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Telling the Sculpter How to Sculpt?

The ships Captain looked off into the dark night and saw some faint lights in the distant horizon. He called up his signalman on deck instructing him to immediately flash the message. "Alter your course 10 degrees south" A return message promptly answered "Alter your course 10 degrees north." Having had his command ignored the old ship captain got a bit angry. So he sent a second message, "Alter your course 10 degrees south, I am the Captain!" The reply message came back; "Alter your course 10 degrees north. I am seaman third class Jones." Immediately the captain forcefully sent off a third message knowing the fear it would invoke in this poor little third class seaman. The message? "Alter your course 10 degrees south...I am a battleship." The reply came quickly, "Alter your course 10 degrees north...I am a lighthouse"

We can have all sorts of foggy dark times in our lives. There are all sorts of different voices trying to tell us which way to go, what to do and not do, how to adjust the course of our life. There are those who tell us to add things, others who tell us to strip away certain things. Friends may tell us one way to go, our desires may point us one way, our perceived need may send us in another way. Yet, out of the darkness, there is one voice that calls to us. It's a voice that is often signalling something quite the opposite to the rest, sometimes its message seems absurd, but if we fail to listen, fail to follow the Light of the World, we will put ourselves in danger. Failure allow Jesus to call the shots in our lives will ultimately lead to our ship crashing on the rocks.

So often we decide on a course for our life without any regard to what Jesus may want us to be doing. Sometimes we are cruising through life and Jesus steps in and says. Hey, it's time to step out of that comfortable coach you've been sitting on for the last five years. I have some great things all planned for you. It's time to take a change of direction. Have you experienced a restlessness? Maybe a pull by God to head in a different direction, but you are so used to calling the shots in your own life, making all the decisions that you are not able to notice

when Light of the World says, It's time to alter your course, the way your battleship is cruising is going to be of no help for your physical or spiritual well being..it's time to let me start setting the standard. It's time to let Jesus begin calling the shots and having the authority, His rightful place in your life.

Our study in Mark climaxes in the conflict between Jesus and the religious authorities. Jesus has been unveiling who He is to His disciples and also establishing His authority to the religious leaders. The more encounters they have with Jesus the more agitated they become, the more Jesus shows of who he really is and what He came to do, the more threatened they feel. Their stable power base is being challenged. The safety of the rules they built around themselves is being crumbled away. They fear loss of control, loss of stability, loss of power. They have watched as Jesus forgave sins and proved to the crowd that He had that authority, because he healed the paralytic. He ate with sinners, feasted instead of fasted, he told them He had come to burst some old worn out wineskins, not just putting a patch on the old system, but bringing in something totally new, and now in Mark 2:23-Mark 3:6 Jesus is threatening the icon of Pharasaic Judaism...Jesus clearly states He has authority over the Sabboth. Authority to flex their manmade rules concerning the Sabboth. (READ)

What I want to do this morning is first work through the passage and flesh out some of the meaning and context. Then we can glean out some principles that we can apply to our lives.

In verse 23 the scene is set for us along a field of grain on the Sabboth Day. Jesus and his disciples are walking, talking. As they walk they reach down to strip off a few heads of grain. They probably roll the heads in their hands, crushing the husks and leaving the grain kernal. This would make a great commercial for a multigrain cereal. Their leisurely walk is interrupted by a group of ever critical Pharisees. They are the Sabboth police and they stop the group inquiring as to why they are unlawfully breaking the Sabboth. They were not concerned that Jesus was stealing the farmer's grain, the taking a handful of grain was an accepted practice and even referred to in Deut 23:25 as long as no reaping equipment was used to harvest. The Pharasees were concerned that Jesus was being too lax on observing the Sabboth Day. They felt

His handful of wheat was work and the Law was very clear about working on the Sabbath. They question Jesus; why don't you obey the Sabbath Laws?

Sabbath comes from the Hebrew word Shabbot meaning to cease or stop. The idea is to stop all work. Originally intended as a time of rest it also came to be a great time to worship God. Now it's helpful to know that the Pharisee were much more rigid in their keeping of the Sabbath than the Old Testament Law required. They restricted travel to about 3000 feet from your house during the Sabbath Day. Any travel over 3000 feet they decided would definitely be work. Those who are pregnant would possibly agree with that. But there was also ways to get around the 3000 foot mark. If one took a lunch with them walked 3000 feet and then ate the lunch, he could call that lunch stop a legal residence and then walk an additional 3000 feet. Not a bad way to travel if you get to stop and eat every 3000 feet. If one of your barrels of liquid sprung a leak on the Sabbath it was illegal to plug the hole by using a little wax. It was illegal to wipe a wound. Illegal to move a sheaf of grain on your field. However there were ways to get around that as well. A farmer could stick his commonly used spoon into the grain, in order to move the spoon he must also must the grain as well. The Sabbath was based way back in Genesis in the creation account. Remember that after God worked His miracle of creation for six days, He then rested on the seventh. The Sabbath was made for man to enjoy. It was to be a joyful time of rest and relaxation enjoying the things of God and His people. God knew it wasn't good for people to work constantly. We need a break. We need a time to come away and regain perspective and spiritual recharging. The principle of the Sabbath is that we need rest. It's for our own benefit. Observation of the Sabbath is one of the Old Testament ten commandments, however, its' the only one of the ten that is not repeated in the New testament. Why are all the other nine commandments repeated at least four time each and yet no commandment for us to observe the Sabbath? Well, I believe that a specific day Sabbath Observance was not repeated it the New Testament, not because the principle is bad. The principle of the Sabbath still is valid we need rest, we need some down time, we need time of focus on God and spiritual things. The reason a command to observe the Sabbath on a specific is

