

A Man With a Withered Hand

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[0 : 00] And I'd like to take as our text this morning the words of verse 10. We can read it, verse 9. Jesus went on from there and entered their synagogue. And a man was there with a withered hand. A man with a withered hand.

And this is a passage which tells of the contrasting views of Sabbath law.

Isn't it strange that, or perhaps not strange, that those who were challenging the rightful interpretation of Sabbath law were those who were challenging the very giver of that law.

But that is not strange because that spirit is innate in man from the time of the fall. And so the passage tells of how conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees arose on this point.

[1 : 21] Jesus used the occasion to teach two important lessons. One, he is Lord of the Sabbath. He has designed it as a day for worship and service for love of God and neighbor.

And secondly, he used the dispute to teach about his own identity and character. It was the practice of Jesus to worship on the Sabbath day.

Many of the Jews had developed a complex web of rules of conduct. Rules with only a tenuous link to the Old Testament itself.

However, we should not lose sight of what the Bible teaches regarding the Sabbath day. A day that God commanded to be observed as a day of rest and worship.

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. The fourth commandment. It reminds me, my late mother-in-law had severe Alzheimer's.

[2 : 39] But there was one commandment that she never forgot. I don't know whether it was drummed into her more than any other. But she would repeat the fourth commandment in Gaelic flawlessly and also in English.

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor to all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.

On it you shall not do any work. You or your son or your daughter, your male servant or your female servant, or your livestock or the sojourner who is within your gates.

For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them, rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Some find the teaching on the Sabbath day restrictive and irksome and so dismiss the need for a day specifically set aside for worship.

[3 : 55] In their eyes it is merely applicable to the days of the Old Testament. Therefore it is not applicable in the New Testament era.

But that, my friends, is a fallacy promoted and perpetuated by the forces of darkness.

The Sabbath principle is as much an element of the New Testament as it was of Old Testament worship. The change of day from the last to the first day of the week does not change our obligation to the Fourth Commandment.

For others, the Sabbath or Sunday is the best day of the week. It gives them the opportunity to join in the corporate worship of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This holy day is not just a matter of not doing certain things, but rather a matter of engaging positively in the worship of God.

[5 : 07] It is an opportunity to delight in God's provision and rejoice in the good things of God's grace. And in this particular context, we are told that the Pharisees were in the synagogue on the day that Jesus was present.

They were looking for an opportunity to attack and criticize the teaching of Jesus and his practices. It is clear from the very beginning of the passage we have read that these men's intention were to seek to undermine the practice and the position of the Lord Jesus Christ.

They were not looking to uphold God's law. They were looking to tear down God's Messiah. And so we learn from this passage that even divinely appointed religious means, like the Lord's Day, like the Sabbath, can be misused.

Men can hold to the outward form and yet miss the whole point of the Lord's Day, the inner spirit of the law.

Their attack gave Jesus an opportunity to respond to their formalism. He accused them of misunderstanding and of misusing the law of God.

[6 : 45] And so you have to see how the providence of God comes to the fore in the passage. The Pharisees, by their own way of it, had designed an ambush.

And the Lord Jesus used it to teach his disciples and us something very important about the heart of a disciple.

According to their rules, it was permissible to rescue a trapped sheep on the Lord's Day. They had posed the question, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?

And Jesus responded by asking another question, as he often did. It's a very useful approach sometimes when you're asked something to respond with another question.

Which one of you, he says, who has a sheep if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? Jesus was asking a hypothetical question.

[7 : 48] Which one of you, literally, who among you would not rescue his sheep? And before they give a reply, he then states, Of how much more value is a man than a sheep?

So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. In other words, if people will rescue trapped animals, which have much less value, then surely Jesus can do good on the Sabbath to humans.

And so Matthew draws our attention to this nameless individual, a man with a withered hand. I'd like just to look at three points.

First, to whom was the command addressed? Secondly, by whom was the command addressed? And thirdly, a specific command.

To whom was the command addressed? And the answer we receive from the Bible, a man with a withered or shriveled hand.

