

INCIDENT IN THE GRAIN FIELD

Dowlen Road, May 10, 2009 PM

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Reading: Mark 2:23-28.
- B. It was an unlikely place for a religious debate to break out.
 - 1. Jesus clashed with His enemies in many different places, the synagogue (Luke 6:6-11); the temple (John 2:13-25); the house of a tax collector (Mark 2:14-17). But in a grain field?
 - 2. Details are sparse. We do not know where Jesus and His disciples were going; we do not know why they were traveling on the Sabbath.
 - 3. We do know what prompted the controversy (Luke 6:1). I was reading the comments of an atheist on this passage. He was astonished that the Pharisees did not first complain about the disciples stealing this farmer's crop. This charge is not raised because the disciples did not break the law.
 - 4. There was a provision in the Law of Moses that allowed a person to enter another man's field and eat a small portion of his crop if he was hungry (Deuteronomy 23:24-25). This was a necessary provision when you realize that there was not a McDonald's at every exit and travelers had to eat, especially poor travelers who might have limited provisions. They could eat some grapes or grain to satisfy their hunger, but they could not bring their truck and load it up.
- C. But the Pharisees do bring an accusation against Jesus' disciples.
 - 1. They do charge Jesus' disciples with sin. It is this accusation that leads to this incident in the middle of a grain field.
 - 2. It is an important story with weighty implications, but one that is often misunderstood.
 - 3. Let's take a closer look. If the disciples were not guilty of stealing grain, then what would their crime be?

THE ACCUSATION

- A. The Pharisees charged that the disciples were violating the Sabbath.
 - 1. Perhaps more to the point, they charged that Jesus allowed His disciples to violate the Sabbath.
 - 2. The Law of Moses provided a day of rest (Exodus 20:8-11). The Pharisees charged that by rubbing the grain in their hands to separate the grain from the chaff, they were harvesting – working on the Sabbath. They were violating the law. Jesus should have rebuked them.
- B. But was this truly a violation of law?
 - 1. Keep in mind that the law simply said not to work on the Sabbath. Very few details were given beyond this. There is certainly no statement that the actions of the disciples – picking grain and rubbing it in their hands - constituted work and thus were a violation of law. So why do the Pharisees bring this charge?
 - 2. What was violated on this occasion was not the law itself, but the Pharisees' traditions about the law.
 - a. The Pharisees trace their roots to the period between the Old and New Testaments. They began as a group determined to keep themselves undefiled by the world and to carefully follow God's law. Over the years that developed their own set of guidelines to help ensure that they did not break the law. These came to be known as "a hedge around the law."
 - b. Their Sabbath rules serve as a good example. The law simply said that they were not to work on the Sabbath. But to insure this law was not violated, they defined exactly what constituted work. They developed meticulous guidelines: How heavy an object could be before it became a burden – thus work to carry it. How far you could travel before the journey became work.
 - c. But their guidelines went from meticulous to absurd. Their traditions prohibited tying knots on the Sabbath, but this required more explanation about what knots were prohibited. A knot that could be untied with one hand was permissible, but one that required two hands was not.
 - 3. There was certainly nothing wrong with a spiritually-minded Jew figuring out in his own mind what was to be counted as work on the Sabbath. The mistake the Pharisees made was treating their traditions as though they were God's laws (Matthew 15:7-9). At times they even used their tradition to get around obeying God's law (Matthew 15:3). It is this problem that gives rise to this incident in the grain field.
 - a. The disciples had certainly not violated God's Sabbath law simply because they picked some grain and rubbed it in their hands.
 - b. No reasonable person would ever describe this as work on the Sabbath.
 - c. However, they did violate the tradition of the Pharisees. This provoked the accusation.
 - d. In the verses that follow, Jesus gives His response to their charge.

THE ANSWER

- A. Jesus first points out that His critics are inconsistent.
 - 1. He illustrates their problem by citing an Old Testament story about their great hero, David (Mark 2:25-26, also I Samuel 21).
 - a. David is being pursued by King Saul who wants to kill him. He comes to the village of Nob and asked the priest for food to feed his men.
 - b. The priest tells him the only thing available is the sacred bread that only the priests were allowed to eat (Leviticus 24:9).
 - c. In spite of this, the priest gives the bread to David and he shares it with his men.
 - 2. It is very common for people to misunderstand Jesus' reason for citing this story, and to draw a dangerous application from it.
 - a. Some believe that Jesus is making the two stories parallel; He is saying that His disciples merely did what David did.
 - 1) David was not supposed to eat this bread, but it was an emergency. For that reason, it was okay for him to violate the law.
 - 2) Similarly, Jesus' disciples were hungry, so it was okay for them to violate the Sabbath law and pick and eat the heads of grain.
 - 3) From this they reason that at times it is acceptable to violate God's law.

- b. Let's be clear: this is NOT the point Jesus is making and not the application to be drawn from it.
 - 1) First, these two stories are not parallel; there is a critical difference. David's actions were sinful (Mark 2:26, *"is not lawful"*).
 - a) In fact, taking the bread was not his only sin. He lied to the priest about his true purpose for being there, a lie that ultimately led to the death of eighty five priests.
 - b) David did not trust the Lord at this moment and the consequences were tragic (1 Samuel 22:18,22).
 - c) By contrast, the disciples were NOT guilty of sin (Matthew 12:7, *"condemned the innocent"*). The only thing they violated was the Pharisees traditions. The two stories are not the same.
 - 2) In fact, Jesus cites this story because of this key different.
 - a) David clearly violated the law, but the Pharisees would be reluctant to condemn him because he was their hero.
 - b) By contrast, Jesus' disciples had violated no law, but the Pharisees condemned them.
 - 3. Jesus is pointing out their inconsistency.
- B. Jesus goes on to charge His critics with corrupting the purpose of the Sabbath (Mark 2:27).
- 1. This day was designed to be a blessing for men. It gave them the opportunity to rest from physical labors and attend to spiritual needs.
 - 2. The Pharisees had completely corrupted this purpose. With all their detailed requirements, they had turned the day into something that afflicted men. There could be no rest because you had to constantly think about all the restrictions to be sure you did not violate one of them. Instead of a day of rest, it was all about knots.
 - 3. They had turned the Sabbath into a burden, not a blessing – completely corrupting its purpose.
- C. Jesus finally points out that He is the Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28).
- 1. Jesus here asserts His authority in this matter. He is the Lord of the Sabbath. Sabbath law came from Him. He rules in this matter. It is a claim to be divine.
 - 2. Let's not miss His point. Jesus is not saying, "I'm the One in charge; I can do whatever I want to do on the Sabbath." But what He is saying is that, as Lord of the Sabbath, He is certainly able to speak to what is (and is not) a violation of HIS LAW. His voice is the final voice in this matter. He has spoken. His disciples are innocent – end of story.

Summary: It was an interesting moment – this incident in the grain field. But what should we take away from it?

THE LESSONS

- A. We must be careful not to treat our traditions as though they are laws of God.
- B. What Jesus says about a matter is the law.

CONCLUSION: WHAT HE SAYS ABOUT SALVATION IS THE LAW!

We hear a lot of different things about what a man must do to be saved. There is a lot of controversy and confusion in our religious world. But Jesus has addressed this issue (Mark 16:16). This settles the matter – end of story.