

## THE MAN WITH THE WITHERED HAND (Mk. 3:1-6)

<sup>1</sup> And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand. <sup>2</sup> And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him. <sup>3</sup> And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth. <sup>4</sup> And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace. <sup>5</sup> And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched *it* out: and his hand was restored whole as the other. <sup>6</sup> And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him.

What had Jesus done so terribly bad that the religious leaders were so intent on destroying Him? After all, He had brought healing to the sick, and comfort to the distressed. He had preached the message of forgiveness of sin, of eternal salvation, and the promise of eternal life in Heaven for all who repent and believe ... This was more, surely, than they could have hoped for. ... And yet, they hated Him. They hated Him for what He said, not for what He did. It was what He said that enraged them ... that He claimed to be God, God the Son, and that He had come down from Heaven, and that He was the Messiah, the Saviour ... and it was through these claims He performed His miracles. This all should have been so welcome. There shouldn't have been any nastiness or any antagonism towards Him. They should have listened to the Truth He was imparting to them, before deciding to condemn Him.

However, it was their religion and their spiritual pride that motivated their hatred. Their concept of salvation was different to His ... and His preaching was in complete opposition to tradition.

The teachings of the Lord Jesus haven't changed! His Gospel remains the same and ought to be so beautiful and so attractive, but it's not. ... Just imagine if society would take on His principles and aim towards living up to the standards of Scripture. Just imagine if the Gospel was being accepted and souls were being saved ... What a change it would make to Kirkcaldy!

That is not happening, though. If Jesus was here today preaching the same message, He would receive the same aggression and opposition and misunderstanding ... and it would actually be the religious people who would condemn Him first, as it was here in the Gospel of Mark. That is why the people who responded more readily to Jesus came from what was considered the lower class of society, - the tax collectors, prostitutes, and criminals ... not the elite!

However, just for a moment, let's try and see it from the point of view of these religious leaders ... They weren't gamblers, or mixed up in prostitution. They weren't robbers, or adulterers. They had never been dragged before a court. These were upstanding citizens. You never would have found them in the haunts of the common people ... [touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless \(Phil. 3:6\)](#), - that's how they were. Like the rich young ruler, [Mt. 19:20 All these things have I kept from my youth up.](#)

Take a look around us today, though ... Do we not hear about individuals within the upstanding leaders of our society, with their secret involvements? ... Don't we hear about the revelations of the gross immoral behaviour of politicians and judges, and others in places of high-standing? Even the conduct of what is known as the 'Church' is not exempt ... The point is, here were these people 'letting on' to be so righteous, - on the outside, - but on the inside they were as rotten and as iniquitous as all those sinners they despised.

How could those Pharisees act the way they acted towards Jesus? What made them do those things to the Saviour? ... Take a look at those men who hated Him ... Their spiritual pride had 'drugged' them into walking around judging everyone else, so that no one escaped their reproach and condemnation. That was what they did day after day. On the outside was the pretence, while on the inside was the reality. They found so much satisfaction through their spiritual pride in castigating everyone else. ... Spiritual pride is as much a sin as any other, and it is a sin that anaesthetises the mind of the sinner. ... And those kind of people are no more aware of it than the drug addict who is 'high' on heroin.

These were the people, though, to whom Christ spoke, [Mt. 5:27 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: 28 But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.](#) ... He went down a list of sins, - secret sins, - to expose the ugly reality and corruption of their hearts ... even these outwardly upright well-dressed people. ... And no-one had ever dared speak to them the way Jesus spoke, and the worst about it was, - as far as they were concerned, - Jesus was 'hitting the nail on the head', because they couldn't argue with what He was saying.

You see, here is the 'bottom line', - if you are not saved, you haven't been changed, and if you haven't been changed you haven't been converted by the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. It doesn't matter how many times you attend church, or what you do in the church ... even if you stand in the pulpit ...

If God's grace has not worked in your heart, you continue to be in danger of the fires of Hell. In fact, even at this very moment, if you are not saved, the Word of God says, Jn. 3:18 *he that believeth not is condemned already*, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

So, why exactly did these self-righteous Pharisees despise Jesus? They despised Him because He attacked them at the point of their pride, and they were particularly proud as to how people saw them on the Sabbath. With their self-inflated laborious righteousness they *condemned* everybody for not keeping it as well as they did! Nobody was right ... and, - on occasion, - they fell out among themselves! But Jesus was definitely the target they all agreed was their enemy. You could look into their eyes and see for Him their hatred *seething*. They had seen the Light, but they put, - as it were, - their hands over their eyes. It is not that they *could* not see it ... they *would* not see it!

