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**The** tenacity

***Mark 2:23-28***

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Thank you so much for allowing me to be here today. I am honored to be asked by Pastor Trevor to come and speak with you from the Bible. My prayer is today that we can all grow from this Scripture. Before we do anything else though, I would like to pray for Trevor and the team who are with him, asking God to bless the work on their hands. It is amazing to know God wants them to succeed. He wants his Word to go out to people who do not know Him, so we can trust with the faithfulness of Trevor and his team, God is going to use and bless their work.

I remember when my wife and I were first dating, and she got a new job at David’s Bridal, a wedding dress store. Naturally, the store was opened on Sundays as the weekends were the days with the best business. As a new worker, she had absolutely no power to say what days she did or did not want to work. She just had to say yes and thank you for the shift. She naturally got told she would be working on Sundays as this is the day people do not want to work. It is interesting how even while living in a secular society, we are still prone to want Sunday off. When Ashley heard this, she really struggled. She did not know what she should do. She needed the money and the job was a dream for her. We talked and prayed about it and came to for this season of life, she needed to just work when they told her to work and hopefully, after a time of working there, she would have enough power to ask off those days. During this sermon, I want to explore this Scripture and find out if we made the right decision.

I will be completely honest with you all today. When Trevor said you were going through Mark, I was excited. I love this book so much and I think this is so forming for the church. When I saw the verses he wanted me to preach, I became scared. These are verses I have read multiple times, but I have struggled with them before. I usually just skip read them quickly and move on. This sermon has forced me to slow down and understand what is going on. I hope the next few minutes can do the same thing for you as well.

*One Sabbath he was going through the grain fields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain.****24****And the Pharisees were saying to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?”****25****And he said to them, “Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him:****26****how he entered the house of God, in the time ofAbiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?”****27****And he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.****28****So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”* ***Mark 2:23-28***

There is a lot going on in this story right now. Let’s start by breaking down the story. Jesus and his disciples are walking through a grain field. Now I am not sure how many of you have ever done this, but the grain would be about the height of your waist. You can eat grain raw. It is not the tastiest thing in the world, but it can be done. The same story is told in Matthew and it says the disciples were picking the grain and popping it into their mouth. Why would they do this, because they were really hungry. This is not something you do because you love the taste. You do it because you are very hungry and need something to eat right now.

A few other things of note here. First, what were the Pharisees angry with? Was it the taking of grain that did not belong to the disciples? No, they were mad only about the day in which the disciples were taking the grain. Was it wrong for the disciples to take the grain of somebody else? Yes, it was. The Old Testament allowed the hungry to take some grain, but only like this. Who did the Pharisees bring a charge against? Was it the disciples who took the worst of the charge? No, they went straight to Jesus. Did Jesus even pick any? It does not appear He did. So why come to Jesus? He was the leader. Also, at this point, they already do not like Jesus, so they were looking for anything they could attach to bring a charge against Him. Although He was not doing the thing they were mad about, they still went after Him.

I want to really look at what the Pharisees were angry with here. They are angry about the disciples breaking a law. What is the law? They were not to break the Sabbath by doing any work. The Sabbath was one day a week in Jewish culture where they were supposed to do nothing except spend time with God. It was a day in which they were to rest and allow everyone in their house to rest. In the Jewish mindset, they should not have even plucked grain like this to eat.  Let’s look at Jesus’ response though. He brings up the story of David. There was a time before David was king where the king before him, Saul, was chasing him. Saul knew that David was supposed to be the next king. Saul wanted to kill David because of this. David is running with a small group of soldiers and people who all believe he is to be the king. He goes to a place that is basically a Jewish church. Now priests were to keep bread before the altar of God and the only ones who could eat it were the priests. David goes to the priest and ask for food. The priest only has this holy bread on hand and he gives it to David and the men with David to eat. God does not strike down David or anybody with him.

Why was David allowed to eat this bread that was considered holy? Think about their state for a second. They were hungry and needed food. This is the only reason David would risk asking for food in the first place. God allows this bread to be eaten because they needed it for substance. While this bread was dedicated to God, the bread is still made for food. The priest was supposed to eat it. This was a time where David and other men needed it, so God allowed it to be eaten to sustain someone. Was anybody allowed to eat the bread? No, but in this circumstance, God allowed it so David would not die.

Let’s look at what happened with the disciples. They were picking grain. Why? Because they were hungry and needed substance. They needed something to eat. The same principal was in play at this story as the one about David. God made the grain to be eaten just the bread was made to be eaten. The Sabbath was a holy day to the Lord just as the bread was holy to the Lord, but in both cases, the substance and fulfillment of man was more important than the holiness of the actual bread of the actual day. Therefore, Jesus was able to say what He did in verse 27. The disciples in this instance realized that Jesus was greater than a specific day of the week. They realized it was better to be with Jesus than to adhere to a specific rule about a specific day of the week. You see, the disciples saw that spending time with Jesus was better than any day of the week. To spend time with Jesus meant they were going to be moving and not really have a home which meant they needed to eat when they could. They could not take a break from eating, so they needed to eat this in the grain field. Jesus was not displeased by this, but instead was totally okay with it. The Pharisees were not okay with it. They were so angry about the Sabbath rule being broken. They did not understand what it meant to be in the presence of Jesus. They were looking towards the law to save them. They had this idea that if they followed the Scriptures well enough, they would be counted as holy and be allowed to go to heaven. Their religion became one of doing all the right things instead of one of trusting God.

