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Title: Healing of the withered hand on the Sabbath (3:1-6) - Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill? (3:4)
Text: Mark 3:1-6
Theme: In Christ His people are set free from bondage forming rules and regulations.

Introduction:

"The doctrine of a new way (assuming it is a new way) is laid out further."
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark_2#Fasting_and_new_wineskins

"Today's Gospel shows again the problems that Jesus posed for the authorities of His day. The issue in question is the purpose of the Sabbath. He highlights the fact that a law given for the good of God's people was actually a burden to them. Instead of enjoying their day of rest and spending precious time in worshipping God - they were concerned not to transgress any of the additional rules imposed on the Sabbath."
http://www.wellsprings.org.uk/weekly_wellsprings/year_b/sunday_09.htm

"According to the Gospels, Jesus was involved in sixteen healing miracles, whereby God, through Jesus and the power of faith, healed a person. The Gospel of Mark records ten consecutive incidents at the beginning of his Gospel where Jesus was involved with people being healed of their diseases. These healings were signs that the reign of God was present." http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series_b_healings_on_the_sabbathGA.htm

From the inception of our Lord's ministry, the religious establishment sought to put Him to death. His person and works threatened their very existence. His kingship would destroy their man-centered, self-serving empire.

"Note, Ritual observances must give way to moral obligations; and that may be done in a case of necessity, which otherwise may not be done."
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/henry/mhc5.Mark.iii.html>

The sequence began in a synagogue with a sharp clash between Jesus and the Pharisaic champions of the strict moral code of the perishing world-age, a clash that came into focus because of a healing miracle. Now the sequence comes to a climactic end with another such sharp clash that focuses from the outset upon a healing miracle; this clash throws a bright light upon antithetical visions of God's will: to make life whole rather than to kill.

<http://www.ioa.com/~cwconrad/Mark/mk2notes.html#130>

It was the religious establishment that sat front and center in the synagogue. It was their responsibility to safeguard the truth. They were not there to worship but to watch. They sat coiled like a venomous snake waiting to strike at their victim.

THE BIG PICTURE:

The Gospel of Jesus Christ in Galilee - Early Galilean Ministry - His authority challenged [Ministry in Conflict])

- “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” - concerning the forgiving of sin (2:1-12)
- “Why is He eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners?” - concerning the friends He kept (vv. 13-17)
- “Why do John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?” - concerning the fast and food (vv. 18-22)
- “Why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” - concerning the forsaking of the Sabbath (2:23-28)
- “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath?” - concerning the forsaking of the Sabbath (3:1-6)

Kingdom Truth:

Jesus is the “new wine,” He is the king whose kingdom is present. The shadow cast by Him gives way to His actual presence. When we lose sight of Him, “The rule matters more than the reality.” (Tom Wright, Mark for Everyone, 30).

The Present Danger:

Our present danger is that we allow the shadow to replace the substance. In the name of Christ we kill the enemies of the cross. There is a day of reckoning for all those who reject the person and work of Jesus Christ, but it is a day when God alone will exact a horrific sentence against the unbelieving. Until that day, we are to love our enemies and speak well of those who would abuse us without mercy.

Its Eternal Value:**Questions:**

1. Are we willing to save life and do good, even if it appears contrary to man’s understanding of the “law”?
2. “Have we fully appreciated the way in which God’s kingdom burst in, through the work of Jesus, bringing a whole new domain in which new creation, and true redemption, had already arrived?” (Tom Wright, Mark for Everyone, 31).
3. “Are there ways in which the church today can get so blinded by its commitment to what appear necessary rules that it fails to see God’s healing and restorative work breaking through?” (Tom Wright, Mark for Everyone, 31).
4. How can we recapture the principle of rest in a world gone crazy?

To Know: The Holy Spirit desires for us to know the power for life that is in Christ Jesus.

To Choose: The Holy Spirit desires for us to choose life over death.

To Feel: The Holy Spirit desires for us to feel the joy of resting in His resurrected life.

How will they best hear?

“This is a wonderful illustration of how degenerated a good religion can become. For the Pharisees, their religion had deteriorated into rules, regulations and rituals. Rulers, regulations and rituals became more important than mercy and kindness, more important than serving other human beings in need.”

http://www.sermonsfromseattle.com/series_b_healings_on_the_sabbathGA.htm

The yoke of Christ is easy and light, therefore if our religious expression is heavy, then something is wrong (Matt. 11:28-30). The intent of God in giving prohibitions and or guidelines is that we might enjoy Him and all that He has provided. There is a serious flaw when all we see is the negativity to the Christian walk. Sin is wrong; everything else is right.

Jesus knew what He was up against. He knew that the religious establishment meant Him harm. He knew that they sat waiting on His every word and action in order that they might find fault. Yet despite this open and crass opposition, He continued to speak and act in order to bring hope, healing, and wholeness to the depressed, the diseased, and the dysfunctional.

