

Sabbath Healings *and* Hard Hearts



SABBATH AFTERNOON

TROUBLE BREWING. It wasn't long before controversy started to swirl around Jesus. And that's not hard to understand. Anyone saying what He said, and doing what He did, would create controversy.

And yet, it's not all trouble. Besides the Sabbath healing, we follow Jesus as He ordains the Twelve to ministry, this motley group who will change the world forever. And we see Jesus, too, dealing with His own human family and their own misunderstanding of Him and His mission.

But most of all, this week we get another glimpse of the life and ministry of our Savior, whose every word, every act—even when accused of being in league with Satan or of being a Sabbath breaker—should help us love Him even more.

The Week at a Glance: Why did Jesus do healings on the Sabbath? What was the real issue behind the Pharisees' hatred of Christ? What were they trying to protect? What is the unpardonable sin? Why did Jesus mention it when He did?

Scripture Passage for the Week: *Mark 2:23–3:35.*

Memory Text: “And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath” (*Mark 2:27, 28*).

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 16.*

Made for Man *(Mark 2:23-28)*.

Read the account in Mark 2:23-28. Analyze Jesus' answer to the scribes and Pharisees. What was the principle for David's actions? In this specific context, what does Jesus mean when He says that the Sabbath was "made for man"? What does that teach us about how we should experience the Sabbath ourselves?

In the world of Jesus' day, two characteristics set the Hebrew nation apart from other people—they worshiped one God instead of many gods, and they refrained from work on the seventh day. Centuries earlier, when they were a free nation, they failed on both these matters, falling into idolatry and Sabbath breaking. Prophet after prophet warned them of the disastrous course on which they were headed, but they continued their downward spiritual slide. Eventually they were carried away captive—the ten northern tribes by Assyria and the Southern Kingdom of Judah 140 years later by the Babylonians.

When they returned from Babylonian captivity, they tried hard to avoid the errors that had led to their earlier loss of nationhood. Attempting to put a hedge around the Sabbath, they formulated detailed lists of what was permitted and not permitted.

The *Mishnah*, the codified traditional law of the Jews, lists 39 major types of labor prohibited on the Sabbath. But "these general regulations were further explained in minute detail. In addition to these major regulations there were countless other provisions concerning the observance of the Sabbath. Most commonly known, perhaps, is the so-called 'Sabbath day's journey' of 2,000 cub.—some-what less than 2/3 mi. . . . It was also counted as Sabbathbreaking to look in a mirror fixed to the wall . . . , or even to light a candle. . . . It was counted unlawful to expectorate [spit] upon the ground, lest thereby a blade of grass be irrigated. It was not permissible to carry a handkerchief on the Sabbath, unless one end of it be sewed to one's garment—in which case it was no longer technically a handkerchief but part of the garment."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 587.

Whereas the Jewish leaders had become obsessed with detailed regulations, Jesus restored the Sabbath to the purpose for which He created it. The Sabbath was not meant to be a burden but a delight. It was to be a day of worship, relaxation, and restoration; a day of joy; a day that contributes to the happiness of others.

We are told to call the Sabbath a "delight" (*Isa. 58:13*) and to "keep it holy" (*Exod. 20:8*). What is your concept of "delight" and what it means to be "holy"? Why should there be no contradiction between these ideas? How can we make both a part of our Sabbath experience?

The Man With the Withered Hand

Read Mark 3:1-6. Why do you think the leaders wanted to kill Jesus? Was it because He healed on the Sabbath day? Or was there something else going on, a much bigger issue at stake for them? See also John 11:48, Acts 17:6.

Even on the Sabbath, a day for worship and contemplation of heavenly things, the enemies of Jesus could not keep their minds off Him. Instead of opening their hearts to the blessings that God had for them through the reading of Scripture, prayer, and fellowship, they kept their eyes fixed on Jesus, waiting to see if they might find an opportunity to accuse Him. They wanted to “prove” that He was a Sabbath breaker, but they themselves were breaking the Sabbath in their hearts.

Mark says that Jesus was grieved because of the hardness of their hearts. Yet, the hardness wasn’t over their firm belief in how the Sabbath should be kept, but it was over their attitude toward Jesus. He threatened their power; He threatened their religious and political influence over the people. That’s why they hated Him so much. Of course, they couldn’t come right out and say that, so they needed to make up some excuses, anything they could find, in order to accuse Him and thus weaken His power. Thus, their fear of losing influence so blinded them that instead of rejoicing in the great power of God being manifested before them by the miracle of the healing, they accused Christ of Sabbath breaking.

Read Mark 3:4. Why didn’t they respond to Christ’s question? Shouldn’t they have had an answer? What does their silence reveal about their true motives?