I love the way Mark as a book is constructed. It is so important to realize the events that happen in Scripture are not always chronological. For example, this same story is told in Matthew chapter twelve. It is not placed in the same context of what is going on at the time. Each of the authors had a reason for putting this story into their book. Each other was trying to convey a different idea. Events are not always in chronological order because the theological idea is more important than the timing of things. Does this make them a liar? Absolutely not. They are trying to convey a spiritual truth which is much more important than a timing truth. Based on where Mark puts this text, what is he trying to tell people? Let’s look at the story right before and after our text from today. The story right before is a time where Jesus is asked about fasting. This was a religious practice for a way of growing closer to God and trying to get alone with God. What is Jesus’ response? The disciples will not fast because they are with Jesus right now. They are as close to God as they can be.

The story right after our text from today is about is about a man Jesus heals on the Sabbath. The Pharisees get angry that Jesus would do this. Jesus’ response to them is that it is better to do good on the Sabbath than to allow a person to suffer one more day. If we look at these three stories as a whole, it is easy to see what the central idea is Jesus is trying to teach. Mark wants readers to know that Jesus is better than any religious practice we could follow. He is better than fasting. He is better than religious food. He is better than a certain day of the week. Are these things bad in and of themselves? No. They are good. Jesus never says they are bad. What He says is in comparison, He is so much better than and more important than fasting, holy food, or the Sabbath. Spending time with Jesus is more important than anything else man can do to be holy. There is nothing that can substitute time with Jesus. No act that the Pharisees did could replace Jesus. This is what Jesus wanted to teach them. This is why Mark put these three stories together.

What does this mean for us today? The first way this is applicable today is it shows us **religion and good things do not save**. We can get so caught up trying to do Godly things that we totally miss out on Jesus. We can feed the poor. We can do street evangelism. We can serve in the church. We can cook food at church. We can read five chapters out of our Bible a day. We can pray in groups. But we can still miss Christ. Nothing we can ever do can substitute time with Jesus.

So often we get bogged down by religion that we miss out on Jesus. While talking about these verses, one commentator “‘The Sabbath’, he said, ‘was made for the sake of man and not man for the sake of the Sabbath.’ That was self-evident. Human life was created before ever the elaborate Sabbath law came into existence. Human beings were not created to be the victims and the slaves of Sabbath rules and regulations, which were in the beginning created to make life fuller and better for them. Men and women are not to be enslaved by the Sabbath; the Sabbath exists to make their lives better.” This is how all the religious things we do should be seen. We should come to church. Church is good, but it is not Jesus. This church building was given to us for us to have a fuller and more enriched life with Christ. The Bible should not be a slavish thing we must do as Christians, but a way to communicate with God. It should bring us rest.

All the things we should do should bring us more faith. Let’s take a look at the Sabbath from a Jewish perspective from the Bible times. The community of Jews currently were a farming community. They took care of animals and crops for a living. They lived off the land. My grandpa was a farmer and he worked so many hours a week. There was never a day off. Even on Sunday, he would wake up and take care of the animals before church, then after church, go right back out and continue to work. For the Jews to take a Sabbath rest one day a week would mean that they have to put faith in God that the day they take off, God would sustain the animals and take care of the land. This is how we need to approach each of the things we do. We need to approach them in faith. We approach reading the Bible in faith believing that God will bless the time we spend in the Bible. We come to church in faith believing God to help us get closer to Him there. Here's another example. Think of the Lord’s Supper. It is so easy to get into the rhythm of doing this and lose the significance of doing it. How wrong this is. We are becoming Pharisees if we allow this to happen. We need to approach this in faith and trust that we can grow closer to God in this moment.

The second major lesson for us today from this text is that **people are more important than things we do**. One of the first ways to serve God is to serve people. Jesus here is more interested in the health and wellbeing of the disciples than He is over them following the Sabbath. God was more interested in David and the men being fed than He was over the holy bread staying on the altar. Jesus was more concerned with the man’s hand being healed than not doing work on the Sabbath. Jesus was more concerned with spending time the disciples than them fasting.

If you are wondering what it means to get closer to Christ, it is spending time with the people in pain and loving people well. I love a passage in Micah. Micah was a prophet from the old testament and he is talking to a people who have put their faith in doing good things. They feel justified in the fact that they offer sacrifices and give money at the temple. In ***Micah 6:6-8*** it says,

*“With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with[a] thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”*

What is it that God requires of the people from Micah, and us as well? It is not our huge offerings. It is to do good to other people. This is the who reason for the Law. The law is there to help us do good to other people. That is the point of Jesus in these verses. The people are to get to the heart of God not by doing religion well, but by spending alone time with God and loving other people well. What does this mean for us today? We need to look at everything we do and see why we are doing it. Are we doing it because it has always been done or do we do it to get closer to God and to serve other people. If the act does not fit into one of these two categories, it is probably time to change.

Going back to the original story I told about my wife Ashley and her working at David’s Bridal on Sundays, was she okay doing this? My interpretation of this Scripture is that she was okay working on Sundays. Jesus showed us that the human need of substance is more important than the religious activity. What was her responsibility though? She still needed to find a way to be in community with other Christians outside of a Sunday gathering. She needed to find a way to be alone with God still. The day of Sunday is not as important as these two things. My encouragement to you is to look at everything you do and remember why you do it. It is to get closer to God and love people around you.