I. The regularity of synagogue attendance (v. 1a)

Note the regularity with which our Lord is found in the synagogue (1:21, 23, 29, 39; 3:1; 6:2). After Mark 6:2, “synagogue” is used only twice (12:39; 13:9). Mark seeks to establish our Lord’s habit or pattern early on in his narrative. Although we do not even suggest how often you should seek to gather with the church family, we do maintain that church attendance is God’s idea and for your protection and edification.

Why does it appear that Jesus withdraws from the synagogue after Mark 6:2?

“Unless Jesus wished to be involved in a head-on collision with the authorities he had to leave the synagogues. It was not that he withdrew through fear; it was not the retreat of a man who feared to face the consequences. But his hour was not yet come. There was much that he had still to do and say before the time of final conflict.” (William Barclay, Mark, 70).

II. The deficiency of the infirmed (v. 1b)

The word means “to dry out, to become dry. The perfect [tense] points to a withered state and may show that it was not from birth, but was the result of injury by accident or disease.” (Rogers & Rogers) “In keeping with his love of strong language [he uses a word to show the] extreme immobility of the hand.” (Ralph Earle, Word meanings in the New Testament, 33). There was nothing he could do to change his condition, his hand was withered.

III. The insensitivity of the audience (vv. 2, 5a)

Unlike the friends of the paralytic in 2:1-12, those who saw watched to see the unfolding drama. Inside the soul of man there is insensitivity toward the sufferings of others. This is often seen by those who slow down near an accident in order to see the sufferings of others. Their cruelty is noted by their desire to destroy the Christ rather than see a person healed (vv. 2, 5a).

“(On the Sabbath) one is not to work on an infant or set a fracture. If one dislocated his hand or foot, he may not pour cold water on it; but he may wash it in his (usual) way. And if he is healed, he is healed.” (Mishna, Shabbat^h 22.6)

“They were harboring murderous thoughts; he was seeking to save life. Which was breaking the Sabbath?” <http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/bjohnson/hg1/PNT02-03.HTM>

“*He* was taking steps to save this wretched man’s life; *they* were thinking out methods of killing himself [emphasis his].” (William Barclay, The Gospel of Mark, 69).

“In the synagogue of the Jews was a man who had a withered hand. If he was withered in his hand, the ones who stood by were withered in their minds.” (Athanasius, Homilies 28, in Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament II – Mark, 35).

The hardness of their hearts can be seen in their attentive watching with the intent of accusing and destroying. O what wickedness rests in the heart of men; O what wickedness is found in my own heart.

The idea of watching in verse two speaks of observing minutely. “It was used for keeping a watchful eye on criminals, for watching out for a bowl lest it be stolen. It was also used of observing one’s conduct to see if the person would act falsely toward another.” (Rogers & Rogers).

v. 5 "thick-headedness": the Greek phrase is "hardening/hardness of the heart", a recurrent OT phrase for stubbornness or willful failure to discern and heed God's will; it is interesting that Codex Bezae (D05) displays "deadening" rather than "hardening." That is probably not the original reading, but is an astute appreciation of the sense called for here. <http://www.ioa.com/~cwconrad/Mark/mk2notes.html#130>

“He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart, This is the only time in the Scripture that the gospel tells us that Jesus had anger. It takes a lot to get Jesus mad and the petty arguments of the Pharisees pressed his “hot button.” Notice that Matthew and Luke omit Jesus’ reference to being “angry” as if his being angry would be too human. (We recall Jesus cleansing the temple and driving out the money changers, but the word, “anger,” is not used in that story although Jesus was using a whip and appeared angry at the desecration of the temple.)”

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When we lose ourselves in the shadow of ritual and regulation we assume the misguided and malignant position of the Pharisee. "The Pharisees were esteeming man-made ritualism above God-ordained concern about a man's welfare. Strict adherence to a rabbinical rule evidently meant more to them than the happiness of a human being." (William Hendriksen, Mark, NTC, 116).

IV. The priority of the Christ (v. 3)

- A. The summons ("Get up" [v. 3b])
- B. The statement ("Is it . . ." [v. 4a])
- C. The silence ("kept silent" [v. 4b])
- D. The sadness ("with anger, grieved" [v. 5])
- E. The sickness ("might destroy Him" [v. 6])

Jesus called to the man to stand up and come forward. Such action was to place the man center-stage and to perhaps awaken in the cold of heart life.

"Note the tender compassion of the Lord when he deliberately brought the man with the withered hand right into their presence. He hoped that the mere sight of the misfortune might soften them, that they might become a little less spiteful by seeing the affliction, and perhaps out of sorrow mend their own ways. But they remained callous and unfeeling. They preferred to do harm to the name of Christ than to see this poor man made whole." (Chrysostom, Gospel of St. Matthew, Homily 40:1, in Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament II - Mark, 36).

