

In Carolyn Chen's great new book, *Work, Pray, Code: When Work Becomes Religion in Silicon Valley*, Carolyn undergoes a sociological exploration of the manner in which work has become the new de facto religion of Silicon Valley. She writes,

Today, companies are not just economic institutions. They've become meaning-making institutions that offer a gospel of fulfillment and divine purpose in a capitalist cosmos...Silicon Valley is still in the business of silicon and the sacred. And the vast majority of Silicon Valley tech workers continue to be migrants...who find belonging, meaning, and identity in the "congregation" of their companies. But if religion was "sewn in the lining" of tech entrepreneurs' coats back then, they are now more apt to wear it on their sleeves of their hoodies. Silicon Valley firms have taken up the pastoral mantle of spiritual care. Carolyn Chen

Chen's analysis of Silicon Valley is that rather than work being a deeply important part of one's life that fits into a larger framework of meaning and purpose, work has become religion. It has consumed every corner and aspect of one's life, taking on and inviting its adherents into a life of devotion built on the twin gods of accomplishment and accumulation.

Over the course of the past 40 years, workers have been devoting more and more time to their work while simultaneously leaving traditionally religious spaces. Chen connects these two phenomena. Chen is not alone in seeing how the modern world has drastically changed in how it fulfills its religious impulse.

Andrew Root, a Theologian and Philosopher, has done great work over the past decade on the impact of secularism and the modern world. He wrote in his most recent book about how the modern world demands an increased pace of life. Because life is achieved only when resources are spent and accumulated. Commerce and consumption are the new gods.

The point of my actions is to have as much of the world as I can expend my energy to possess...But here is the irony. To get (and keep) this having, I must continue and never decrease my pace of more and more expended energy. I'm forced to always accelerate my activity to keep what I have. Standing still, or even taking a break, is no option...With enough expended energy, I'm told I can possess the world...Soon the exhaustion of this expenditure of energy, to have as much of the givenness of reality as I want, alienates me from myself. And worse, being alienated from myself, I'm alienated from the world. Inside the busyness

to have, the world is no longer a place to encounter life. Andrew Root

What we sacrifice at the altar of accomplishment and accumulation is not simply our time and our money, but it is ultimately our very souls. We are forced to accelerate our lives so that we can earn more, spend more, consume more, and repeat. The irony that we all feel and live under is the cycle of expending more energy to earn more resources so we can spend more energy trying to consume more. And in that cycle that we deeply believe holds resonance and meaning, we disintegrate ourselves beyond recognition and lose touch with the deepest parts of who we are.

There is a tenuous and tumultuous relationship between work-life, spiritual life, and pace of life. The totalizing effect of the modern work environment fuels a pace of life that, if not attended to, will slowly disintegrate our souls, turning us into mere consumers and producers working away at the altar of the gods of accomplishment and accumulation.

Is there something in the way of Jesus that would speak to this frenetic pace of life? Is there something in the Kingdom of God that would put a stake in the ground and prophetically speak a new way to find work, life, spirituality, and the way of Jesus in a new way? Of course there is!

This morning, we have a story about Jesus and the Sabbath. More specifically, it is about Jesus' understanding of the Sabbath against the Pharisee's understanding of the sabbath. Now, it is easy for us to rush past a story like this, particularly about the Sabbath, because in our modern world, it would seem like the Sabbath is some sort of antiquated practice. But I invite you to listen with fresh ears again to Jesus' teaching on the Sabbath today, something I believe is more resonant and important than ever before.

Turn to Mark 2:23. What we'll see today is a set of two stories about Jesus and his redefinition of the Sabbath over and against the Pharisee's understanding of the Sabbath. This section will finish a part of Mark's gospel where he detailed the direct opposition Jesus faced having now announced and proclaimed the arrival of the Kingdom of God. Mark will detail this again by using the occasion of a healing to confront the opposition against him.

One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grain-fields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" Mark 2:23-24

Now, at first glance, I imagine your question is, why are the Pharisees so concerned with the Sabbath? Why did they seem so stodgy over Jesus' disciples picking a few heads of grain? Well, for a few reasons. For the Jews, there were really two primary markers of national identity; the Sabbath and circumcision.