Indeed, false religion runs deep. It is a thick darkness that encompasses its prey. It hates exposure to the Light of God's grace, salvation, and repentance. It will allow discussion of *any* subject, but not the subject of the Gospel. They hold tightly to the reins of their religion, - that they can control and manoeuvre into something that suits them comfortably. The demands that such a religion requires fits with their qualities and criteria, and it makes them feel 'good' ... it makes them feel 'righteous', Lk. 18:11 *God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.* <sup>12</sup> *I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.*

These sanctimonious Jewish leaders 'picked up' on Jesus healing a man on the Sabbath. In our previous study we saw how Jesus defied their self-regulated customs, and how those customs were *additions*, - additives, - to the Law of Moses, given by God. Their rules were not what God had given, Prov. 30:5 *Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.* <sup>6</sup> *Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.* ... They were guilty of 'adding', - they were 'liars' ... and so Christ reproved them, *and they did not like Him for it!*

He had reproved them harshly when He told them, 2:28 *the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.* ... He actually did away with the Sabbath. The Sabbath is gone, as far as the Christian is concerned! We, - as Christians, - don't celebrate the Sabbath! The Jews do, but we don't ... as far as the Christian is concerned, it is gone. The Sabbath was a shadow, whereas we have the reality in Christ, - He is our rest and our 'Sabbath', Col. 2:16 *Let no man therefore judge*

you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath *days*:<sup>17</sup> Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Christ. That is why the Sabbath, as the seventh day of the week, is of no relevance to the Christian ... and that is also one of the reasons why we now meet on the *first* day of the week, - instead of the seventh, - to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. ... The shadow of the Sabbath has been fulfilled in the reality of our Saviour. And He brought this message into another one of the synagogues in Galilee, [And he entered again into the synagogue \(3:1\)](#).

And so, He is teaching in this synagogue (cf. Lk. 6:6), and His teaching wasn't like anything these people had heard before. He was teaching salvation, forgiveness, repentance and faith, - He never changed His message, because it was what the people needed to hear, and *still* need to hear ... and that is why we daren't change it either! He went from town to town, from synagogue to synagogue teaching the same truths. He met all kinds of people, and He always spoke directly into their context.

Here is a man whose right hand (Lk. 6:6) was withered (Mk. 3:3 *ξηραίνω*; Lk. 6:6 *ξηρός*). It had shrunk. It had almost withered away. The word that is used describes what happens to dead plants that wither and rot ... So, his right hand was 'dead', there was no power in it, and he might as well not have had it! This was a man in need. His right hand was 'there', but it was no good to him, and he would have found it difficult earning a living for him and his family.

However, on the other hand, it's not like he had a life-threatening condition. A withering hand isn't terminal, - you wouldn't want it, but you are not going to die with it! ... I suppose Jesus *could* have waited until the next day to heal the man, and have avoided this confrontation with the Pharisees on the Sabbath. Notice, [v.2 they watched him](#) ... they were watching Him! Every move Jesus made was an opportunity to condemn Him. Luke was more specific, [6:7 the scribes and Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the sabbath day; that they might find an accusation against him](#). ... Would He do it on the Sabbath? Would He give them the opportunity again to 'heap more coals' on Him?

What hypocrites those Pharisees were! They were all for observing the Sabbath, according to their rules, but at the same time, they desperately wanted Jesus to violate it so they would further accuse Him! ... Isn't it amazing how Jesus did not 'lift a finger', and yet they condemned Him ... He didn't lift a single finger ... what He did, though, was, He spoke ...

It didn't matter though ... *whatever* Jesus would have done, they would have found some way of denouncing Him! They argued that because He was helping someone, it constituted a Sabbath violation ... What a terrible religion they had constructed around their self-righteous pride! ...