[8 : 57] You find that all the synoptic writers, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, they all refer to this incident. Yet we're not given much background information about this man.

Luke, probably because of his medical background, gives a little more detail than that provided by Matthew and Mark.

Luke tells us that it was his right hand that was withered. On another Sabbath, Luke says, he entered the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was withered. But that's all the information that we have to go on. Does the fact that it was his right hand that was incapacitated mean that he was even more restricted in what he could do in life?

For example, many of us who are right-handed and who may not be ambidextrous, as I think few naturally are, would find it difficult to go through the remainder of life just using our left hand.

[10 : 15] This man would certainly be restricted in what type of employment he might be engaged in. Possibly, on account of that, living in dire poverty.

But I'm in the realm of speculation. Was he a regular attender in the synagogue, or just on that particular day? Think of what he could have missed had he not been there.

Apply that to your own life, if you're not here on a regular basis. To this disabled man, Jesus says, Stretch out your hand.

Jesus is asking him to do something which he had hitherto been unable to do. He is asking possibly what a man may have dreamt of, but in reality could not do.

You've probably seen hands misshapen, severely arthritic, incapable of being straightened out. But this man's hand was affected by some kind of wasting process.

[11 : 41] And yet Jesus says to this man, Stretch out your hand. No indication that Jesus touched the hand, but merely addressed the command to the man.

Now this man's condition, Now this man's condition, I would say, is suggestive, even symbolic, of the person here this morning without Christ.

The preacher is commanded to preach, stressing the need for believing. Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.

The message of salvation has been sent to sinners. Your incapacity and inability is but the space where the divine power might be displayed, that the excellency of the power may be seen to reside

in the gospel and in the Savior himself, and not at all in the person who experiences salvation. The command, then, which brought healing with it, was addressed to a man who was totally disabled. It's worth noting, although not mentioned by Matthew, in both Mark and Luke's accounts, we are told that the man was asked to stand and come forward.

[13:07] Mark tells us Jesus invited him to come close to him. Luke says, come and stand here, and he rose and stood there. The initial command to come and stand was a test, I believe, of the courage of the faith of this man.

Was he willing to be identified among the crowd? In other words, was he willing to rise above the fear of man and come forward?

Many would shrink from that kind of attention, even without disability. Quite sure, if we were permitted to question him, and you were able to ask him, would you like to have your hand restored to health?

He would have answered in the affirmative. Is anyone like that here this morning? The reason I ask is there are those who attend services regularly, and strange as it may sound, they are happy to remain as they are.

But is there anyone present this morning or watching online who can say from the heart, I really want to be saved? Saved from the power of sin, delivered from the guilt of sin.

[14:35] Is there anyone who is crying out, I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out? I would love to repent, but cannot. My heart is so hard like a stone.

I want to love Christ, but I feel chained to the world. I would love to be holy, but the power of sin within captivates me. Friend, if that is you, let me ask you the question that was asked of another in the Bible by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Find the episode recorded in John's Gospel. John's Gospel tells of one who had spent 38 years helplessly by the pool at Bethesda until on a certain day he was asked the question by the Lord, do you want to be healed?

No ifs, no buts. Do you want to be healed? The questioner was the great healer. His name is Jesus, but he will save his people from their sins.

And if you say you have no sin, then you can't be saved. He cannot heal shriveled, wasting hands if there are no such hands. But he comes to those who want him, those who are guilty, those whose hearts are shriveled by the wasting power of sin.

[15:54] those who are well, the Bible reminds us, have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. For Jesus came to call not the righteous but sinners.

God, grant you grace to hear it believingly and feel its power. To whom was the command addressed? An aimless person with a wasting, shriveled right hand.

Secondly, by whom was the command addressed? It was Jesus who gave the command. Then he said to the man, stretch out your hand.

Was the Lord unaware of the true condition of this man? Of course he wasn't. Was he aware that the man was suffering from a severe disability?

Of course he was. Was he merely teasing the man out of ignorance? Of course he wasn't. Jesus was aware even of the thought process of the hearts and minds of the Pharisees, never mind the disability that hampered the life of this man.