The observance of the Sabbath was a fundamental practice for the Jewish identity. These two practices were promoted and defended with a pietistic zeal because it was a matter of national pride. Many would be willing to fight in self-defense of their practice of the Sabbath, even to the point of death. The pious Jews would rather die than desecrate the Sabbath.

One other note that must be made is that the disciples were not actually doing what was unlawful on the Sabbath according to the Torah, but they were doing what was unlawful in what is called the Mishna, the Pharisee's oral tradition and teachings on the Torah that was used to protect and guard against the breaking of the Sabbath. We'll come back to that at the end of our time together.

This was problematic because, while the principle of the Sabbath was never contested as important for the Jews, its practice and the implications for its practice were very much contested, and this is what you see taking place here in our text today. What we will see at the end of the second story in chapter 3 is that Jesus' posture and reteaching of Sabbath practice will drive the religious leaders to try and kill Jesus. So if we are to understand this response, we must do some work around what is the Sabbath.

So, what was the Sabbath?

Allow me to take us on a five-minute detour where I can provide a really brief biblical theology of the Sabbath that will enable us to understand it more fully. Then we will return to the text here and see how Jesus responds to the opposition of the Pharisees. The creation of the Sabbath goes all the way back to the creation narrative in Genesis chapter 1.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. Genesis 1:31-2.3

Note three things about the Sabbath as defined here in Genesis:

Sabbath is Rhythm

Notice that built right into the very fabric of creation is this rhythm of work and rest. It should stand out to us that God took a rest. He rested, not because he was worn out and not because he needed to sleep, but rather, he rested in order to weave into the very fabric of our world a rhythm between rest and work.

For six days, God worked; he created the very universe and all that is within it. This was a creative, busy, and full week of work. And after it is completed, God rested. Think of how interesting it is that all societies across the globe, regardless of culture, religion, etc., all of it, every last bit, functions according to a seven-day work week. This is because God has embedded into the created order a seven-day rhythm in which the image-bearers are to work for six days and rest for the seventh.

This is simply how God has created us as humans and created the world to work. We have been wired into this rhythm, and once we begin to work against this rhythm, we are going against the grain of the universe, and that tends to result in splinters. To fight this rhythm is akin to trying to fight the law of gravity. It is nearly impossible and almost always destructive.

Sabbath is Blessed (barak)

Secondly, notice that God blessed the Sabbath. This is really interesting language. What does it mean to "bless" a day? Well, to understand what it means for things to be blessed thus far, let's just look at what else God blesses in the text: living creatures, "*God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number..."*" (Gen. 1:22), and humans, "*God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number"*" (Gen. 1:28).

In each of these two prior examples, God would bless things, and within that blessing was the ability for them to be generative—to produce more life. So, when God then blesses the Sabbath, one could deduce that it too has a sort of life-giving quality to it. Fascinating!

Sabbath is Holy (qadash)

Lastly, notice that God makes the Sabbath (a day or time) holy. For the ancient world and for our world, this is a fascinating change. Every religion across history declares things, places, or the material holy or set apart, but God does something different. He designates time as holy.

For Yahweh and the Jews, what is holy is a day—time. Meaning, that if you want to meet God, you don't have to go anywhere; you can simply meet God in time. For the Jews, this meant the Sabbath, a day designated and set aside for the Sabbath.

Abraham Joshua Heschel, in his beautiful little book entitled *Sabbath*, writes of the Sabbath as the Jews' great "cathedrals in time," or later, he would refer to it as "our great architecture in time."

Sabbath as holy means that it is a day that is set apart, not just for relaxation and leisure, but it is a day set aside for rest to the Lord. Meaning the Sabbath is the combination of rest and worship. These two things go together.

Most of us don't know the distinction between rest and leisure, but it is an imperative distinction. Because when we are not making the Sabbath holy or set aside, we are continuing in

leisure that merely shifts our focus from accomplishment to accumulation.

