

# True Sabbath Rest

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[0:00] Good morning, everyone. Well, religions are known for their sacred places, aren't they? There's many religions with many sacred locations on Earth.

You can probably think of a few examples. The Dome of the Rock, the Kabba in Mecca for Muslims, and Hindus have their sacred places.

There's a lot of places, particular locations on Earth, that have a lot of meaning, that are very sacred to a lot of people. Now, the Jews in the Bible, they had their sacred places, but one of the things they had, which the other religions didn't, was a sacred time as well as sacred places.

And they treated this time, this 24-hour period called the Sabbath, as sacred as any venerated place. And they do, the Jews do that to this day.

They take the Sabbath really seriously. And there are certain rules that they have to make sure that they're not doing any kind of work on the Sabbath, as defined by the rabbis.

[1:10] So I just want to give you some examples of the Sabbath rules that the Jews have. And what is forbidden on the Sabbath? Climbing a tree is forbidden, because you might break a branch on your way up, and that would be construed as reaping.

I got this from a Jewish website, by the way. Adding fresh water to vases of cut flowers is considered sowing, or contributing to the growth of plants, and so that's not allowed on the Sabbath.

Brushing dried mud from your boots is considered grinding. Cutting your nails, applying makeup, braiding hair, which is weaving. Drawing blood for a blood test, which is considered in the realm of slaughtering.

Sharpening a pencil, painting, drawing, typing. Switching off an electric light, which is extinguishing a fire. Setting a watch. Or opening an umbrella, which is considered part of building work.

All of that is considered not allowed on the Sabbath. And we laugh. You know, we think that's very unnecessary, isn't it?

[2:19] And yet, we see this veneration of the Sabbath in Christianity today as well. In many branches of Christianity. It is one of the Ten Commandments, and so Christians can't help but think and take the Sabbath also seriously.

There's rules amongst many Christian denominations about what you're allowed to do on Sunday. And we've seen it in our own culture as well. And also consciences about not going to the shops or not watching sport.

Or some Christians don't watch TV on a Sunday. And this is, of course, these ideas about the Sabbath have caused a lot of stress for Christians. Feeling guilty for, am I allowed to do this on the Sabbath?

Am I allowed to do this on Sunday? And, of course, it's caused a lot of debate in Christian circles over what construes observance of the Sabbath today for Christians. And so there's still a lot of confusion, even amongst Christians, as to how we apply the fourth of the Ten Commandments. The commandment about observing the Sabbath, which was given to the Jews. How do we apply it to us today? And that is why we need to understand this passage in Mark that is written in this Gospel.

[3:29] And one of the main points, of course, is Jesus teaching about the Sabbath. And as he does, and as we unpack this account this morning, what we see is that Jesus is showing here to the Jews, and I think to Christians as well, to all who read this, that we have not only missed the point of the Sabbath, by and large, but that him coming to earth, the Son of Man, the Messiah, the Son of God, coming to this planet, and implementing a new covenant, a new way of relating with God, between humans and God, him coming to earth actually fundamentally changes how we view and apply all of God's laws in the Bible.

So that's what we're going to look at. We're going to look at how Jesus' coming introduces a whole new kind of law-keeping to this earth.

That's the point of this morning's story. So let's look at them. Open your Bible, Mark chapter 2, and it starts from verse 18. I'm going to read a few verses again from there.

This is how the whole conversation about the law and how it applies to Jesus' disciples kicks off from verse 18. Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting.

People came and asked Jesus, why do John's disciples and the Pharisees fast? But your disciples don't fast. Jesus said to them, the wedding guests cannot fast while the groom is with them, can they?

[ 5 : 01 ] As long as they have the groom with them, they cannot fast. But the time will come when the groom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast on that day. Okay, so now fasting was a custom, and still is today, a religious custom of self-denial.

Fasting was a way of expressing that all is not right in the world. That is essentially what fasting is about. Expressing grief for the way things are.

