Jesus is referred to by its writer as Lord of all, or Lord of everything as other translations render it. Other Bible writers refer to Jesus as the Lord of both the dead and the living, or the Lord of glory who was crucified, or the Lord of peace. And, of course, in Revelation the returning Jesus will be called Lord of lords.

I have no problem with any of these conceptions. As a Christian, you probably accept them as well. But, what are you going to do about His claiming to be Lord of the Sabbath? I pray you will think this through. I pray you will study further just what Jesus said about Sabbath keeping and what He Himself did to keep the Sabbath holy.

So, let's return to the circumstance surrounding Jesus claim of being Lord of the Sabbath. The Pharisees had accused Him of allowing His disciples to pick, husk and eat seed from a farmer's grain field on the Sabbath. The Pharisees saw this as unlawful.

Jesus explains why He did not stop them. He knew they were hungry. He pointed out that King David ate and gave to his men the showbread from the Temple to eat when they were hungry, even though it was clearly lawful only for the priests serving in the Temple to eat this daily bread.

Regarding the same incident, we find the following additional information in Matt. 12: 5-8:

“Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? Yet, I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple. But, if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

Here again, Jesus is pointing out a serious misunderstanding by the Pharisees of the Sabbath. Doing good work, especially to serve others, or to carry out God's purposes, was not to be prohibited on the Sabbath. Clearly, the Levites worked in the temple on the Sabbath and were blameless according to the Old Testament Scripture the Pharisees and scribes claimed to know so well and to follow in detail.

Yet, when One greater than the temple (referring to Himself) was there to serve God and man by His good work for man, they condemned Him! Jesus references the words of God's Prophet in Hosea 6: 6 that show God's love for man, desiring mercy and emulation by them, and not sacrifices or burnt offerings.

The Pharisees had not understood the true meaning of the Sabbath and were misusing the law given to Moses for Israel. The Sabbath was given for man's benefit according to Jesus own words. Yet, the Pharisees had frustrated God's purpose by not permitting work on the Sabbath, even if it helps the needy. In some ways, the man-made rules concerning Sabbath law had made observing the Sabbath a burden rather than the benefit and delight that God intended.

So, let's assume you are moved to accept Jesus as Lord of the Sabbath AND desire to keep it holy as commanded and intended by God. What would you do, or not do, on the Sabbath? Next Sabbath, we will look at the basic requirements of the Fourth Commandment as intended by its Creator...the Lord Jesus, the Christ.

This is such a foundational program, even those who are Sabbath keepers will want to tune in to see if some of their practices meet, or fail to meet, these valid requirements as stated and revealed by God to man in His law.

Until next week, this is Brother Kenny praying that you will find the peace available from the Lord of the Sabbath and that you will follow Him in all that He commanded and did as recorded in your Bible. I ask this in the precious name of the man called Jesus, the Christ. Amen!