Laws bend to save the lost. Life takes precedence over laws. This is a great dilemma. How far would we go, should we go to save the life of the dying when such actions on our part violate the laws of the land?

Was it lawful when people were willing to break Nazi law in order to save the lives of hundreds of thousands from ethnic cleansing? Breaking the law to save life is never our first response. There are many actions that can be taken before we break known law.

"Already these inveterate enemies were resolved to destroy Jesus. They took counsel *how* it might be done. As they went to the partisans of Herod, who ruled in Galilee, they probably sought to persuade them to have Herod put him to death."

<http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/bjohnson/hg1/PNT02-03.HTM>

The words used to describe our Lord's emotion toward the hardness of hearts are intense words. His anger was mixed with deep grief at the unbelief. He loathed their insensitivity toward the helpless and hurting and grieved at their own calloused existence. Again note how both parties were infirm but only one acknowledged it.

Jesus asks those who would murder Him if it was better to save a life or to kill. He exposed the utter hypocrisy of their verbal profession. They claimed to love God but hated those for whom God came.

“He puts the question in its starkest terms, in words dripping with irony: is it legal to do good on the Sabbath, or only to do evil? Is it legal to make people alive, or only to kill them? If the Sabbath speaks of creation and redemption, the answer is obvious – and if the current interpretation of the rules says otherwise, so much the worse for the current interpretation of the rules.” (Tom Wright, Mark for Everyone, 30, 31).

V. The authority of the healer (v. 5)

Similar to our Lord’s statement in 2:11, He calls out to the infirmed to do what was impossible. What God commands He enables, what He promises He fulfills. What part did this man play in the healing of his own hand? He contributed nothing to the healing of his hand, no more than we contribute anything to the saving of our immortal soul. The man had faith to believe what God commands He enables and fulfills. Yet something stirred within him that told him to obey. God began a good work in this man that He would finish (1 Thess. 5:24). The author of this man’s faith would also be His perfecter (Heb. 11:1).

VI. The iniquity of the enemy (v. 6)

“While the withered hand was restored, the withered minds of the onlookers were not.” (Athanasius, Homilies 28, in Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament II – Mark, 37).

“Not only did the Pharisees leave the synagogue: they left in a huff. They were furious (Luke 6:11). The fact that a handicapped man had been delivered of his serious impediment, did not affect them in the least.” (William Hendriksen, Mark, NTC, 116).

The Greek word in Luke 6:11 says they were “filled with rage.” Herein is the great tragedy of a legalistic mindset that desires the praise of man more than the approval of God that follows the letter of the law and allows the spirit of the law to go undone. It is the legalist who says “Lord, Lord” (Matt. 7) only to find themselves unknown and cast out by the Lord of glory. Where you stand on any issue is equal to why you stand. It is impossible for any of us to judge the heart of anyone, but let us look at our own heart and ask God to protect us from a judgmental heart.

Contributing to the tragedy of this moment was the loss of “face” before the audience. The Pharisee kept the common man in bondage to their every whim and desire. Here, their authority and standing before the common man was challenged and overthrown. God reigns not man.

v. 6 Herodians: those concerned to promote the continued or expanding political authority of the family of Herod, whose members functioning as tetrarchs or as "client-kings" provided a measure of autonomy to Jews in Palestine; while not natural allies, Pharisees and Herodians both might recognize Jesus as a threat to the political status-quo and be desirous of removing him. <http://www.ioa.com/~cwconrad/Mark/mk2notes.html#130>

"Destroy him": this is the climax of this story as it is of the whole sequence 2:1-3:6: Jesus holds forth God's will for the Age-to-come as restoration--on the Sabbath itself--of life to wholeness, while his opposing defenders of the establishment are plotting--on the Sabbath day--to kill. <http://www.ioa.com/~cwconrad/Mark/mk2notes.html#130>

"The Pharisees had no power themselves. If they were going to attack Jesus, they needed to make unlikely alliance." (Tom Wright, Mark for Everyone, 31).

APPLICATION: (Where do we go from here, what is our NEXT ACTION STEP?)

"This passage is fundamental because it shows the clash of two ideas of religion. First, to the Pharisees religion was ritual; it meant obeying certain rules and regulations. Second, to Jesus religion was service. It was love of God and love of men." (William Barclay, Mark, 69).

- To obey is better than sacrifice (1 Sam. 15:22).
- You have left the weightier elements of the law (Matt. 23:23).
- Is the ministry of WBC characterized by life or by death?
- Is the ministry of WBC liberating or bondage forming?
- Today, let us with purpose send letters, emails, make phone calls, provide touches that produce life and lift burdens. May this week manifest the power of the cross in producing life in those who are dead.