So Jews would have fasted at the death of someone, a death of a loved one. They would have gone into a time of fasting and mourning. And when they were dealing with a particular sin, either a national sin or a personal sin, they would also fast, as many people do today.

And so fasting, at its heart, is a religious tradition that is an expression that things are not right in this world.

Which is, of course, true. But Jesus' disciples stood out from the crowd in that day, amongst all the religious sects and the religious people who were taking religious seriously and following rabbis, they didn't fast.

[ 6 : 07 ] All the others did. So people, obviously, were asking why. Why do they not get to fast? Why don't they have to fast? Now, it wasn't technically a law that they had to do.

There was only one prescribed fast in the Jewish calendar, once per year. But if you wanted to be taken seriously as a disciple, as a religious Jew, you would fast more than that.

And these disciples were conspicuous for their lack of fasting like the rest of the religious people.

And Jesus, therefore, defends them.

And the reason He gives, what He's saying in His defense of them, is essentially this. Well, you see, the thing that you're mourning not having when you fast is now with them.

It's with my disciples, because it's me. So why should they fast? Do you see what He's saying? If fasting is an expression that things are not how they should be, it's a looking forward to the kingdom of God that has not yet come, Jesus, saying that His disciples don't have to fast, is saying, in effect, the kingdom is now here.

[ 7 : 23 ] Which is exactly what He said, of course, in Mark chapter 1. The kingdom of God has come near, so why should my disciples fast? It is a claim to be the Messiah. It is a claim to be the one who brings the kingdom.

But, of course, He talks about it in terms of a wedding celebration, because He's not wanting to make it obvious that that's the claim He's making.

And so He says, listen, it's like a wedding. At a wedding, a wedding is not time for mourning. That's what a funeral is for. A wedding is time for celebration. And what He's saying is His arrival here in our broken world is actually a time for celebration and not for mourning.

The point He's making is that Him being present, with Him coming on earth, something has now fundamentally changed. And not just fasting, but a whole lot of other things, a whole lot of other religious traditions that the Jews did have now changed as well.

That's how He starts here. He's saying, listen, the way you consider religion, the way you think of what it means to be religious is now completely different. Okay, that's the point He's making.

[ 8 : 32 ] And so He goes on from verse 21 and 22 and puts it this way. He uses two illustrations. He says, no one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth in an old garment, otherwise the new patch pulls away from the old cloth, and a worse tear is made.

And no one puts new wine into old wineskins, otherwise the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost as well as the skins. No new wine is put into fresh wineskins. What do you think He's saying here?

What do you think? Is He just giving, is He telling people how they should look after them? Wine? No. You know, it's a parable. He's wanting to make a point. He's using these as illustrations.

And they are both. Both the cloth on the clothes and the wine in the wineskins are illustrations of how old things can't accommodate new things. So, I mean, if you wanted to use a modern illustration, maybe you would think about how you can't run Windows 10 on a 386. Okay. You know, I don't even know if many of you are old enough to know even what a 386 is. It was a computer back in the 1980s, you know, when personal computers really started to take off. The i386.

[ 9 : 38 ] It had 16 colors. And it could, like, its memory was something like 5 or 10 megs of information it could hold. It was top of the line.

But then, in the 80s, now you can't run any pieces of software on that old computer. Modern software cannot run on old machines. And I think we've all experienced that. Maybe you've tried to run an app on an old phone, your grandmother's old cell phone, and it says you can't install this app.

It's too modern for the phone. Well, I think maybe those are the kind of illustrations Jesus would have used today if he was here. You can't install new software on old hardware. But that's essentially what he's saying about the cloth.

The cloth, you can't put new cloth in old clothes. Otherwise, it'll shrink and tear the old clothes. You can't put new wine in old wineskins, which has already expanded because of the fermentation, because the new wine still has to ferment, and that'll burst the wineskins.

You can't put new things in old things, is what he's saying. And he uses that illustration to say that he is the new thing that's come.

[ 10 : 44 ] He's the new wine. He's the new cloth. He's the new software, if you like. And the Jewish laws, the Jewish traditions, the Jewish framework of understanding how to relate with God, the religious assumptions, are the old thing.