Rest is when we disconnect and disengage from them all! There is a day that is set aside from the rest of the created order, and it is holy (set apart) for the explicit purpose of rest and worship. This is its task. This is what Sabbath is, a day for those two purposes—rest and worship. At the most basic level, to practice Sabbath, you run everything you do through the filter of rest and worship. Those categories are intentionally broad. That will look a whole lot different for each of us, and that is okay. Now, let's read on to see how Jesus responds.

He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." Mark 2:25-26

Jesus is offering a bit of humor and jab at the Pharisees in this first line..."Have you never read what David did..." The Pharisees would have known the Old Testament like the back of their hand and most likely had it memorized. So Jesus, asking if they have never read this story is absurd. It is a bit like asking if the Pope is Catholic? Or if Steph Curry has ever taken shooting lessons?

Now this story that Jesus is referencing comes from 1 Samuel 21. David had been anointed as King but had not yet ascended the throne because King Saul was hunting him down in a power move to keep the throne. So David is on the run and enters the temple to eat the bread because they did not have any food at the time.

Why did Jesus pick this particular obscure story? I think it is because of the kingship motifs that have been going on around Mark's gospel. The Jews of Jesus' day were on the lookout for the Messiah, the King. And the story that Jesus tells is a story about the transfer of kingship. He is aligning himself with the line of David and speaking about his own lordship over the Sabbath.

Let's read the next couple of verses, and then I want to come back to it in more depth at the end of the second story. These two verses are the hinge verses that connect the two stories and elaborate on Jesus' teaching on the Sabbath and religiosity.

"Then he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath'" (Mark 2:27-28). Note for now that Jesus is asserting his lordship over the Sabbath. He is asserting his lordship over the practice of the Sabbath that would have been incredibly near and dear to the Jews.

By asserting his lordship over the Sabbath, he is asserting himself as God's appointed agent of rule in the Kingdom of God, who has the authority to approve of the manner in which the Sabbath

is to be embraced. Jesus is not setting himself up against God's law; he is ushering in and fulfilling God's intent with the law.

Jesus is also countering their understanding of the Sabbath as some sort of oppressive thing, "The Sabbath was made for man..." Meaning it is a gift from God; it is not something to do away with, but rather, it is a gift for us to embrace. It is a direct gift from God that helps us understand what it means to live with the grain of the universe. But the Pharisees were missing it; they were missing the plot. We'll come back to this verse at the end of our time, so for now, let's move on and see the next story of opposition.

This one verse functions as the hinge verse between these two stories. It offers a radical return in the teaching of the Sabbath against the distortion of the Pharisee's practice of the Sabbath. And it also offers an invitation to embrace the Sabbath as new again in the lives of Jesus' followers.

Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone." Mark 3:1-3

So Jesus continues on in his work and mission, but remember, the verse and chapter numbers were added to the text much later for our reference. The story from earlier flows directly into this story about the Sabbath.

As Jesus was in the synagogue, a man with a deformed hand was also there. Now some people are there, presumably the religious leaders, who are watching him to see if he would violate the law again. They are seeking Jesus' destruction and corruption. It would also seem that they had not learned their lesson prior and assumed that Jesus' healing on the Sabbath would be worthy of arrest.

This watchful accusatory spirit is the religiosity that Jesus rebukes. It is a heart posture of skepticism and cynicism and quick to point out all that is wrong with others. This is the Pharisaical spirit.

You see this on full display with the spirit bent against healing on the Sabbath. Who would get upset over healing, of bringing good news to an injured and broken man! But yet, their rote pietism destroys the spirit of life.

Their posture toward Jesus and the Sabbath is a sinister one. Their motivation is to capture Jesus and is completely out of step with keeping God's intentions. The alternative logic of the Kingdom of God is contrasted with the religious pietistic impulse to legislate their intentions and move toward power. The logic of the Kingdom of God is always oriented and aimed toward intentional goodness. It was meant to restore, give life, and heal.

"Then Jesus asked them, 'Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?' But they remained silent" (Mark 3:4). Jesus then, in front of the entire synagogue, asks a provocatively simple question that immediately confronts and challenges the religious elites and those in the synagogue. He is challenging them to see if they have indeed lost the forest for the trees. Have they lost the plot about the gift of the Sabbath?