[17:11] He knew that the man's hand was shriveled and yet he said to him, stretch out your hand. It's almost as if you can see in your mind's eye.

Jesus looking around the synagogue when he poses the question as it is recorded for us in Luke's Gospel.

Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm? To save life or to destroy it? And there was a silence.

His critics didn't respond. And so Jesus with the authority that rightly belonged to him says to the man, stretch out your hand. For any of us to issue such a command would have no effect and be a futile exercise.

but for this person who is the second person of the Trinity in our nature, the fact that the man's hand was all shriveled and wasted was no obstacle to this power of healing.

[18:22] And the Bible tells us the man stretched it out and it was restored, healthy like the other. One moment that man's hand dangling limply, useless, incapable of responding to the signals from the brain to the hand.

The very next moment that man he could flex his fingers. His hand was healed and restored. At the command of Jesus he was able to do the very thing he had always been unable to do. And at least we're not told otherwise. He stretched out his hand. This man acted in faith. for the command to stretch out his hand tested the inner, deeper faith of his spiritual nature. I think if the man had not completely trusted Christ then at that moment he would have given way to doubts. His hand was withered. Until now he could not do what he was commanded to do. He may even have dreamt of restoration. but when awake again the reality of his disability confronted him every waking hour.

[19 : 38] Reminds me of something I read of a man who was to have a particular honor bestowed on him. Apparently it was an honor that he had coveted for many many years.

But when the day dawned and the moment arrived and this coveted honor was bestowed upon him this is what he said the dream of the reality was better than the reality of the dream.

The dream of the reality was better than the reality of the dream. And is that not often the case in a world full of disappointment?

The dream of the reality was better than the reality of the dream. But for this man the reality was far in excess of the dream.

He had two functioning hands once more. It was restored healthy like the other. He was healed. And it was patently obvious to all that a miracle had taken place.

[20 : 47] The Pharisees would have been quick to highlight the fact had there been no healing. But you only have to note their furious reaction to know that the restoration was complete.

Luke tells us they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus. The Greek word for fury in Luke's account of the episode refers to an unthinkable rage, almost a kind of madness.

it flowed from a fanatical hatred of one who exposed their lack of love and compassion for people in need.

No rejoicing on their part that this nameless individual was healed. Their empathy is really touching, isn't it?

of course their fury may have been exacerbated by the true interpretation of the law, by the one who gave the law, rather than their pharisaical interpretation of the law and their adding to it.

[22 : 04] The healing was immediate. There was no delay. The moment he obeyed the hand, the command, his hand was healed. As already highlighted, it was restored healthy like the other.

Perfect healing, permanent healing. And is this not in many ways a picture of what happens in the salvation of a sinner? The gospel message is proclaimed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And unbelievers hear at least the text of the message of good news. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and by his death on the cross and resurrection from the grave you will be saved.

And up until that point, the unbeliever has been unable to believe the gospel. When given to sinful men, all commands are impossibilities.

Do you remember how the Lord himself illustrated this very truth? In what he said to the rich young ruler, again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle and for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

[23 : 17] And you remember how that statement left the disciples absolutely amazed. When the disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, who then can be saved?

To be saved there is the equivalent of obeying God's command. Christ is surely teaching the sheer impossibility for men to save themselves by the usage of the graphic illustration of the camel and the eye of a needle.

But it is possible for God. He can bring it to pass for with him there are no impossibilities as far as works of power are concerned.

God never commands us of our own strength to believe. When he commands what we cannot do of ourselves, he pledges and promises in that command grace and strength to obey.

By his amazing grace, God enables us to do what we cannot do for ourselves, which is to trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

[24 : 31] Now, you may ask the question, and I think it would be a legitimate question to ask. why does God give commandments that on the face of it are impossible to fulfill?

And my answer to such a question is this, in order to convince us of our own total lack of power and sheer helplessness, in short, to teach us what we really are, sinners, breakers of the law of God,

guilty in the sight of God, totally unable to fulfill the law of God.

