

Mark 3:1-6
Lord of the Sabbath
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Introduction

The World had looked forward to the coming of Messiah for thousands of years. The Old Testament clearly stated what Messiah would do and even prophesied of His Deity. Yet when Messiah arrived, His own people rejected Him. What God offered through Messiah was an offer of the forgiveness of sins. God's grace and mercy are undeserved and cannot be earned.

This grace and mercy put Jesus at odds with the religious system which taught one could earn acceptance with God by their own accomplishments. While the Pharisees looked good on the outside, their hearts were filled with pride and evil.

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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.

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The Context

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Jesus entered the synagogue, most likely to teach the Good News of the Kingdom. In of the congregation gathered at the synagogue was a man whose hand was withered. Luke, the physician, notes that it was his right hand (Luke 6:6). Given that most people are right-handed, this condition would have been debilitating. The text does not explain what caused this man’s affliction—whether it was an accident or a disease. The Greek word translated **withered** is a term that refers to atrophy. It is used of dead plants that have dried up and wasted away, suggesting that his hand was neurologically lifeless or incapacitated.

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Since even normal manual tasks would have been extremely difficult to perform, it is likely that this man was unable to earn a living. However, the man's condition was not life-threatening. Jesus could have waited until after the Sabbath to heal him, but He was intent on making a spiritual point. He deliberately chose not to postpone the man's healing, because He wanted to confront the unbiblical restrictions contrived by the rabbis. As on other occasions, He intentionally healed this man on the Sabbath (Luke 4:31–35; 13:10–17; 14:1–6; John 5:1–9; 9:1–14).

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The Pharisees and scribes, were aware of Jesus' antagonism toward their religious system. They were watching Him to see if He would heal this man on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. This was no casual observation. It was intensive, sinister scrutiny, "**they watched Him closely**". Perhaps they had even arranged for the injured man to be in attendance at the synagogue that day, hoping to trap Jesus in the act of violating the Sabbath. Outwardly, they pretended to protect the Sabbath. Inwardly, they desperately wanted Jesus to break their Sabbath traditions so that they could discredit Him.

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The Pharisees and scribes knew what the Old Testament specified. Over the centuries, they had developed additional rules and traditions—including restrictions on what level of care could be given to those who were sick or injured. Unless a person's life was at stake, the rabbis determined that doing anything to improve someone's physical condition constituted work. The most a physician or relative was permitted to do on the Sabbath was keep the sick person alive, or maintain the status quo of their condition, until the following day. Anything more than that was regarded as work, and therefore a violation.

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On that basis, if Jesus healed the man, He would be violating Sabbath restrictions. They did not care about the physical well-being of the disabled man. Nor did they care about the unprecedented, supernatural power that Jesus would display by healing the man's hand. Their only concern was with whether or not Jesus would break their petty traditions. If He did, they could indict Him as a Sabbath violator—an irreligious blasphemer who deserved to be condemned. Jesus, of course, perceived the hostility of their hearts. According to Luke 6:8, "He knew what they were thinking." He recognized that this was a trap. But rather than avoiding the conflict, He confronted it.

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The Confrontation

Mark 3:3-5

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.

Matthew 12:10-12 adds another piece to the story.

And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—that they might accuse Him.

¹¹ Then He said to them, "What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? ¹² Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

Jesus points out the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, they will break the Sabbath to save their sheep (money) but refuse to allow a man made in the image of God to find healing and restoration.

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Jesus did not back down with regard to the Pharisees. It is also important to recognize that there is no record that the man asked to be healed. It was Jesus who initiated the situation. Jesus called him out of the crowd. He said to the man with the withered hand, "**Step forward!**" Jesus then addresses the Pharisees, "**Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?**"

If the Pharisees said to do good, they would validate Jesus healing the man's hand. If they said evil, it would reveal their hearts and contradict the teachings of the Old Testament. So they "**kept silent.**"

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The Confrontation

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Jesus paused and stared His enemies down, looking around at them with anger. As their silence filled the room, their consciences must have burned under the weight of His piercing gaze. Jesus was angry with the calloused unbelief of the Pharisees. In particular, He was "**grieved by the hardness of their hearts**". Though angry with their unbelief, He grieved understanding their eternal destruction that would come as a result of their unbelief.

Jesus then turned His attention to the man and said, "**Stretch out your hand.**" **And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other.**

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The Conspiracy

Mark 3:6

Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him.

One would think that the Pharisees would have responded in faith after witnessing a supernatural healing like that. At the very least, it should have given them pause. Instead, their fury against Jesus escalated because their authority had been publicly challenged. The Pharisees "**went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him.**"

The Herodians were Jews who sided with the Roman Government and supported King Herod. They were viewed as traitors having rejected Jewish customs and culture and were viewed as sinners

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So What ...

What about you? Where do you stand with Jesus?

The Pharisees hearts, like many people today were hardened and as a result they were unable to see the Truth that was right before their eyes. They trusted in their works and knowledge which stood in total contrast to the grace and mercy offered by Jesus. When confronted by Truth, they became angry rather than humbling themselves before God. Their intellect saw the things of Christ as foolishness. Many today will claim that they will believe if given evidence, however there is nothing they will accept until their heart is changed. Like the Pharisees, God could stand before them and demonstrate His power, and they will still reject.

Do not lose hope in your witnessing. God alone is able to convict of sin, righteousness, and a judgment to come!