

Miracle 10: Jesus Heals a Man's Withered Hand on the Sabbath

Matt. 12:9-16; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11

Matthew 12:9-16

9 And when he was departed thence, he went into their synagogue: 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. 11 And he 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? 12 How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days. 13 Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched [it] forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other. 14 Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him. 15 But when Jesus knew [it], he withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all; 16 And charged them that they should not make him known:

Mark 3:1-6

1 And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand. 2 And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him. 3 And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth. 4 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. 5 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. 6 And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him.

Luke 6:6-11

6 And it came to pass also on another sabbath, that he entered into the synagogue and taught: and there was a man whose right hand was withered. 7 And the scribes and Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the sabbath day; that they might find an accusation against him. 8 But he knew their thoughts, and said to the man which had the withered hand, Rise up, and stand forth in the midst. And he arose and stood forth. 9 Then said Jesus unto them, I will ask you one thing; Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy [it]? 10 And looking round about upon them all, he said unto the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he did so: and his hand was restored whole as the other. 11 And they were filled with madness; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus.

The Context: Context (12:9; 3:1; 6:6): All three of the synoptic gospels place this miracle after the incident of the grain fields that occurred on the previous Sabbath.

- 1) Jesus has just declared that He, the Son of man, is the Lord of the Sabbath (Matt. 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5). Jesus is proclaiming that He is the One who exercises authority over the rules and regulations that govern the Sabbath day. As the preincarnate Christ, He is part of the Godhead that established the Mosaic law including the keeping of the Sabbath.
- 2) The legalistic Pharisees and Scribes had added to the Mosaic law at least 39 categories of forbidden activities; whereby making themselves self-appointed “lords of the Sabbath.” Unable to keep the law, these self-righteous religious leaders had instituted a confusing, complex, oppressive system of Sabbath laws to govern the Sabbath day.
- 3) Jesus now enters a synagogue (likely in Capernaum though no text specifically states the location) and He begins to teach (6:6). It is not stated what He was teaching; as we will see that was not at all important to the Pharisees what was being taught.

(over)

- 4) Matthew calls it “their” synagogue (12:9) referring back in the context to the fault-finding Pharisees of the previous narrative.

The Situation (12:10-12; 3:2-4; 6:7-9): A very complex situation develops:

- 1) Matthew (12:10) says “and behold” (a demonstrative attention-getting word meaning look; observe carefully what is said next). A divine highlighter indicating something very important is about to happen.
- 2) While Jesus was teaching, the passage notes that there was a man there with a withered hand. Luke (6:6) points out that it was his right hand. Dr. Luke gives this detail, which is important, because most people are right-handed and this likely affected his ability to make a living in that society.
- 3) The use of the Greek perfect tense indicates that this man was not born with this withered hand, but that he had obtained it from either disease or an accident.
- 4) Both Mark (3:2) and Luke (6:7) say the Scribes and Pharisees were “watching carefully” (closely; spying out of the corner of their eyes) to see if Jesus would heal on the Sabbath. Instead of listening to His teaching, they were watching to catch Him in breaking one of their Sabbath laws.
- 5) All three accounts tell us their purpose was that “they might accuse Him” of breaking the Sabbath. They wanted to accuse Him and ultimately kill Him (Ex. 31:15).
- 6) Some commentators say this man with the withered hand was a “plant” to ensnare Jesus into breaking their Sabbath regulations, but nothing in the passage indicates that the man was part of such a contrived set-up. I personally think God set it up as He Sovereignly orchestrates things to accomplish His purposes. Nothing happens by accident in Jesus’ life.
- 7) Regardless, the welfare of the man was a small matter to the Pharisees; being blinded in their formal religionism, they were there to “catch Jesus in the act” of breaking their Sabbath rules.
- 8) Thought: The very place they were to worship God (the synagogue); they were using to ensnare His Son.
- 9) Luke tells us (6:8) that Jesus knew their reasonings (thoughts, motives). Numerous times Jesus’ omniscience (all knowing) is demonstrated in His miracles (another miracle itself). God looks at the heart (I Sam. 16:7).
- 10) Then, Jesus says to the man with the withered hand, “Rise into the midst” (3:3; 6:8). And rising up he stood (6:8). The man obeys and steps into the middle of the synagogue for all to see. There are no secret methods or “sight of hand” in Jesus’ miracles; all could see.
- 11) Matthew tells us they questioned Him (12:10); asking, “If it is lawful on the Sabbath to heal (cure)?” A guarded question to seek an answer for grounds for accusation.
- 12) Note their assumption that Jesus could heal the man. Underlying their hypocrisy was their sole aim: to accuse Him publicly in an attempt to condemn Him legally. They actually didn’t want to stop Jesus from breaking their Sabbath rules; they wanted Him to perform a healing so they could accuse Him.
- 13) Jesus, instead, gives some incisive, convicting counter questions. “Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath or to do evil? To save life or to destroy? (3:4; 6:9). He is stating an ethical principle by questioning. Not to do good when it is within your power to do so is to do evil. Doing nothing is doing harm. Neglecting the opportunity of doing good is incurring the guilt of doing evil.
- 14) Matthew also adds (12:11-12) that Jesus asks about saving the life of an animal (sheep) on the Sabbath (which was permitted by their added traditions). He then makes comparison; “How much better (surpassing; more valuable) is a man than a sheep? He then states, “**It is lawful** to do well (good) on the Sabbath days.”
- 15) There is no law in Scriptures that forbids healing on the Sabbath. Healing is an act of mercy (Micah 6:8); and God gives no Sabbath restrictions on showing mercy.

