

The Sabbath Setup

We come today to Mark chapter 3. The title for today's message is *The Sabbath Setup*.

- 1 And He entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a withered hand.**
- 2 So they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him.**
- 3 And He said to the man who had the withered hand, "Step forward."**
- 4 Then He said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they kept silent.**
- 5 And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other.**
- 6 Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him.**

These verses form the last a series of five conflicts that Jesus had with the religious authorities here in Galilee. It is primarily Pharisees that we see in conflict with Jesus during His earthly ministry. Even though the Pharisees were a minority in Jewish life, they had a great influence on the religious attitudes of all Jews in Jesus' day.

They had a form of religion with no power; His ministry had power because God was with him, influence on the common man because in Him they saw mercy and love, and rightness with God because He did always those things pleasing to the Father. They trusted in the Law and the keeping of the Law to save them; He, the giver of the Law, knew that it was but a tutor pointing men to His coming, and he knew that a true relationship with God is based on Love and Grace and Faith, and that from those things obedience to His decrees springs forth. They were proud, He was humble. They were spiritually blind, He was the light of the world. They placed extreme importance on ritual and the keeping of the Sabbath, He taught that those who worship God must worship in spirit and in truth, and as we saw last week, He is Lord of the Sabbath.

So Jesus often ran into conflict with these men. The controversy in Mark 3:1-6 takes the form of a test case. Verses 1-2 seem to indicate that: **"And He entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a withered hand. So they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him."**

They knew that the Lord Jesus would not miss synagogue on the Sabbath. And they knew Jesus was always compelled to help those who were most needy. So they saw this as an opportunity to lure the Lord Jesus into a trap of healing on the Sabbath day.

They thought that if they could catch the Lord Jesus to healing this man on the Sabbath. They would have a case against Him in order to condemn Him as a transgressor of the Sabbath laws - and ultimately kill Him, that's where these guys are going to: they want to condemn the Lord Jesus to death.

So let's look this morning at this Sabbath setup. First of all I want you to see,

The Setup: A man with a withered hand.

Whether through an accident or some disease that he had contracted, his hand had become withered. A withered hand simply meant that his hand was atrophied, it was wasted, withered, or paralyzed. Luke tells us that it was this man's right-hand - and we assume, perhaps, that he was right-handed, and this disabled him in a great way in his daily life, and probably in his livelihood.

This man was the ideal inducement to get the Lord Jesus to heal, that the Pharisees might ambush Him on the Sabbath. So they watched Him closely. They kept on watching Him, that's the sense of the word. They were bent on finding fault, they were scrutinizing every move of the Lord Jesus.

What were they watching for? Look at verse 2: **whether He would heal this man on the Sabbath day, that they might accuse Him.** If the Lord healed this man on the Sabbath, their desire was to rush in have him killed like a mad lynch mob.

Here's the great question that we need to answer, just as we sought to answer the question during last week's incident: did these Pharisees and Scribes have legal grounds to accuse the Lord Jesus of breaking the Sabbath if He healed this man? Was it grounds for condemning Him? Would He have broken the law of Moses if He had healed this man, as of course He did?

Exodus 31:14-17 does say that the violator of the Sabbath should be killed - but did the Lord Jesus violate the Sabbath? As we saw last week, what the law of Moses actually said, and what these lawyers had made the law become were very different. They added many rules to the simple Sabbath principle. In relation to healing someone on the Sabbath, the Pharisees said: 'If you're going to heal or help someone on the Sabbath, that person's life must be in immediate danger'. It's got to be a life and death situation.

Now imagine how ridiculous this is in a practical scenario: someone is in real need. Imagine as you're going out church this morning you see someone get hit by a car. Now if you believe like the Pharisees, the first thought that comes into your mind is not the natural human instinct to help, but rather to think: 'Well, is this person going to die? If they're going to die I'll have to help them, if not, I can't touch them'. Now if you decide it is life or death, then you've got to start to calculate in your mind, 'What can I do to save their life, but not do too much in order to condemn my soul'. It's idiotic, isn't it?

So, in the Lord Jesus' day, to provide medical attention on the Sabbath in cases that meant other than life or death was considered by the rabbinical schools as working. Healing was only permitted when the person was not likely to live another day. As far as these Pharisees were concerned, this man with the

withered hand had been living with a withered hand for many years, and there was no need for Christ to heal him on the Sabbath, it wasn't an emergency, life or death case.

You see what's happening. An over-emphasis on law is destroying the higher principle of love - have you got it? Legalism is eroding love. To prove their legalistic point, the Pharisees and Scribes used this man with the withered hand as a pawn in a religious game. They weren't concerned about the man's predicament.

The Turn-About: Jesus Turns the Tables on them.

They give Jesus this test case trap, and He turns the tables on them. **And He said to the man who had the withered hand, "Step forward."** In other words, 'Step where all can see you, all can see your awful predicament, all can see how these Pharisees are using you, imposing upon your predicament for their own ends. Stand into the midst that everyone can see Me healing you.' Jesus made no attempt to avoid the trap. He could have, He could have said: 'Well, let's not make a big issue of this one, it's not a hill to die on yet, let's leave it till Monday, or Tuesday, or Wednesday, or Thursday, or Friday, or Sunday - let's leave it till then'. But He didn't, because He wanted to challenge them, He wanted to expose their legalistic traditions that were binding and destroying them.