not repeated is due to its tendency to cater to legalism. We see how devious it had become in Jesus' day and its inherently legalistic pitfalls today. We are called to rest and called to worship for our own benefit. We are to be worshipping God every day and thinking the things of God not just on one specific day but every day. God does not want to limit our praise of His glory nor confine us in ways that shackle us to a list of do's and don'ts that define what is spiritual. He's much more interested in our love for him than whether we follow a list. As Jesus tells the Pharisees, "The Sabbath was created for man, not man for the Sabbath." The Sabbath was for the benefit to serve man, man should not become a slave to the Sabbath. Because the Sabbath observance was an icon of pharasaic Judaism, the principle of rest is still valid today, but the specific day is no longer of consequence in the age of grace. Jesus came to bring something new and fresh. He came to bring grace and love that supercedes the Old Testament Law, not superceded in principle...but superceded by giving something better.

It's a lot like the widower whose wife had died of cancer and with three children, hired a housekeeper to clean, cook the meals and care for the kids. His conversations with the housekeeper were very business like. He instructed her as to the kinds of meals, the times they would be served, the bedtimes and desires for discipline of the children. She was obedient to His wishes and tried to follow them as best she could. Well, after several years the man and the housekeeper began to fall in love. They married and became husband and wife. The husband no longer told the woman how to do things and did not oversee her work to ensure the quality. He doesn't tell her what to cook for dinner, because they are in a relationship of love. Now she delights to do his will. She actively seeks out what his desires are and wants to please. She will ask him what he wants for dinner and goes to extra work to do it. She is operating not under the housekeeper contract, not under Law, but under love, under grace. God has given us the privilege to choose to love not because we are mandated by Law, but because we are motivated by grace.

In verse 25 Jesus answers the Pharisees' critical concern of Sabbath breaking with a story about David, the anointed King of Israel. David and His men were on the run and hungry. They needed food so

they went to the nearest temple and asked for the consecrated bread, the show bread that was sacrificed before the Lord. Only priests were allowed to eat this bread, yet God did not condemn David for His actions. He acted for the benefit of His men who were in need. The principle of providing for the needs of men was not violated. Because of David's position future king, he had the authority to override the rules and yet uphold a higher principle, the saving of the lives of his men. Jesus uses this illustration to compare Himself with the same authority that David had. Jesus has the right to flex the rules, to set the standard, to be able to provide for those in need who follow Him. Jesus is claiming the priority to set the rules, to establish the standard. Jesus clearly states, "I am the Lord of the Sabbath" You Pharisees are not the one's who are going to make me turn 10 degrees to the north,.. You may think your an imposing Battleship not to be messed with, but I am the Lighthouse. I am the one who calls the shots. It was the creator who made the Sabbath. The Pharisees trying to force their legalism onto Jesus was almost laughable. It was like telling the Sculpter how to sculpt, trying to finish a master painter's painting. You just don't do it. Jesus is the one who sets the standard.

In the first 6 verses of chapter 3 we see the Pharisees just don't give up. They are in the synagoge...it's Sabbath day again and Jesus is there teaching. They are just hoping to catch Him working on the Sabbath so they can put a nail or two in His coffin. They were looking for a way to discredit Jesus in front of the people, He was threatening their authority and power. So, there is a man in the crowd who has a withered hand. Jesus has him stand up and walk to the center of the room so that all can see him. While the man is standing in the middle of the room, possibly a bit uncomfortable, because all the eyes are looking at his deformed hands, the Pharisees and then back to Jesus. Look at verse 4 "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save a life or to kill?" Well, not only was it legal to save a life on the Sabbath, it was illegal to kill all seven days a week. The answer was quite obvious. They could have countered that a withered hand is hardly a life and death situation. They might of asked him to wait until Sabbath was over that evening. But there response was silence. There is no excuse for a legalism that merely for the sake of upholding orthodoxy fails to do good,

thereby produces evil. To withhold God's healing power and not to heal would be to deprive this man of God's restoring power. Just as Jesus healed the paralyzed man who was let down through the roof and forgave the man's sin. Here Jesus healed the man with a withered hand.