Imagine if *man* was God, what a terrible world this would be! It would be 'shambolic'. There would be no order. It would be totally out of control. It is bad enough when we have people in government who have no regard for God ... but, imagine if they were *as God*. You know, that's what the serpent tempted Eve with, Gen. 3:4 the serpent said unto the woman, ... <sup>5</sup> For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. It was also what they wanted in Gen. 11:4 let us build us a city and a tower, whose top *may reach* unto heaven; and let us make us a name. And it was what Lucifer hankered after too, for he had said to himself, Is. 14:13 I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: <sup>14</sup> I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. And it is what the man of sin will also declare at the end of the age, II Thess. 2:4 *who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped*. The position of God is nothing less than what man wants to occupy, and it's all around us today! ... That's what Jesus was being confronted with. They were out to bring Him down!

Luke tells us, *But he knew their thoughts* (Lk. 6:8), - God will not be caught unawares! No affairs of men, - no matter how secretive or conniving, - will catch God out! *The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity* (Ps. 94:11). *Thou understandest my thought afar off* (Ps. 139:2). ... Jesus knew these religious leaders were trying to make Him out to be a loose-living, blaspheming, deceiving law-breaker! They had no concern for the man with a withered hand, - their only interest was to find something more with which they could condemn Jesus! ... These weren't the robbers who waited for their victims along the road from Jericho to Jerusalem ... Neither were they the tax-collectors squeezing every penny out of their clients ... These were upright, self-righteous pillars of the community, - ask them and they would tell you!

Then Jesus said to the man, *v.3 Stand forth*, - He didn't even help Him ... or do anything that should have attracted the abuse He was receiving from inside the hearts of these Pharisees. ... The man hadn't asked to be healed, - in fact, he hadn't said anything at all ... he hadn't even moved in Jesus' direction before the Saviour called him.

Let's for a moment take a look at this from the context of God's sovereign grace in calling the sinner. This man had not made a move towards Jesus ... but Jesus came to where he was in order to find him and call him. This man had not uttered a word appealing to Christ to heal him, - he hadn't touched the hem of His garment, or shouted out above the crowd, or been let down through the roof by his friends, - and yet Jesus knew the man's need and worked a miracle, even without being asked. That is God's Sovereign grace at work! The man with the withered hand would have let Jesus pass on by, after all, why should Jesus bother with him?! ... But, that is grace, - saving grace, - that came to you where you were and directed you into the irresistible arms of God's salvation. ...

And we see here a man who was in a need he wasn't aware could be met ... until Jesus called him out of all the people attending the synagogue. In Matthew's account we read, *12:10 And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him.* Jesus did not answer them though. Instead, v.11 he [*Jesus*] said unto them, *What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?* <sup>12</sup> *How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days.* In other words, do you have special days when you do good, and other days when you don't?! Is that how your religion works? Is today the day you give to God, but tomorrow isn't it? Do you 'pick and choose' when you serve Him? ... What kind of a ridiculous set of principles do you hold to?! Surely if you would do good and help a sheep out of a ditch on the Sabbath, it would be more important to help this man with a withered hand!

And then, - back in Mk. 3:4, - *he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill?* It was obvious how they would answer! You save a life! No question about it! They weren't *that* heartless! ... And also, the way Jesus *asked* the question, *Is it lawful ...* What does the Law of Moses say? What does God say? After all, these were 'experts'! ... They knew the answer ... Jesus caught them out!

It reminds us of another time yet in the future when we shall stand before the judgment throne of God. There will be no arguing with Him on that day ... as there was no arguing with Jesus on this day. So He 'hammered the nail further in', *Is it lawful [is it right] to do good on the sabbath days ...?* Was it right to leave this man with his withered hand, or was it right for the power of God to heal him on the Sabbath? The answer was obvious. They were full of venom ...

their bellies were rumbling because of their hatred of Jesus! They were a bad lot, - a *religious* 'bad lot'! ... They knew that what Jesus was saying was right, but they couldn't bring themselves to agree with Him ... It *galled* them!

Now ... enter the man. Jesus spoke to the man and told him to come out of the crowd and stand before Him. Remember, the man hadn't said a word ... he hadn't asked for healing. Nonetheless, Jesus called him, *Stand forth* (Gr. Arise, stand forth in the middle). The air was thick with silence. He had asked the Pharisees a question, *Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill?* ... but they didn't answer, *they held their peace*. ... And Jesus stared them out, *he had looked round about on them with anger* - this is the only explicit mention of Jesus being angry in the New Testament. Wasn't He angry in the temple when He tossed over the tables, and drove out the sheep and oxen? Yes, He was, but it doesn't actually say He *was* angry.