They're the old clothes, the old wineskin, the old hardware that can't accommodate the new thing that he's bringing. Jesus coming to earth fundamentally changes what it means to be religious. We need to understand that because it applies today just as much as it did then. What he's saying here about the new thing that needs a new framework to understand it, we often look at Jesus and read the Bible through an old type of religious law-keeping framework, much like the Jews did, and look for, you know, what must we do?

Where must I find my checklist, my tick boxes to know that I'm right with God? So many people still read the Bible that way, and Jesus is coming here and saying, you can't anymore read it like that. Because me coming to earth, something has changed. You can't put the new wine into the old wineskins. You can't put the new software into the old hardware of how you think you must read the Bible and relate with God.

[ 12 : 06 ] Jesus coming changes what it means to be religious. And then, in case you didn't get it, he makes it clear in the next thing he does.

When he applies this idea of the new thing to the most sacred aspect of Judaism, the holy Sabbath. And this is where things really start to heat up.

In fact, at the end of the account, the guys are plotting to kill Jesus because he's messed with their real sacred cow, the Sabbath.

Let's see what he does. And how he shows us, actually, through this account, the real meaning of the Sabbath that they had been missing all along. From verse 23. On the Sabbath, he was going through the grain fields, and his disciples began to make their way, picking some heads of grain. And the Pharisees said to him, look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath? Okay, so he was walking through a grain field, and his disciples, they were hungry. And they started to take some of the heads of grain and rub it in their hands and eat it.

[ 13 : 11 ] Now, for some types of grain, you can do that. Not particular types of grain, but there was a type of grain, obviously, that you could eat as a snack, and they would do that. And the Pharisees took exception to this. Not because they were taking from someone's grain field.

In fact, that was allowed in Jewish law. The law of gleaning allowed people to take from the edges of the field. That was totally fine. And the thing that the Pharisees didn't like was that they were doing it on the Sabbath. And it was considered harvesting grain for them to do that and eat it. And so they stood up. It's almost a comical scene. They're just walking, having a nice Sabbath, eating some grain, and then the Pharisees pop up from nowhere, from these cornfields, and say, what are you doing?

And the Pharisees, that was a religious sect, by the way, of Judaism. It was the most popular religious sect, and it was the most law-abiding, and the most stringent about how to keep the rules and keep God's law.

And they were essentially the religious policemen of the day, the Pharisees. So there they were, pointing out that Jesus' disciples had crossed a line. But Jesus' response, again, defending His disciples, is very surprising.

[14:23] Because He doesn't say, well, you know, technically they're not breaking the rules, because you've added more rules, but they're not breaking the Sabbath. He doesn't go that route. That's not His argument at all.

Look at, instead, how He responds to this accusation that they're breaking the Sabbath. From verse 25, He said to them, Have you never read what David and those who were with him did when he was in need and hungry?

How he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar, the high priest, and ate the bread of the presence, which is not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests. And He also gave some to his companions.

So you see what Jesus is doing here? This is very important to get. When the Pharisees stand up and say, Your disciples are breaking the Sabbath, He doesn't stand up and say, Well, no, they're not. He says, Yeah, they are.

And they're allowed to, because they're with me. Very confrontational. They're allowed to, but don't worry. They're with me.

[15:27] And so, there's an exception for them. I remember at school, primary school, there'd be many areas of the school, but there was one area in the school, and the door was always closed, and it was like the sacred area.

Nobody knew what was behind the door. It was the Holy of Holies. It was the staff recreation room. And no people knew what was behind that door.

Every now and again, though, you would be passing in the passage, and the door would be slightly open, and the kids would be like, What's in there? What is in the Holy of Holies? One day, I was shocked, because I walked past, and I saw a school pupil inside that room.

And I thought, How can they break the rules like that? But then it turned out that they were the son of one of the teachers. And they were with their mom. And so, they were allowed to, not because they wanted to, but because of who they were with.