The question is an absolute freebie of a question. It is nearly impossible to get wrong. But the question reveals Jesus' interpretation of the Sabbath. For Jesus, to not do good on the Sabbath would be to do evil.

He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus. Mark 3:5-6

The response of Jesus is so telling of his deep heart for others and the Kingdom of God. His anger and distress are caused by their opposition to God's saving purposes. For the Pharisees, their spirit of self-righteous pride had no interest in seeing the marginalized and the broken healed; it was rather to bolster their own religious spirit.

But the man with the withered hand reached out, and immediately, his hand was restored. His immediate response to Jesus' teaching is in sharp contrast to the Pharisees' arrogance and pride. He reaches his hand out and is healed.

There is a deep and wicked irony in the response by the Pharisees to the question Jesus asked. Because they actually do respond to the question, not with their religious answers but with their actions. They take up a plot on the Sabbath to kill. In doing so, they are answering Jesus and saying, "It is better on the Sabbath to do evil, to kill." They take up with the Herodians and attempt to kill Jesus.

Even more so, we see how deeply embedded their hatred was because the Pharisees and the Herodians were bitter rivals and in no way natural allies. This is the insidious nature of hatred. Hatred has the profoundly tragic ability to unite, and therefore we must reject organizing our lives around hatred. We must resist its ability to metastasize our thinking, posture, and hearts.

Mark seems intent on communicating to us the means through which Jesus is confronting the religiosity of the Pharisees while also inviting us into a greater alternative logic of the Kingdom of God. So what does this mean for us? How is Jesus confronting the logic of our own world and religiosity?

Because what we corrupt, Jesus restores.

To close, I want to note that what we are dealing with here in the modern world is three rival versions of the Sabbath teaching. Then after detailing these, I want to extend an invitation to you

to imagine what Sabbath could look like for you. All of it centers around these two stories of the Sabbath and the hinge verses in vv. 27-28.

"Then he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath'" (Mark 2:27-28). In this line, Jesus does two things that are appropriate for us to lean into this morning. He first invites us to embrace a new teaching on the Sabbath, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." And second, he challenges our religiosity, "The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

The three views of the Sabbath are the Pharisees' corruption, secularism's rejection, and the way of Jesus. The Sabbath, for most of us modern followers of Jesus, is an antiquated and lost practice. But I really believe what Jesus has here for us is an invitation to rethink and enter into a practice of the Sabbath in a fresh way.

Pharisees' Corruption of the Sabbath

I find that most of us are very comfortable with idea that man was not made for the Sabbath. I have yet to find too many in the modern world so concerned with practicing the Sabbath that they are crowding out the Sabbath with too many laws and restrictions. We generally don't have a problem with legalism around the Sabbath. I could be wrong, but for the most part, I think we don't have this problem. This is what the Pharisees needed to hear.

But for us, I think what we need to hear is actually the first part of this line, "The Sabbath was made for man..." If you are anything like me, growing up in church, the Sabbath was either never discussed, preached on, or it was simply ignored and treated as a trap for legalism and, therefore, should be avoided at all costs. But I think we do so at our own peril.

The Sabbath we reject is the Pharisee's Sabbath and not Jesus' teaching on the Sabbath. What Jesus is offering is a whole other view and teaching about the Sabbath, one that is an invitation to practice the Sabbath in a new way, a renewed vision for an engagement with the Sabbath that brings rest and renewal.

The rejection of the legalism surrounding the Sabbath is a proper rejection of the wrong form of the Sabbath, but in doing so, we have also rejected the wisdom and invitation of the Sabbath in the way of Jesus. Jesus is not doing away with the Sabbath here; he is actually re-inviting us to engage with the Sabbath in a manner that is against the failures of the Pharisees.

So what we see arise is three rival versions of the Sabbath. And the first is the Pharisees' corruption of the Sabbath. In the Torah, there are 613 commandments given by God. These were commands that were intended to inform the people on how to live and be God's people. Over time, an oral tradition grew up around these laws and added 1500 more on top of the 613. This is called

the Mishna. So by Jesus' day, you had the Torah's 613 and the Mishna's 1500 more.