As human beings, we have a frightening ability to mask our true motives under the cloak of piety or holiness, and what makes it so frightening is that we don’t just cloak it before others, but we cloak it before ourselves. How can we be sure that our religious motives for what we do are pure, or if we are, in our own way, doing the same thing as the Pharisees?

The Twelve Apostles *(Mark 3:7-19).*

This lesson marks an important expansion of Jesus' ministry. Previously He had called various individuals to follow Him; that is, to be disciples. As His fame grew and as He traveled around Galilee, the band of followers continued to grow. It was now time to select some from among the many for a special work.

Mark 3:7-14 gives us a brief but vivid portrayal of the strength of Jesus' movement in Galilee by this time. What do the verses say about the popularity of Christ? In what ways might the answer explain why He decided, at that point, to ordain people to work with Him?

At the height of His popularity Jesus withdrew to a mountainside. Luke supplies an important detail—He spent the night in prayer (*Luke 6:12*). Jesus faced an important decision and, as was His custom, He sought His Father's guidance.

What were the two purposes that Jesus intended for the twelve people He selected to be apostles? *Mark 3:13-19*. What larger purpose, though, was intended? *See Matt. 10:5-15, Mark 16:15*.

The word *apostle* literally means “one who is sent.” The Twelve whom Jesus called would be sent out to preach and to drive out demons. That is, they would be an extension of His ministry while He was still on earth, and after He returned to the Father they would carry on His work. But before being sent, they were to be “with Him”—observing His methods and becoming like Him in character.

As we look at the Twelve, we see a mix of backgrounds, personalities, strengths, and weaknesses. Several were fishermen, one a tax-collector, another a member of the zealots, a strongly nationalistic faction that at times resorted to violence. Simon Peter, bold and impetuous, had much to learn. James and John were fiery tempered. And then there was Judas Iscariot, who would betray Jesus.

There were so many other people in Israel—learned, eloquent, erudite, rich—who could have, it would seem, made a much better nucleus for this new movement. And yet, Jesus chose this bunch? What lessons are here for us about (1) judging the outward character of others, (2) judging another person's spiritual potential, (3) judging what characteristics we deem important in people engaged in ministry?

Jesus and Beelzebub *(Mark 3:22-30)*

The miracles of Jesus were too many and too amazing to deny. A power more than human was at work in Him, but the spies who dogged His footsteps seeking to find grounds to accuse Him refused to admit the obvious—that He was the Son of God. Instead, they tried to argue that Jesus was in league with Beelzebub, the devil.

How did Jesus answer the claim of the critics that He was in league with the devil? *Mark 3:22-27*.

By a simple but effective reply Jesus demolished the accusation of the teachers of the law. Jesus' work tore down the kingdom of Satan: He cast out demons, healed the sick, and set men and women free from the chains of sin and bad habits by which they were bound. This was just the opposite of the manner in which Satan works. If Jesus were in league with the devil, He would do the works of Satan and build up Satan's kingdom, not destroy it.

Why did Jesus, after His specific response to the charges, say what He did about “the unpardonable sin”? What was in their words and attitudes toward Him that would have elicited this strong warning? How were they, by their attitude, doing just what he warned about?

“The Pharisees to whom Jesus spoke this warning did not themselves believe the charge they brought against Him. There was not one of those dignitaries but had felt drawn toward the Saviour. They had heard the Spirit's voice in their own hearts declaring Him to be the Anointed of Israel, and urging them to confess themselves to His disciples. In the light of His presence they had realized their unholiness, and had longed for a righteousness which they could not create. But after their rejection of Him it would be too humiliating to receive Him as the Messiah. Having set their feet in the path of unbelief, they were too proud to confess their error.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 322.

How, in this context, do we then understand “the unpardonable sin”? What would you say to someone who thought they had committed it? How is the mere fact that they feel this conviction evidence that they have not committed that sin?

Jesus' Mother and Brothers (*Mark 3:31-34*).

During His earthly ministry, Jesus did not receive support from His family. John the beloved tells us plainly: “Even his own brothers did not believe in Him” (*John 7:5, NIV*). His mother, Mary, had stored in her heart the events connected with His birth and childhood (*Luke 2:19, 51*), but she did not understand the mission that Jesus as the Messiah had come to fulfill.

With Jesus surrounded by crowds so that He hardly had time to eat, what did His family members decide to do? (*Mark 3:20, 21*).

The New International Version translates *Mark 3:21* as “When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, ‘He is out of his mind.’ ” Perhaps they were embarrassed by the sort of people Jesus was associating with. Perhaps the accusations of His critics that He was in league with the devil bothered them. And most troubling of all to them was His rejection by the religious leaders, who might have been expected to embrace Him as Israel’s deliverer from the hated Romans.