And Jesus is using the same concept here, that these rules that you are imposing, you Pharisees are imposing, don't apply to my disciples, all because of who they're with.

[16:44] That's the point he's trying to make. And the story he uses to make this point is the story of David. Now, if you don't know the story, in summary, David was the anointed king, the Messiah of Israel, the anointed one, the one that God had raised up to lead his people.

But, before he was enthroned, he was already anointed, but before he was enthroned, the incumbent king, Saul, wanted him dead.

And so, he was on the run from Saul, and a number of men followed David, became his followers, and they were hiding out in the desert. They were hungry, and the only bread available was this bread, the sacred bread in the temple.

And so, they went in there, and because it was David, the priest allowed them to eat this sacred bread. Because these men were following the Messiah, because of who they were with, they were allowed to not have to be bound by these rules.

And Jesus is saying the same thing here. He's making a very bold statement about his own identity. He's saying, you know what? They can eat that stuff on the Sabbath. It's fine because of who I am, and they're with me.

[17:49] But not just, this is important, not just because he's the Messiah. He goes on to make a profound claim that they can do this on the Sabbath, not just because I'm the Messiah, and I'm with them like David, but because I'm the one who fulfills the whole meaning of the Sabbath anyway.

So not just, oh, well, they can break the rules for fun. That's not what he's saying. He's not saying to Christians either, well, if you're a Christian, you can just break the rules and do what you want. He's saying, the rules don't apply because I fulfill the rules, and by following me, they're already fulfilling the whole meaning of the Sabbath anyway.

That's what he's saying. Look what he says next. Look at how he puts it in verse 27 to 28. Then he told them, the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. So then, the Son of Man himself is Lord even of the Sabbath.

You know, last week we had, you know, what would be the headline verse? What would be the big news if there was a newspaper published in that day? Well, the big headline would be Jesus claims to be Lord of the Sabbath.

You know, that's a big thing he's saying. It's huge. He's saying again that he's fundamentally, his arrival has changed how you view religion, how you view law keeping, and how you view the Sabbath.

[ 19 : 15 ] He says, the Sabbath was made for man. That's how he starts. And what he means by that is the Sabbath was meant always, even when it was imposed in Moses' times on the Jews, it was meant to bless people.

It was meant to be for their good. It was meant to be a blessing, not a burden. It was meant to be a day where you stop and you don't feel the pressure of having to carry on going and you can just enjoy God and his gifts without feeling like you have to earn them.

That's the heart of the Sabbath commandment. It's actually a good thing for the Jews. But what Jesus is showing here is that by his time it had been so twisted out of shape that it was doing the very opposite of what it was designed to do.

It was becoming a burden rather than a blessing. And that's then what he makes clear to the Pharisees that they had made God's good law into a burden that doesn't give life and that doesn't bless.

Which is typically where any kind of law-keeping based religion ends up. Not as a blessing but as a burden. And he makes this point quite clearly in chapter 3.

[ 20 : 28 ] Have a look in your Bibles from verse 1. Jesus entered the synagogue again and a man was there who had a shriveled hand. In order to accuse him they were watching him closely to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath.

He told the man with the shriveled hand stand before us. Shame. I feel sorry for this guy. You know this guy is sitting in the back he's got the shriveled hand he's probably embarrassed about it.

But Jesus wants to make a point. He could have just left him and gone to his house afterwards and healed him. That's fine. He could have waited until Monday or Sunday the next day and healed him. Fine. But he doesn't. He wants to make a point about the Sabbath. And so he says to this guy stand before us. Verse 4 Then he said to them this is the Pharisees he's confronting is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath or to do evil?

To save life or to kill? Hmm? They were silent. See the point he's trying to make is you guys have totally lost the point of the Sabbath and all of God's laws.

[ 21 : 34 ] You distorted the point of the Sabbath. And then he goes on to show them what the point of the Sabbath really is and that he is the one who can achieve what the Sabbath was always meant to achieve as the Lord of the Sabbath in doing this in verse 5.

