

Sermon at Sunnyside – 2 June 2024: 0900 and 1030

### **God's law or man's rules? Jesus' authority tested.**

I'm sure we all have our own reaction to the petty and often infuriating rules which plague so much of our social interaction. There have always been people who take issue against freedoms by imposing by-laws restricting when you can or cannot do something, that at another time would be perfectly acceptable.

Walking a dog, playing games, crossing some grass...

Some rules are there for our personal and community safety and we ignore them at our peril... even when the road seems perfectly clear but there is a temporary speed limit which I failed to observe and now have the opportunity of attending a Motorway Driving Refresher Course!

Jesus came head to head with the Pharisees on many occasions and our gospel reading today describes how he challenged their embellishment of God's Law

#### Context

- Jesus' healing ministry
  - 1:21 Capernaum: driving out evil spirit. "A new teaching – and with authority."
  - 1:30 Simon Peter's mother-in-law
  - 1:34 Many with various diseases
  - 1:39 Driving out demons (would not let them speak)
  - 1:40 Man with leprosy (Don't tell anyone)
  - 2:1 Capernaum: paralytic let through roof. "Your sins are forgiven"
    - Pharisees claimed was blasphemy as only God can forgive sins.
    - Jesus: Son of Man has authority to forgive sins...
      - Claiming messiahship
- Pharisees challenge: "Why does he..." contravene the law
  - Hatred and antagonism from early days of ministry

#### Circumstance

- Jesus and disciples walking on Sabbath
  - Rabbinical rule restricted to 1999 steps (Sabbath Day's journey)
- Picking ears of corn
  - Picking was OK

- Harvesting and threshing forbidden
  - Myriad of Rabbinical Rules added to burden Jews about Sabbath Observance
- Pharisees keeping eye on Jesus, challenging his actions
  - No authority:
    - Self-appointed pressure group keeping eye on public morals and wayward preachers.
  - Great influence on ordinary Jews
    - Sabbath observance marked out the faithful Jew
    - Following minutiae of rules makes me a better faithful Jew...
- Another Sabbath: another healing.
- Pharisees watching closely. Jesus knew their thoughts
- Simply told man to stretch out his hand, now healed.

### Consequences

- Challenged religious knowledge (and authority) of Pharisees... “Have you never read...”
- David was the Great King and Hero to Pharisees
- Reference to 1 Samuel 21:1-6
  - David and his men were hungry. Asked for the Shewbread from the Table of the Presence.
  - Bread restricted to use by priests when replaced at each sabbath.
  - David seen to have authority as anointed, but uncrowned, king.
  - Jesus claiming his authority as anointed, but uncrowned, king.
    - “Son of Man” = messianic title from Daniel 7:13
- Jesus restated God’s purpose of Sabbath
  - To keep it “holy” – set apart for celebrating and worshipping God (Ex. 20:8)
  - For rest from work (Ex. 23:12)
    - Of the people, servants, animals and the land.
  - For doing good
  - Made for humankind’s benefit, to celebrate, not to be celebrated.
  - Claimed messianic authority over Sabbath, as God’s gift of freedom, not burden
  - Disciples only breaking with Rabbinical tradition, not scriptural teaching.
- Healing on another Sabbath
  - Can one do good deeds on the Sabbath?

- Rules allowed to save human lives (Essenes even not allow rescue animal in distress - Pharisees did allow this. Matt 12:11))
- Could not minister medication if not at risk. Leave until next day. “Come back tomorrow to see the doctor!”
- Jesus displays his limit to his compassion with anger and sorrow

## Considerations

- What is mandate for Sabbath?
  - Creation account:
    - [Gen. 2:2] God rested on the seventh day, blessed and made it holy
  - Ten commandments
    - [Ex 20:8-11] Keep Sabbath holy.
  - Other Laws
    - [Ex. 23:12] 6 days work, 7<sup>th</sup> for rest and relief and refreshment
  - Rabbinical rules laid burden with minutiae of observance
    - Sabbath created for mankind’s benefit, not burden.
- Christian equivalence
  - Sunday observance
    - Early church, (being Jewish) honoured Sabbath, but also worshiped together on Sunday, being Day of Resurrection of Jesus
    - Secularised with sport, shopping.
      - Is it just the same as every other day?
    - Personal discipline to keep holy
      - Limit activities which can be done on other days
      - Sport for children
        - Saturday league for church teams to join
        - Come to church before or after.
          - What would help?
      - “How may I best use this day to the glory of God, to the blessing of my neighbour, and to my spiritual good?”
  - Does day of rest have to be Sunday?
    - Only as much as best time for Christians to gather for worship
    - [Rom. 14:5-6]; Do all to honour God, on whichever day in whichever way. Don’t judge nor allow weaker brethren to fall.
    - Can we recapture true essence of sabbath rest, in today’s commercial and exploitative world?
    - How to rediscover rhythm of work and rest.

- Modern “Rabbinical Rules”
  - Equivalence in our Christian tradition
    - Do these help or hinder honouring God?
    - Do they achieve purpose of rest, relief and refreshment?
      - What we wear
        - Cosmetics?
        - “Suitable” clothing
      - What we do
        - Shopping, cinema, sport?
        - Dancing, Night clubs?
  - Must not restrain the liberty in the gospel of Christ
    - [Romans 8:21] Our liberty as the children of God
    - John Calvin puts the point well when he says that we restrain the exercise of our freedom for the sake of weak believers, but not when we are faced with Pharisees who demand that we conform to what is unscriptural. Where the gospel is at stake, liberty needs to be exercised; where the stability of a weak Christian is at stake, we need to restrain it.
      - Challenge or permit?
    - Styles and traditions of worship
      - How to sing, how to pray

## Challenge

- Response to Jesus:
  - [Mar 3:5] Called man with withered hand
    - He responded
      - Willingly? To heal hand
      - Reluctantly? Not want to be involved in argument
  - Jesus calls us to wholeness in him
    - How do we respond?
      - Are we so blinded to “necessary rules” that we fail to see God’s healing and restorative work in world around us?
        - Are we willing to be identified? Or afraid?
  - If Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath, is he also Lord of our lives?
  - Do I honour him as Lord of my life?