

The Miracles Of Jesus Christ: Healing A Withered Hand (Part One)

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In a synagogue in an unknown town in Galilee, Jesus Christ healed a man with a withered hand, of which three of the Gospel writers give an account (Matthew 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11). Mark tells us that Jesus "entered *again* into the synagogue" (Mark 3:1), indicating that this was His usual custom each Sabbath. Luke (Luke 4:16; 6:6) and John (John 18:20) inform us that Christ regularly taught in the synagogue service. Jesus, then, regularly attended Sabbath services, and in doing so, He was a familiar figure who spoke and took part in the worship of God.

More than irritating Him, it angered Christ to hear the Pharisees and Sadducees misconstrue and burden the people with their misinterpretation of the law of God, by which they loaded it with trivial laws and overly restrictive rules. Luke records another situation, which is indicative of their approach: "But the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath; and he said to the crowd, 'There are six days on which men ought to work; therefore come and be healed on them, and not on the Sabbath day'" (Luke 13:14). They had perverted the Sabbath into a day of miserable constraint instead of its true intent, which is to free people from the pressures of the world, allowing them to have a personal relationship with their Creator. The accumulation of superstitious rites had exchanged the spiritual for mere ceremonial obedience.

In sharp contrast, God made the Sabbath for mankind, not mankind for the Sabbath, and He appointed Christ as its Lord (Mark 2:27-28). God intends that people use the Sabbath to rest physically from their normal work, but more importantly, to receive spiritual rest and to improve their relationship with Him and their worship of Him. For God's people, the Sabbath is an eagerly anticipated spiritual sanctuary from the material worries and activities of the world.

1. What was the mood of the Pharisees when Christ entered the synagogue? Matthew 12:10, 14; Mark 3:1-2; Luke 6:7, 11.

Comment: On this particular occasion, the Pharisees were at the synagogue ready to entrap Jesus for His use of the Sabbath. When He came to the man with the withered hand, they watched and waited, suggesting that the Pharisees expected Christ to intervene and heal the man. They resolved that no matter what He did, they would find fault with it, to use it as the ground of an accusation before the local tribunal. The rabbis allowed Sabbath healing in cases of life and death, but a withered hand did not meet the criteria.

From the beginning, the scribes and Pharisees had persistently opposed Christ's teachings because He exposed their hypocrisy, lessening their esteem and influence among the people. Jesus knew of their animosity toward Him even before they began to hinder His work. As the word "watch" implies, they were spying on Him, scrutinizing every move He made. Their hypocrisy was obvious.

Christians should not expect to fare any better—in fact, we should count it all joy (James 1:2) because the "sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared" with the coming glory (Romans 8:18). In trying to uphold righteous standards, Christians are often watched by a suspicious and spiteful world. Jesus says, "If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. . . . But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me. . . . They hated Me without a cause" (John 15:20-21, 25).

In order never to give the enemies of Christ a reason to blaspheme, our lives must be sterling examples of God's way of life. The Father gave Jesus a full measure of the Holy Spirit, empowering Him with the discernment and ability to know people's hearts. We need to rein in our thoughts and bring them under control. Every day a vast number of vain and worldly imaginations pass through the average person's mind. Others never notice them, but God does. Nothing is hidden from Him.

2. How important is it that the man was in the synagogue on the Sabbath? Matthew 12:10, 13; Mark 3:4-5; Luke 6:9-10.

Comment: The man Christ healed is described as having a "withered hand." With professional accuracy, Luke alone tells us that it was his right hand, as ancient medical writers always noted whether the right or the left was affected. Since most people are right-handed, his right hand was especially important to him since he likely needed it to work. In addition, only the man's hand was withered or shriveled, not his whole arm, apparently the result of paralysis due to some accident or disease rather than a congenital deformity.

He was in the right place—where he should have been—on the Sabbath day. If he had stayed home that day, would he have had this wonderful opportunity to be healed? The same principle holds true regarding our own Sabbath attendance with others of God's church, when possible. If we fail to attend the commanded "holy convocation" on the Sabbath, we may miss out on the spiritual healing God provides through the inspired messages from His Word, as well as the encouragement of the brethren to press on in faith and obedience to God. As the author of Hebrews writes:

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:24-25)