

Healing the Man with the Withered Hand

Mark 3:1-6

Mark 3:1-6 – *“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.”*

Background Notes

Here we have another Sabbath-day healing, the healing of a man with a “withered” hand. The synagogue mentioned in verse 1 is probably the synagogue at Capernaum, where the Lord healed the demon-possessed man in Mark 1. The Lord was back at this same synagogue, and this time a man with a withered hand was present. He probably suffered from some sort of paralysis. The religious leaders may have purposely brought this man there because verse 2 says, *“they watched Him”* – “they” being the Jewish religious leaders. *“They watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him.”* So this man may have been a “plant” who was placed by the legalistic religious leaders. They wanted to see if Jesus would heal on the Sabbath so that they could accuse Him of “working on the Sabbath” - which was against the Jewish law.

The self-righteous scribes and Pharisees considered healing - or even giving medicine – on the Sabbath as “work.” Only in a matter of life and death could you give help on the Sabbath. This was not really part of the Mosaic Law; this was just their Jewish rabbinic tradition. What a terrible attitude! They would prefer a person to suffer rather than to be healed on the Sabbath! No wonder verse 5 mentions their hardened or calloused hearts.

Notice, by the way, that they didn’t doubt that the Lord **could** heal! In verse 2, they weren’t looking to see if the Lord **could** heal – they were watching to see if He **would** heal. They knew Jesus had supernatural power to heal.

In verse 6 we read of the “Herodians” who joined forces with the Pharisees. The “Herodians” were a non-religious political party that supported the “Herods.” Remember “Herod the Great” - the “King Herod” who was in power at the time of the Lord’s birth? Now, in Jesus’ adulthood, one of his sons, Herod Antipas, was ruling in the Galilee area. Pontius Pilate was the Roman ruler in Judea; but Herod Antipas was the ruler in Galilee. So there were a number of Herodian party members in the Galilee area. The Herodians opposed the Lord because they feared that Jesus would unsettle the political situation in the area, and they wanted peace at any cost. Because Herod derived his power from Rome, the Herodians favored the Roman occupation, and they were therefore not well liked by most of the Jews—including the Pharisees! The Pharisees hated the Roman occupation, and therefore they hated the Herodians. But here we see that even the Pharisees compromised their principles and joined in with the Herodians - in common opposition to Christ!

Doctrinal Points

1. Anger is not necessarily a sin.

Look once again at verse 5. The Lord looked around at the Jewish leaders, the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees, *“with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts.”* **This is the only unquestioned and explicit reference to the anger of Christ in the entire New Testament.** His anger is certainly implied on other occasions - in the two cleansings of the Temple, for example, when the Lord overturned the tables of the moneychangers and threw out those who were making the Temple a “den of thieves.” Certainly we can assume that the Lord was angry then. But here the word *anger* is actually used.

“But,” you may say, “isn’t anger a **sin**? I thought it was a sin to be angry.” Well, normally anger is a sin. Even at the times when we feel our anger is justified, even then there’s a good possibility that it’s sin, because we may be upset because our pride has been hurt, or we may subconsciously be taking revenge because of something someone has said or done to us.

Although anger is normally a sin, there is such a thing as **righteous anger**. Righteous anger is a **non-malicious indignation** at injustice or evil. That’s the kind of anger our Lord exhibited here. He didn’t “lose His temper” or have a desire for revenge. It was the proper emotional response to the unbelievable hardness of heart exhibited by the so-called “religious leaders.”

Notice, by the way, along with the anger, verse 5 says that our Lord’s *heart* was *grieved*. This is a term that is often used for the deep sorrow of God’s heart at sinful and callous behavior. The Lord Jesus was *grieved* by the hardness of their hearts - another indication that His anger was **righteous** indignation. Think of their incredible hardness of heart – that those self-righteous, legalistic men would prefer for a man to continue to suffer rather than to be healed! This certainly caused the Lord to feel anger - **righteous** anger.

A few years ago I experienced what I believe was righteous anger. I was in a shopping mall and I saw a teenage kid begin to bully a much younger and smaller boy. The teenager began to beat up the small boy, and I can still recall the feeling of anger that rose within me. I went over and pulled the teenager off and gave him a piece of my mind (after I saw he wasn’t bigger than I was!). That was righteous indignation. It was not loss of temper or a fit of rage or venting my wrath because of something that had been done to me. No – it was righteous indignation.

In Ephesians 4:26 we read: *“Be angry and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath.”* Here we’re actually commanded to be angry! In fact, it would be wrong **not** to be angry at certain times! Hearing the Lord’s name misused, for example, *should* bring about righteous indignation. But notice this verse says be angry - **but do not sin!** Even righteous anger can turn to unrighteous anger and thus become sin.