After looking around at them with anger he was grieved at the hardness of their hearts and he told them he told the man stretch out your hand.

So he stretched it out and his hand was restored. See the Sabbath was meant always to point to life and new creation.

The seventh day the day God rested of creation which pointed to the future rest that he wants all people to enjoy in his creation. The point of the Sabbath was to point to that new creation life not to be associated with burden and restriction and the stopping of life.

And that's why Jesus was so angry. Can you understand why he was so angry? This word look at verse 5 again. He looked around at them with anger that word anger it's the only time it appears in Mark it's the only time it describes what Jesus is feeling he is really angry here because they had taken something that is meant for the good of God's people and they had made it the opposite.

[ 23 : 04 ] They had made it the one thing restricting them from enjoying God's the freedom and life and good gifts that the Sabbath is meant to point towards.

Imagine that there was a girl who was getting ready for her matric dance and she was looking forward to it and she had a special dress and she had anticipated this matric dance and her father has a fancy car and he says you know what I'm going to let my son your brother who's a little bit older than you drive use my car to drive you to the matric dance so you can make a cool arrival and

she's so excited and he gives his key to his son and says you know what to do okay I'm giving you this so you can show your sister a good time and that she can really have a nice arrival but now the night before the matric dance he decides to take it out for a joy ride and he crashes it and because he crashes it now she can't go to the matric dance at all she can't get there alright now imagine how angry the father would be he gave his son this responsibility in order to bless his sister and yet now it's actually preventing her from being able to go and enjoy this and that is how Jesus feels here because the Jews have taken these laws which were meant to be a blessing and a freedom and show life show a way to life for his people and they had taken it and they twisted it so away from what it was that it prevented his people from having life and now it had just become religious rules that were a burden and Jesus is angry he's really cross when people see the freedoms that he comes to bring and the freedoms that God wants to give us and the blessing that God wants to give us and people take that and they twist it out of shape so it's a burden and following rules and ticking boxes

Jesus doesn't only go that's not the point he's angry when people do that really angry because we're taking something good and making it something that stops us from enjoying God and then what he goes on to show of course in this miracle is that not only does the Sabbath law fail to give the blessing it was meant to but it doesn't need to anymore now that he's come and he's the one who can bring about what the Sabbath was always pointing to in bringing in bringing real life real restoration and that's why the story ends with a very ironic statement look at verse 6 look at the irony in this immediately the Pharisees went out and started plotting with the Herodians against him how they might kill him see what's happening here the law breaker the one who is technically breaking the law Jesus fulfills the real purpose of the Sabbath while the law keepers show that their hearts are actually against the law in wanting to kill him and that really is the end of all law keeping religion law keeping the stringent box ticking of law keeping religion actually shows people's hearts to be truly against what

God really wants because essentially what law keeping is a law keeping religion is ticking boxes so that I can feel good that I've done my duty so I can go off and do what I want to do so it's the opposite of actually fulfilling the purpose of what God wants and that's what Jesus is trying to point out here and that's what Mark points out in showing us how it ends so ironic the ones that are most stringent about the law the ones who are actually ending up breaking the heart of the law and wanting and plotting to murder Jesus okay so that's what this I hope you see the point of why this is in Mark and what Jesus is teaching here but the question is what does it mean for us today how do we apply that to us today well I think the first thing we need to take from this is a warning not to fall for the appeal of law keeping Christianity the Pharisees were the most popular Jewish religious sect of the day and that was for a good reason and that is because our hearts love law keeping actually deep down inside we might say no we want to be free but actually we want to know a list of things to do so that we can feel good about ourselves and justify ourselves we actually deep down inside we love the idea of law keeping the Pharisees were the most popular