All the Torah said was don't work—remember it, keep it holy, and don't work. That was it. It sounds easy enough, and it even sounds life-giving. But the Pharisees came along, with the human propensity for regulations, and began to pile rules on top of rules. The intention was to protect Torah observance and to maintain allegiance, but it was—over time—corrupted by the propensity toward legalism and control. The Pharisees' corruption was constricting, legalistic, man made for the Sabbath, and disintegration of the soul. What was meant to be life-giving became the opposite.

Now, this must be avoided, for sure; but if I could be so bold, I would think that most of us are not tempted to adhere to the 1500 rules of the Mishna around the Sabbath. I would guess that we are far less in danger of succumbing to the legalism of the Pharisees than we may think.

There is, on the other side of the coin, a more dangerous temptation for us today, and that is the secular rejection of the Sabbath. The danger of the Pharisee's rejection of Jesus was their temptation to believe that "man was made for the Sabbath." For us, in the modern secular west, our temptation is to reject the first part of Jesus' teaching that "the Sabbath was made for man." Our temptation is to reject any idea, need, or invitation to live more in rhythm with the created order. But this is also a failure to step into the invitation of Jesus' teaching. This is characterized by the following: secular rejection of the Sabbath, lack of rhythm, you are what you accomplish, you are what you accumulate/consume, and disintegration of the soul

But either way, whether you are tempted by the Pharisees' corruption or the secular rejection of the Sabbath, Jesus invites us into the Sabbath as an acceptance of the wisdom of Jesus' way. It is the depth of Jesus' initial words that "the Sabbath was made for man..." And this version of the Sabbath is characterized by Jesus' invitation to Sabbath, rhythm, rest, worship, and reintegrate with your soul

I can, without hesitation, say that Sabbath has been a spiritual practice that has radically altered my own life and discipleship to Jesus. There is not one command here (in Genesis) or in the New Testament for you to sabbath. Yet, while it may not be commanded, I would suggest from both personal practice as well as from the teaching of Jesus that you may just be missing out on one of the best practices of following Jesus. It is a beautifully challenging and hard practice, but one that has brought about an incredible amount of life and joy for my family and me.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

For around seven years or so, Lindsey and I have started to take our practice of the Sabbath more and more seriously. It has evolved and changed time and time again as our circumstances change. But the commitment to set aside a day for rest and worship hasn't changed. Again, it isn't about a perfect structure; it is about setting aside a day for rest and worship with God. Here is a brief look at ours:

Friday PM - prepare and disconnect

Saturday AM - donuts, coffee, candles, rest with Lindsey and the girls

Saturday PM - rest with God, slow Meal, slow evening/relax

This idea of the wisdom of the tradition is really hard for us sometimes because we get so locked into the binary of is this action—sin or not sin.

For example, there is no command in the New Testament that you should sleep for seven to nine hours a day, but general human wisdom would dictate that it is worth sleeping for those amounts of hours. It is general wisdom. God isn't upset or angry with you if you do not get this amount of sleep. He might be confused as to why you wouldn't just adhere to general wisdom, but it isn't sinning.

Meaning, the Sabbath is an invitation to practice, but God is not upset with you if you don't practice it. It isn't in sin if you skip the Sabbath. It is simply to go against the created order, and its effects will take place. I feel it in my body when I skip the Sabbath. I get more tired, more irritable, and angrier when I bypass our sabbath practice because it grinds against the flow of creation.

The problem in the ancient world was that they believed that man was made for the sabbath, so they created laws to guard against it. They needed to hear, "Sabbath was made for man." The problem in our day is a rejection of the Sabbath altogether, and we need to hear "Sabbath was made for man."

What could the Sabbath look like for you today? Because here is the bottom line, the Sabbath isn't commanded; it isn't law or required. But my goodness, let me tell you that to sabbath is to reacquaint yourself with your soul! Because the daily grind of life will slowly, over time, disintegrate who you are. The busy hustle and bustle of modern American life will do a sort of violence to your soul. And the Sabbath is an invitation to reunite your soul with God. This is the invitation in front of us all. There is no shame, and there is no guilt, but I would suggest that practicing the Sabbath is wisdom. As Jesus taught us, "The Sabbath was made for man."

© 2022 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA
Catalog No.1469-8FC