Suppose in my illustration, I had not only pulled the bully off the little kid and given him a piece of my mind, but I had also begun to beat him up! That would **not** be *righteous* indignation – that would be *unrighteous* anger, and that would be sin. That's why the verse continues with: *“do not let the sun go down on your wrath.”* What starts out as righteous indignation can turn to sin – it can turn to unrighteous anger and bitterness and revenge. So you need to deal with it. *“Be angry, but do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your wrath” (Ephesians 4:26).*

2. Obedience is evidence of faith.

The Lord told the man to *“Step forward”* - and the man obeyed. Then the Lord asked him to *“Stretch out your hand”* - and he obeyed. Notice that the man did not say, “Well, how can I stretch out my hand? I’m paralyzed; I can’t stretch it out!” He stretched it out - in faith! ***His obedience was evidence of his faith.***

Our obedience is evidence of faith, as well. Did you ever doubt your salvation? Did you ever wonder if you *really* have saving faith? Obedience is the evidence of true faith. Do you *want* to obey the Lord? *Are* you obeying the Lord? That's evidence of saving faith.

In John 6, some of the crowd listening to the Lord Jesus wanted to know what they needed to do to please God. Here's their question and His reply (John 6:28-29): *“Then they said to Him, ‘What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.’”* The first and foremost act of obedience which evidences faith is to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, that He is the Son of God, and that He was sent from Heaven to die for our sins.

As we live the Christian life, *obedience* is the evidence of our faith. This is what James was referring to in James 2:26 - *“Faith without works is dead.”* These are not “good works” by which we hope to win salvation! No! James had “works of obedience” because we have been redeemed in mind – works that are evidence of our faith. No wonder James used Abraham as an example, when he spoke of Abraham going up to Mt. Moriah to sacrifice his son. The obedience of Abraham was evidence of his faith. Obedience is the evidence of faith.

Practical Applications

1. Let's not do evil by refusing to do good.

In verse 4 the Lord asked the self-righteous religious leaders, *“Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?”* The Lord seemed to be implying that by their refusal to want to see this man healed on the Sabbath, they were actually involved in doing evil. There was no middle ground. If they weren't involved in doing good, then they actually were involved in doing harm, or evil.

And by the way, when the Lord mentioned the word **kill** in the second part of the question (*is it right to save life or to kill?*), He may have been referring to their attempt to kill **Him**! The Scribes and Pharisees not only wanted Jesus out of the way - they were even willing to plot with the Herodians to kill Him. Notice the word **immediately** (v6). That means they were planning evil on the Sabbath! *“Immediately they made plans with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him.”* Think of it! On the *Sabbath*, the very day they were (supposedly) having such a hard time with the Lord doing something good - the Sabbath, the day that they were so hung up with - that very day they were planning and plotting to do away with Jesus Christ!

But even aside from their evil plans in reference to Christ, not wanting healing for a man with a paralyzed hand was evil. It is possible that we could be involved in evil by refusing to do good? What about refusing to help a brother or sister who is in need because they didn't help us in the past, or because we want to hoard our money rather than sharing it, or because we're too lazy? That is wrong. Is it possible that some Christians even secretly hope that their brother or sister doesn't succeed in business, or isn't healed from an illness, because of an inward jealousy that the other Christian is more talented or more gifted? Not wanting the best for our fellow-believers is actually being involved in evil. Let's not do evil by refusing to do good.

2. Don't be surprised if opposing forces unite against you!

Verse 6: *“Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him.”* The Pharisees and the Herodians joined forces against Jesus Christ. Normally, the Pharisees and Herodians were poles apart – in fact, they were enemies - but they united here in opposition to Christ.

It's possible that this may happen to us as well. In I John 3:13 we read, *“Don't be surprised if the world hates you.”* In John 15:18 the Lord said, *“The world hated me; it will hate you.”* So don't be surprised if opposing forces unite against you.

Common opposition to Christ makes for strange bedfellows. Some of you who are students will find your non-Christian fellow-students will argue about all kinds of things. They'll argue about worldviews; they'll argue about politics; they'll argue about moral values; they'll argue about lifestyles. But when they find out you're a Christian, you'll see them unite in opposition to you because they refuse to accept the claims of Christ, and you're standing for Christ.

This is also true at your workplace or at the neighborhood block parties. These folks may hold all kinds of opposing views, but when they find out that you're a Christian, you may find that they'll join together in opposition against you because you represent Jesus Christ. Don't be surprised if opposing forces united against you!