Analyze Jesus’ response when He received word that Mary and His brothers were standing outside the house looking for Him. Did Jesus not care about His earthly family members? What point was He making by saying: “Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother”? *Mark 3:31-34, NIV. See also Deut. 30:20, Matt. 7:21, John 15:14, 1 John 5:3.*

Elsewhere Mark names Jesus’ brothers—James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon. He tells us that Jesus also had sisters (*Mark 6:3*). It is significant that Joseph, the husband of Mary, is not mentioned in this incident. The brothers of Jesus here and elsewhere relate to Jesus as a younger brother, telling Him what to do and wanting to take charge of Him. This indicates that Joseph had been married previously and was a widower when he married Mary. During Jesus’ ministry he is never mentioned; presumably he had died by this time. After His resurrection, Jesus’ family saw Him in a new light. His brothers are mentioned as being among the believers at Pentecost (*Acts 1:14*), while Paul calls James, the Lord’s brother, an “apostle” (*Gal. 1:19*).

If you know someone (or perhaps you’re facing it yourself) who’s struggling with family members who don’t understand or appreciate this person’s Adventist faith, what kind of help can you give them? How does today’s study offer encouragement?

Further Study: Work through the seven Sabbath miracles of Jesus, noting why He performed each one, the lessons He sought to teach, and the reactions of His enemies. See *Mark 1:21-28*, *Mark 1:29-31*, *Mark 3:1-6*, *Luke 13:10-17*, *14:1-4*, *John 5:1-15*, *9:1-41*. Read “The Sabbath,” “He Ordained Twelve,” and “Who Are My Brethren?,” *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 281–289, 290–297, and 321–327.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** If some new Adventist came and asked you, What principles can you show me about how to keep the Sabbath, what would you say, and why? Discuss your different approaches as a class.
- 2** What differences will there be in our Sabbath keeping if (1) we observe the Sabbath simply because it is commanded by God or (2) we keep the Sabbath because we love Jesus and want to follow Him? What differences will there be between the two?
- 3** Why is it so difficult to work with someone who has the attitude of the Pharisees; that is, who has indeed squelched the prompting of the Holy Spirit on his or her heart? What different approaches might you take to try to help that person? Is it ever too late, even for someone who has committed the unpardonable sin? Cannot someone repent from that sin, or does the mere fact that they have committed it mean that it's too late for repentance? Discuss this as a class.

Summary: Jesus was the Lord of the Sabbath, and He showed His authority by the deeds He did on the Sabbath. What a frightful testimony to the hardness of human hearts that the leaders, those who should have known better, closed themselves off to the very Lord they professed to serve with all diligence and faith. There are lessons here for anyone who believes they are living in service to the Lord.

The Farmer's Dream

Juan Gratica Silva

A farmer in Chile had a dream that Jesus was coming soon. In his dream he was told to tell everyone what he had seen. The farmer had little education, but he did not hesitate. He began visiting his neighbors, giving them his message, "Do you know that Jesus is coming soon?"

The neighbors looked at him curiously. These people considered themselves Christians, but they knew little about God or the Bible. The farmer's message seemed strange to them. But the farmer would not give up. He continued visiting every house in town, asking, "Do you know that Jesus is coming soon?"

He went from door to door, up one street and down another. He stopped people on the street and in cars and asked them, "Do you know that Jesus is coming soon?" People began to refer to the farmer as the "Jesus-is-coming man."

One day a new resident in town answered the farmer's knock at his door. When the farmer asked his familiar question, "Do you know that Jesus is coming soon?" the man smiled.

"Yes, I know that. It is written in the Bible." The man invited the farmer into his home to talk. The farmer rejoiced, for this man was the only person who responded to his questions and wanted to talk about Jesus.

The farmer did not know where in the Bible it said that Jesus would come soon, so the man showed him Jesus' promises. Together they read John 14, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18, and parts of 1 Peter. The farmer was so excited to meet this man, for in the whole city of 5,000 people, he at last had met someone who knew that Jesus is coming again.

The man he had met was an Adventist. He invited the farmer to study the Bible with him. The farmer faithfully studied the Bible to learn more about Jesus, who had spoken to him in his dream. In time the man was baptized into the Adventist Church.

Today the farmer and the Adventist layman work together to tell everyone in their town that Jesus is coming soon. They have formed small groups that meet in their homes, and they look forward to the day when the groups will unite to form a single congregation. And it all started because a farmer had a vision and was not afraid to tell everyone that Jesus is coming soon.

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