For you know there is innate within us the thought that we can turn to God at the time of our choosing, but the Bible teaches otherwise.

We simply cannot. It is God who chooses the time. That's where God's amazing grace and mercy come in. Remember, this incident in the synagogue is not the only example of a cure being effected, where the sheer helplessness of the disabled person is contrasted with the life-giving power of divinity.

Think of the paralyzed man who was let down through the roof of a house to the feet of Jesus. And Jesus said to him, I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home.

[26 : 03] Did the man respond by saying, you are asking the impossible? Can't you see that I'm totally paralyzed? Well, the man did nothing of the kind. It was no ordinary speaker who addressed him with mocking meaningless words to get up.

It was no less than the divine healer and helper of men, Jesus, the Son of God, the man heard, heeded, and was cured. He rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all. And you may remember the reaction of those present. They were all amazed and glorified God said, we never saw anything like this.

And perhaps you too have been amazed when you've seen lives turned around by the power of God's grace. Perhaps lives you thought that could never be turned around.

God's grace at work in their lives, turning them around so that they are followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[27 : 13] Let me re-emphasize even at the risk of repeating myself, we are by nature helpless, graceless, without strength.

By whom was the command addressed? By the great physician of the soul, Jesus the Son of God. To whom was the command addressed?

A nameless person with a wasting, shriveled right hand. Finally, a specific command. The command itself was, stretch out your hand.

The command was very specific. It wasn't, rub your right hand with your left. It wasn't go and show your hand to the priest and let him perform a ceremony on it.

It wasn't even wash your hand, but it was stretch out your hand. It's the very thing he could not do.

And so the command went to the very heart of this man's problem.

[28 : 21] As soon as the hand was stretched out, it was healed. now, the Lord and Savior does not say to any unbeliever this morning, go home and pray.

I hope you will pray. But that is not the great gospel command. The gospel command is believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.

Do you remember the once proud, arrogant, jailer who came as a trembling wreck before the apostle Paul at the midnight hour?

He possibly hardly understood the breadth of his own question when he cried out, sirs, what must I do to be saved? Did Paul counsel him along these lines?

Let's have a little time of prayer. Is that what Paul said? Or did he say, you must go home, jailer, and read the Bible, and I must give you further instruction and pull you in a better frame of mind?

[29 : 29] Oh, Paul did none of these things. But he stated firmly and directly to the distraught jailer, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved and your household.

There is no gospel preached unless you come to this, for salvation comes by faith and by nothing short of it. That's the difficult point.

Yes, and the command is directed at that very difficult point and says, stretch out your hand, or in the case of the sinner, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

For remember, all that any of us ever do in the matter of eternal life, which doesn't have faith in it, can be nothing after all, but the effort of our carnal nature.

For example, what can come from the movements of death, but a still deeper death? Death can never produce life.

[30 : 44] prayer without faith. What sort of prayer is it? It's the prayer of a man who doesn't believe in God. How can a man expect to receive anything from the Lord unless he believes that God is, and that he rewards those who seek him?

Oh, perhaps you're saying, oh, but I must repent before I believe. What kind of repentance is it that doesn't trust God, doesn't believe in God?

An unbelieving repentance is not a mere selfish expression of regret because of punishment incurred. Faith has to be mixed with every prayer and every act of repentance. or they cannot be acceptable. And so, the message goes straight to the point and demands faith. Believe and live, says the message of the gospel. Stretch out your hand, says Jesus, to this, this nameless individual.

[32 : 04] The stretching out of the hand was entirely an act of faith. It wasn't an act of reason. He only did it because faith gave him the ability to obey.

It was a pure act of faith. And you know, the apostle Paul, who accepted that he could do nothing of himself, he also wrote these words, Christ, I can do all things through him who strengthens me. The man who is seeking, Christ can do nothing, but if he believes on Christ, he can do everything, and your withered hand is stretched out.

heart. And in addition to being an act of faith in response to the specific command, seems to me an act of resolve. You know, this man was surrounded by proud, arrogant, disapproving Pharisees. And your imagination can easily picture these upright men with fringes to their garments and phylacteries across their foreheads.