So in verse 4, **Then He said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they kept silent.** Imagine it, this charged atmosphere, both tension and expectation. This is the amazing thing: these Pharisees knew that the Lord Jesus could heal this man, yet they would not believe in Him. How hard are their hearts?

Do you know what the Lord Jesus was doing? He was revealing their wickedness. Imagine this, and this is the whole point: they thought it was wrong of the Lord Jesus to perform a miracle of healing on the Sabbath, but they didn't think it was wrong to plan the destruction of the Messiah on the Sabbath! It's bad enough that they left this man with the withered hand to languish in his poverty of the flesh, when there was one in their midst who could heal him - but worse than that, they were plotting the death of the Son of God on the Sabbath. They couldn't see it.

That's what He means when He says: 'Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days, or to do evil?' - they were doing evil. 'Is it lawful to save life?', that's what Christ was doing, 'Or to kill?', that's what they were doing. No wonder they couldn't answer, if they had replied they would have condemned themselves, so they said nothing.

Verse 5 says the Lord Jesus **looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts.** It's not often we see the Lord Jesus angry in the gospel records. The Lord never became angry at the publicans and the sinners, but He did express anger towards the self-righteous Pharisees, the legalists. If you want to read the tirade that He spoke to them, look at Matthew 23

for His condemnation of them. Yet, while He is angry, He also grieves for the hardness of their hearts.

I would imagine that's how Jesus felt whenever the Pharisees or Scribes or Sadducees were watching and questioning him. These religious folks weren't really interested in learning more about God. They weren't interested in seeing what God was doing in this new movement, they weren't interested in helping people, they were only interested in gathering evidence against Jesus.

These guys weren't interested in serving others unless it involved elevating their own reputations at the same time. They didn't care about doing ministry unless it fit into their own little box and they certainly weren't interested in listening to the needs of the world around them. And, with all that said, they missed out on a tremendous move of God right there in their midst, they missed out on the healing power of the cross.

I heard a pastor once say it this way:

- Blinded by their hostility, they missed the holiness.
- Blinded by their hatred, they missed the healing.
- Blinded by their duty, they missed the divinity.
- Blinded by the old way, they missed the new way.

They would rather protect their religious traditions than see this poor man healed - that makes Jesus angry! After an embarrassed silence, the Savior ordered the man to stretch out his hand, and as he did so full strength returned and the flesh was filled out again to normal size, and all the wrinkle and paralysis and palsy disappeared. And because of the way Jesus healed, none of them could point the finger at Jesus and say: 'You have worked on the Sabbath day', do you know why? Because Jesus used no visible means, no implements, no bandages, no potions, all He did was speak a word!

Verse 6 says the Pharisees couldn't take it any more, **Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him.** Now the Herodians were the Pharisees' traditional enemies. 'Pharisee' means 'separatist' - they would have nothing to do with Gentiles, or men who didn't adhere to the law of Moses. The Herodians were not proper Jews, and they supported the rule of Herod, and they were continually coming in contact with the Romans and dealing with them, and living with them.

Yet now, to put a man to death, to put the Son of God to death, they join with men that they would normally not even be seen with. They made an unholy alliance to kill a man.

There's not only that irony, but the fantastic irony that all this was done on the Sabbath: **the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him.** Maybe they were thinking, Herod had put John the Baptist to death, perhaps the Herodians would be equally successful in killing this Jesus!

These enemies united together because of their common enemy, Jesus Christ. Can I say to you today that if we do not believe in the Lord Jesus, we will finally crucify Him. That was the outcome of their unbelief, it is always the outcome of unbelief, there is no 'no man's land'. You're either for Christ or you're against Christ. Maybe you're here, and you've never taken that step of faith to believe in the Lord Jesus as He is the Son of God, and the one who died for your sins, and promises you eternal life if you believe on Him. My friend, beware how the Pharisees rejected Him, and then their heart hardened to the very point of putting Him on a cross.

The Sabbath setup was an operation of the Pharisees - but can I say to all of us today: there is a satanic setup, and that is to get all of us, believers and unbelievers, tangled in a bondage of man-made laws that will squeeze the life of God right out of us. May I implore you, as Jesus did, to be daring enough to stand it in the face and, whatever the accusation, withstand it and be no more in a yoke of bondage, but live the life of the Spirit, in the law of the life of the Spirit in Christ Jesus which has set us free from the law of sin and death. Don't fall for Satan's trap.

Points From the Passage:

1) Jesus was more concerned with the mans need than with the religious tradition.

Jesus could have waited until the next day to heal him. That was the tradition. The oral tradition was to heal only if life was in danger.

2) The religious leaders were more concerned about their tradition than the man.

“Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath.” Mark 3:2 (NIV)

3) Jesus was angered and saddened at the condition of their hearts.

“ He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts,” Mark 3:5 (NIV)

4) The religious leaders were angered at Jesus not awed by Him.

“Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.” Mark 3:6(NIV)