Every healing that Jesus performed established the presence of the Saviour. This one was brought into a right relationship with God through Jesus healing ministry. He saved this man's life. All the Pharisees could do was sit there with their mouths shut. Was it because they had become convinced of Jesus' arguments and finally persuaded by His miracles as to who He really was? No. Their silence and subsequent response showed their perception of a much larger issue. It was much deeper than merely a challenge of their interpretation of the Law. Jesus had drawn a line in the sand. This who I am and what I'm about. What are you going to do with me? Believe or reject? He called for a decision about His person and ministry. In the Pharisees' corner there is only silence. Jesus, who can see through our skin into our minds and hearts, sees a rock of rebellion and blindness in the Pharisees. The word used to describe Jesus' action of "looking around" is an all-inclusive penetrating look. He sees their hearts and attitudes and thoughts and it grieves him. He's angry at the blindfolds they wrap around their own eyes and the eyes of the people. He's angry at religion that has elevated itself above doing good. He's angry at a group of people who know they are right. And they are right...dead right. Jesus then says to the man in verse 5, "stretch out your hand." He demonstrates His power to all who will see. To all who will choose to see. In verse 6 the Pharisees do not choose to recognize God's power, as they plot to kill, plot to destroy Jesus. Isn't a bit ironic that these men who were so concerned about Jesus violating the Sabbath Law by picking a few grains of wheat and healing a man's hand on the Sabbath, are now on the Sabbath plotting to kill someone.

What are some things we can learn from this passage? What can we take home and allow God to work on in our own lives?

- 1) Allow God to set the Standard. We may think we are the all-powerful Captain of Battleship, the master of our destiny. We may think like the Pharisees that we can change the rules to suit our needs. God is practical. He has our very best interest in mind. He knows our needs, our true needs. We are not the ones to be adding to the lists of

rules...We are not the ones to be subtracting from His desires when they are not convenient for us. Mere desires do not justify need. Sinning cannot be justified based on need alone. Jesus is the Light house, the one who has the authority to establish priority and principle. Jesus came to minister to man's need and release us from the bondage of Legalism to the freedom of grace.

2) Focus on the principle or "spirit" of the Law. Don't look at just what's required or what you can get away with. Serve out of love for God. You are not a contractually bound housekeeper. We are in a committed relationship with Jesus. It should be our delight to love and serve Him. We should be actively finding out and doing the things that would please him. God wants to spend time with Him. We need our rest. Seek to spend time with him not in a legalistic way, because you have to, but because that is truly your desire. Look for the living by the principle and not the letter of the Law.

This week let's look for ways that we can cause Jesus to rejoice. The Pharisees were blinded. They failed to see God's miraculous power or healing. I think it's easy for us to miss God's working in our lives. Are you actively recognizing a change in where you used to be? Has there been some healing in your life? Have you seen God working in some of your friends and family members? Are you actively looking to see God at work? Then praise Him for it. Rejoice when you see His power. I would hate to see us as a people be those who dot all our i's and cross all our t's... but still spell the word wrong. True spirituality does not consist in what one does not do, it is rather what one does. It is not suppression: it is expression. It is not holding in self: it is living out Christ. Allow the Sculptor to Sculpt, rejoice in Him as we are allowed to see His masterpiece be worked in us.

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When you're up to your ears in crocodiles, its no time to talk about draining the swamp.

Christians today are trying to mop up the water while leaving the faucet running.

In the summer of 1968, several Swiss research scientist developed a time-keeping technology using a special type of quartz. When they brought this technology to their superiors, they were laughed at. So what if it was many times more accurate than current watch technology. It didn't have gears. It didn't have wind-up springs. It didn't have meticulously engineered movable parts. People wanted the security that their watch was a piece of fine engineering. Who would buy a watch run by a vibrating quartz that you couldn't even wind?

Discouraged that what they had found was nothing more than a novelty, these engineers didn't even bother to apply for a patent for their new invention. Later that year, they displayed their technology at a small booth at a national watchmakers convention and found a group of watchmakers from another company — a Japanese company called Seiko — were very interested in learning all about what they had discovered.

In 1968, the Swiss held 65% of the world marketshare and 80% of the profit in the business of making watch watches. By 1978, the Swiss held less than 10% of the world marketshare. In the ten years following that watchmaker's convention, 50,000 out of the original 65,000 watchmakers had lost their jobs. The Swiss have never regained their position of leadership in the world market for watches.

For the Swiss, the cost of frozen categories — the fear and inability to embrace the new — was disasterous.

But such questions actually illustrate the distinction between religion which preserves the stories and spirituality based upon principles upon which the faith is based, and spirituality, which reencounters the faith

experience to which the stories and principles witness. Clearly, natural human power can accomplish religion, but not spirituality. That is why men are more comfortable with religion than with spirituality. We are most anxious to control what we most fear. One who fears relationship will therefore try to control his or her relationship with God as well as with other persons. Men most commonly do this through systems of law and institutional hierarchies, which reduce relationship to some manageable form. Similarly, we men may seek to allay our fear of a Living God by writing elaborate “systematic theologies,” believing we can use those theologies to keep the “hound of heaven” on a leash of rationality.

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