Jewish sect for that very reason law keeping makes us feel good about ourselves and just as the Jews love their law keeping so can Christians today you see it far more than you should because people don't understand what Jesus is trying to say here and that is a major problem in Christianity and it always has been Paul in his epistles writes against this very problem over and over again in Galatians essentially the whole letter of Galatians is written to correct these Christians who had been sucked back into Jewish law keeping and he says he uses some very strong language in the book of Galatians Galatians 3:1 he says you foolish Galatians you idiots he's saying this is Paul okay he doesn't hold his punches he writes strongly to show them how they completely missed the point of Jesus coming if they still feel that they have to tick these boxes and keep these laws and then he says later on in Galatians 3:10 he says for all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse they're under a curse you curse yourselves if you continue to think that law keeping is the way to be right with

[ 28:51 ] God again in Colossians he writes this who the Colossian Christians were also they had heard about Jesus they had come to faith in Jesus and yet they were going back into the habits of trying to tick boxes and keep laws and so Paul writes to them he says don't let anyone judge you in regard to food and drink or in the matter of a festival or a new moon or a sabbath day and then he tells you why these are a shadow of what was to come the substance of them is Christ the substance of them is Christ all of these laws of the old testament were meant to do one thing and one thing alone and that is to point to Jesus Christ and to point to how he fulfills all of it for his

people for those who follow him as their Lord and Messiah and that is why following Jesus today is keeping the sabbath that's what the bible teaches

Hebrews chapter 4 makes that exact point following Jesus is keeping the sabbath now Hebrews 4 9 to 10 says therefore a sabbath rest remains for God's people for the person who has entered his rest the rest that Jesus brings us has rested from his works just as God did from his he's saying by following Jesus the point that the writer to the Hebrews is making is by following Jesus you actually are fulfilling the sabbath and Jesus himself says come to me all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest I will give you sabbath if you come to me because you see we truly rest from our works all works when we trust in Jesus Christ and his work his finished work for us because the real work that God actually wants us to rest from which is the heart of the sabbath command is the work of self justification that's the one pastor puts it that's the work behind all other work all the stress we feel about having to work and do stuff underneath all of that is to feel that we need to justify ourselves to feel that we need to build our identity and our value on the things that we do and because

Jesus came and because he died on the cross for our sins and took all our sins on himself he wants us to build our identity and value not on what we do but on what he's done for us and so the real sabbath happens when we truly rely on Jesus works and not our own that's when we start to experience real rest that no amount of law keeping can give and so to break free from the burden of the law and to find its real purpose comes through following Jesus as Lord being with him like David's men were even when it took them into the desert paths they followed David into the desert we follow Jesus now in this world when before he's returned to take up his rule of all governments and all peoples his people are on the run they're fugitives they are wanting to be shut down just like the

Jews wanted to shut Jesus down here and so we can find true rest but only in following Jesus like David's men followed him into the desert okay so what about the Sabbath in closing what does that mean about Christians and the Sabbath are we bound to obey the Sabbath no we are not we wouldn't anyway because the Sabbath is on a Saturday not a Sunday because you see Sunday is not the Sabbath it's not even the Christian version of the Sabbath Sunday is the day we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ see Sunday is the first day of the week Sabbath is the last it's the first day of the new creation and so what we do on Sunday and the reason we do keep Sunday special and we do stop and we come to church and set aside this time for this is not as a law to keep a law it's to celebrate the resurrection and look forward to the new creation and it's a day when we can rest in

Christ not rest in our own works of ticking boxes and being religious but rest in the finished work of Christ and enjoy God and his gifts not as a law but as a delight and if this day Sunday coming to church and doing this and being here and worshipping God and being reminded of all that he's done for us and getting a bigger view of him if this is not a delight for you then maybe you've missed the point and maybe you still need to come and find the real rest from your works that only Jesus can give you let's pray Lord we thank you for your law but we thank you for how it is all fulfilled in Jesus Christ your son who came to give us freedom came to make a way for us to enjoy you and your good gifts in the new creation forever through his death on the cross we pray

[ 34 : 35 ] Lord that we would never be sucked back into a law keeping Christianity but we would enjoy the great freedom that Jesus disciples wherever that leads and that we would anticipate and look forward to the new creation that is coming in Jesus name Amen