

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

Mark 2:23 - 3:6

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Year B - Proper 4, Text: Mark 2:23-28 (3:1-6)
Year B - Proper 4 / Epiphany 9, Text: Mark 2:23-3:6

(Editor's Note: The comments below are taken from "This is the Gospel of Mark - Seeing the Gospel as a First Century Audience Would Have Heard It." This is a self-published work by Timothy J. Schaefer, a former Crossways workshop presenter and a student of Dr. Harry Wendt.)

This pericope addresses the subject of Sabbath observance. David's unlawful behavior is noted in the middle Part.

Verses 2:23-24: After answering for his disciples regarding why they did not fast (Mark 2:18-22), Jesus defends the disciples a second time here. This time it's not about eating with the wrong people but about working on the Sabbath in order to eat. The accusers again are the Pharisees.

Verses 2:25-26: Jesus turns to the behavior of their golden boy, the Old Testament hero and the model for their Messiah, King David. The event to which Jesus refers is in I Samuel 21 when David finds refuge with the priests of Nob while fleeing from Saul. He reminds them that David's disciples also partook of this illicit meal.

Verse 2:27: He then reminds them that the Sabbath rest was designed by God for Israel as a way of assuring them healthy rest from their labors. He tells them in essence, "the Sabbath is your servant. You are not to be its slave. And with the final reference to the Son of Man, and in keeping with an earlier theme that was dealt with, the nation of Israel (the Son of Man) is in charge of the Sabbath and not vice versa.

Verses 3:1-6: In this section, it is now Jesus who defends Himself over His understanding of the Sabbath. This makes two accounts in a row of problems over Sabbath observance. What is the significance of that?

To get a sense for where the Pharisees were coming from on this issue, note the following from the book *Everyman's Talmud*, page 352. The Rabbis taught:

"If Israel repented a single day, immediately would the son of David come. If Israel observed a single Sabbath properly, immediately would the son of David come. If Israel were to keep two Sabbaths according to the law, they would be redeemed forthwith."

Jesus breaks two Sabbaths and the religious leaders are understandably upset. Yet Jesus claims to be the very person they are waiting for.

Here is how it all plays out.

The scene is of Jesus entering a synagogue in which is a man with a withered hand. The Pharisees' first plot involves watching to see if Jesus will heal on the Sabbath so that they could accuse Him of breaking it.

Jesus then gives an order to the man: "Come here." Jesus' questions are such that the enemies can give no answer. The Pharisees obviously are not ready to change their paradigm. Jesus gives them an angry look, grieving over the hardness of their hearts.

He now gives the man a second order: "Stretch out your hand." He does and it's healed. This may be a stretch, but this last order is very reminiscent of God's words to Moses at the Red Sea, which also resulted in a "healing" of Israel from the threat of the Egyptians. The God of the Exodus is at work in the person of Jesus.