[33 : 26] And there too, the scribes, all wrapped in their former Apollo, very solemn, giving the impression of being very knowledgeable men.

People were almost afraid to look at them. They were so holy and so disdainful. And there they sit like a group of judges in a court to judge the Savior.

And Christ singles out the man with a withered hand to be his witness. And by his command, he practically asks him what he will do.

Who will he obey? The Pharisees or Jesus, the Son of God? Wrong to heal on the Sabbath day, say the Pharisees. Remember the physical healing is but illustrative of spiritual healing.

So what do you do with the withered hand? If that is true of you today or online, do you agree with the Pharisees?

[34 : 32] If you do, you will decline to be healed on the Sabbath day and you won't stretch out your hand. But if you agree with Jesus, you will be glad to stretch to be healed.

Sabbath or no Sabbath, this man stretched out his hand and parted from those who would keep him with a withered hand.

You could say he voted in support of the teaching of Christ when he stretched out his hand. And remember that this powerful healer is also a suffering servant.

That's how the prophet Isaiah spoke of him, the suffering servant of Jehovah. And Matthew reminds us earlier in this gospel of a quotation from the prophet Isaiah.

He took out illnesses and bore our diseases. And you can say he bore them all the way from the cradle to Calvary. Jesus' healings flow from his death on behalf of sinners as a substitute for our sins.

[35 : 42] And as the hymn writer put it, O Christ, what burdens bowed thy head? Our load was laid on thee. Thou stoodst in the sinner's stead, didst bear all ill for me.

A victim led, thy blood was shed, now there's no load for me. Death and curse were in our cup, O Christ was full for thee, but thou hast drained the last dark drop, it is empty, now for me.

That bitter cup, love drank it up, now blessings draft for me. For me, Lord Jesus, thou hast died, and I have died in thee.

Thou art risen, my bands are all untied, and now thou livest in me. When purified, made white and tried, thy glory then for me.

unworthy as we are, he has the power. As you hold up your hand for him, to put life in it, to give you the blessing that your heart desires, and of that, my friend, as you today, may the Holy Spirit lead you to this resolution in your own soul, that you will not be saved by anybody, but by Jesus Christ alone.

[37 : 12] Believe and live. To whom was the command addressed? To an endless, helpless man. By whom was the command addressed?

By Jesus, the Son of God, the Great Healer. A specific command, stretch out your hand, equivalent of believe and live.

let us pray. O Eternal God, we thank Thee that Thou art the great physician, and that Thou hast the remedy, the sole remedy, that our sin-sick souls require.

May we be in receipt of that remedy this day and every day, giving Thee the glory and the honor and the praise that is due to Thy name, and the glory shall be Thine.

In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. Let us conclude by singing to God's praise from Psalm 30, page 239 of the Psalter.

[38 : 31] Psalm 30, page 239 of the Psalter. Psalm 30, verse 239 Lord, I will thee extol, for thou hast lifted me on high, and over me thou to rejoice, made's not mine enemy.

O thou who art the Lord my God, I in distress to thee with loud cries, lifted up my voice, and thou hast healed me.

O Lord, my soul, thou hast brought up and rescued from the grave, that I to pit should not go down, alive thou didst me save.

O ye that are his holy ones, sing praise unto the Lord, and give unto him thanks, when ye his holiness record.

Let us sing these verses, Lord, I will thee extol. Lord, I will thee extol, for thou hast lifted me on high, and over me.

[39 : 58] Thou do rejoice, is not mine enemy.

O thou who art the Lord my God, I in this stress to thee.

With love, Christ, lifted up my voice, and thou hast laid me.

O Lord, my soul, my soul, thou hast brought up, and rescued from the grave, that I to pay should not go down, a life, thou didst me save.

O ye that are his holy walls, sing praise unto the Lord.

[41 : 44] Lord, and give unto him thanks when ye his holiness record.

Lord. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, fellowship and communion of the Holy Spirit, rest on and abide with you all, now and forever.

Amen. Amen.