What was He angry at here, in Mark chapter three? He was angry at their unbelief, their rejection of Him, their apostate religion, their spiritual pride and their *stinking* gross iniquity. They were incurring the wrath of Jesus! ... *There* is a warning for all those who think they can amble up to the judgment throne and the God of love will let them into Heaven no matter what type of person they have been ... He won't, because His standards for entrance into Heaven are perfect, and that perfection can only be reached by repenting of your sin and believing in Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord ... And instead of facing His love, if you are not saved, you will face His wrath forever!

God is angry with sin, and so is His Son, - we see it here. But He was also *grieved* ... *grieved for the hardness of their hearts*. He was angry with them, and yet He loved them. These were the people for whom He came, *Jn. 1:11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not*. ... Grieved and angry at the same time ... That is our Saviour Who has come to save the lost hardened sinner!

Here also we see man's responsibility in responding to Jesus. It is a reality. Every sinner is pronounced guilty for their own sin, and if they don't cry out for the Saviour to forgive them and believe in Him to remove their sin, they will carry that burden themselves to God's judgment throne, and there they will be condemned for willingly rejecting the Gospel. They will have been responsible for rejecting the truth, and they will be sent away from God forever because of their own unwillingness to believe ... That is the other side of Sovereign election. ...

And there is the Saviour, angry yet filled with pity ... angry because they rejected Him, and yet grieving over the condemnation they could have avoided. Ezek. 33:11 *As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die*

Despite their confrontation, Jesus continued, v.5 *He saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other. ... There was no work being done there, but the man's hand was healed. Imagine the noise that swept through that synagogue! The man's hand was healed! A miracle! This man who had come in and out of the synagogue so many times was going home with a new hand. He could work again. He could provide for his family ... How did it happen? Jesus healed him!*

<sup>6</sup> *And the Pharisees went forth ... Did they go away and rethink their policy on Jesus? Maybe we've got this Man wrong? ... No, the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him. ... And Luke explains how they went away, Lk. 6:11 they were filled with madness; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus. Try as we may, we could not quantify the hatred these men had for Jesus ... It was driving them mad! If you want another description, the Greek word (ἄνοια), indicates they were 'out of their minds' with rage!*

And so, this was their response to Jesus and the Gospel. They entered into a conspiracy with Herod against the Saviour. Let's see how we can best get Him! ... And that is what the world has been trying to do ever since. They thought by nailing Him to a cross they had managed it ... but they hadn't. They thought that by persecuting and murdering His followers they could do it, but they couldn't, and they can't!

Look at the word *destroy* [ἀπόλλυμι]. It's the same word in II Peter 3:9, *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish* [ἀπόλλυμι]. That is how harsh that word is! They wanted to get rid of Him completely and utterly, - they wanted to annihilate and obliterate Him! ... And look also at who they joined with, - *the Herodians*. The Herodians had normally nothing to do with the Pharisees. Ordinarily, the Pharisees could not stand them because the Herodians were secularists. They had no interest in religion ... and that was who the Pharisees 'teamed up' with against Jesus. Yes, they were enemies, -

one couldn't stand the sight of the other, much less work together ... but this would have been the only project to unite them, - getting rid of Jesus!

Isn't there a very similar and a very awful blindness that is opposing the Church of Christ today. Enemies unite to form laws that flagrantly devise evil ... laws contrary to God's Word. It forces us 'out into the open' where they come together and castigate God's people. We have seen it regarding the homosexual debate, and in the laws relating to the defiling of the Lord's Day, and the opening up of other religions so as to undermine the Christian Church ... Political parties who argue with each other over the smallest and most insignificant, and yet they willingly combine to force out God's Law from our United Kingdom.

The storm clouds are gathering ... as they were gathering over Jesus. They *will* nail Him to a cross outside of Jerusalem, where He will die. Yet, in the sovereign plan of Almighty God, there in death He triumphed ... He triumphed despite their attempts to defeat Him ... He triumphed, and He paid the ultimate sacrifice for all our sin, and then He rose from the dead for our justification. ... The man with the withered hand ... the Pharisees with the hatred burning in their hearts ... and the Saviour, the victorious Lord.

*Who is this that cometh ...?* This is the One of whom Isaiah the prophet had written seven hundred years earlier ... *this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength?* ... This is the Saviour Who has declared, *I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save* (Is. 63:1).