(over)

- 16) Mark (3:4) gives us a summary statement as to the result of this interaction between Jesus and the Pharisees/Scribes. It is simply stated, “But they were silent.” They were stunned into silence by Jesus’ accurate statement of the Mosaic law apart from their added rules. Jesus quickly shut their mouths.

The Miracle (12:13; 3:5; 6:10): All three passages tell us that Jesus said to the man, “Stretch forth (out) thy hand, and he stretched forth, and the hand was restored.” Observe:

- 1) Jesus commands the man to do that which was impossible for that man to do; the man by faith makes the effort to obey, and Jesus makes it possible. Genuine faith obeys. When he acts in faith the miracle transpires immediately. With the command, Jesus imparted the power and ability to obey it.
- 2) Jesus does this miracle by a word, not by work. The Sabbath was not broken.
- 3) Matthew adds (12:13) that it was restored “healthy (medical term meaning physically sound) as the other.” This indicates physical symmetry with his left hand.
- 4) Mark adds Jesus’ emotional reactions to the hard-hearted Pharisees. He looked around at them with both anger and grief. The Greek word anger (#3709 orge) means indignant anger or wrath. It is a settled indignation (not sudden outburst); used in Eph. 4:26 indicating that you can have this kind of anger and not sin.
- 5) Not only did Jesus have righteous anger at their sin, He was “greatly grieved” (troubled in human soul) at the hardness (callousness) of their hearts. Jesus was momentarily angry (aorist tense) and continually grieved (present tense). We, like Jesus, can have anger toward sin, but it should be accompanied with grief and compassion for the sinners. (Psalm 103:8-14; Heb. 4:14-16; Prov. 28:14).

The Results (12:14-16; 3:6; 6:11): Multiple things happened as a result of this miracle:

- 1) Luke tells us the Pharisees were filled with madness (folly; foolishness) suggesting mindless actions and irrational behaviors. They hated to be publicly humiliated.
- 2) They immediately went forth out of the synagogue, not trying to defend themselves.
- 3) Once outside the synagogue, they began to “take counsel” against Him. This Greek word (#4824 sumboulion means conspired, plotted together, consulted, laid a plan) against Him.
- 4) Mark tells us (3:6), they even joined together with the Herodians in this conspiracy. The Herodians were bitter enemies of the Pharisees, but the two opposing groups choose to work together against their common enemy, Jesus.
- 5) Their purpose now was “that they might destroy (utterly destroy or kill) Him.” From this point on they began to seek the aid of the Herodians to put Jesus to death. Still nearly two years before His death, they begin to conspire to kill Jesus. Herod had tried to destroy infant Jesus (Matt. 2:13); now his followers (the Herodians) and the Pharisees are seeking to destroy Him once more. They would eventually finish the task on the Cross.
- 6) An amazing miracle had just transpired which should have resulted in praise and glory to God. Instead, these religious hypocrites were unimpressed by the power of His miracle, the authority of His words, and the compassion of His heart. Rather, they became hard-hearted antagonists of Jesus.
- 7) Matthew tells us (12:15), Jesus “knowing” (ginosko, not oida) departed (withdrew to another location). Jesus didn’t just know intuitively (oida), but now had experiential knowledge (ginosko) of their desire to kill Him.
- 8) The disciples and a great crowd followed Him to the sea (of Galilee) and He healed all that were ill/sick (12:15).
- 9) Lastly (12:16), He charged (admonished) them (the disciples and crowd) that they should not make Him known (publicly visible or manifest). Jesus was not a publicity seeker, plus He knew the Pharisees were out to kill Him.