

Sabbath Legalists Silenced by a Saviour Who Cares

Mark 3:1-6

Halifax: 17 February 2019, 10:30 AM

Introduction

Last week in our Mark sermon series we did not have a sermon from Mark.

- Instead I preached from Psalm 70 which is our new Psalm of Focus that is related to Mark.
- I chose it because in Mark 3, where we begin today, we have various sorts of people coming to Jesus... some of them as friends...and some of them as enemies who oppose His gracious saving work.
 - And Psalm 70 is a Psalm where Jesus our anointed king leads us in a song in which He is asking God to frustrate His enemies who try to destroy Him and His kingdom...
 - And to prosper those who seek God and who rejoice in God's salvation and glory that He brings.
 - We see in this Psalm how eager Jesus is to be blessed in His saving work for us as our anointed king, and how eager He is to see those who oppose stopped.
 - He recognises that currently, He is poor and needy as our king—the kingdom in this world is not yet brought to glory—there is still much to be done.
 - So He asks the Father to hurry and cause His kingdom to come.

Today we are going to see, in Mark 3:1-6, some of those enemies who want to stop Christ from saving people.

- We will see that Jesus is angry with them because they oppose Him being merciful to needy sinners. They don't want Him to be merciful.
- We see Him going ahead and healing a man with a withered hand, despite His enemies' efforts to stop Him.
 - By this He testifies that it is right to do good on the Sabbath Day.
 - The Sabbath is not a day to forget people, but to love them all the more.

Our scripture reading is from Mark 3:1-6.

- Please listen as I read it to you, for this is the word of God.

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.

There we will end the reading of God's word. May He add His blessing to it.

I. Take a look at this man with the withered hand. Consider him.

- Verse 1 presents him to us: **“And He [Jesus] entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had withered hand.”**

A. Here, brought to our attention, is a man with a withered hand.

1. The word *withered* in English and in the original is similar...
 - His hand is like a plant when it is dried up.
 - It used to have life in it, but now it is shrivelled up and worthless... just a useless appendage.
2. Tradition has it that this man was a stone mason of some years.
 - He had once made his living that way, but now he is unemployed and is reduced to beggary.
 - Jerome quotes from sources that say he came to Jesus and said,
 - “I am a mason, who earned his bread with his hands. I beg you, Jesus, to restore me my health, so that I need not beg for food in shameful fashion.”
 - Whether that tradition is true or not, here is a man going through life with a useless hand.

B. Looking at him is very important—really looking.

1. Jesus does that.
 - This man really matters to Jesus.
 - He sees this man’s situation with his withered hand—how it affects him—the stigma—the poverty—the struggle to do basic tasks.
 - Jesus sees this and He cares about this man.
2. But this man does not matter to the Pharisees.
 - They are not concerned about his plight, for he is only a man.
 - He should be able to manage well enough...
 - There are greater concerns such as God’s righteousness and God’s kingdom and keeping oneself from the defilement of sinners.
 - This man and his hand is of little importance compared to all that.
3. But is that so?
 - It is not so—not if Jesus’ kingdom is God’s kingdom.
 - In Jesus’ kingdom, people in need, be they lowly or great, are very important.
 - They are the greatest ones in the kingdom... the ones we should be the most concerned about if we are concerned about God’s glory.
 - Jesus teaches us that God’s glory is seen to the highest degree by ministering to people with withered lifeless parts.
 - That is the very essence of the work that He came to do as God’s anointed king, His Christ, His Messiah.

TRANS> And there is another thing that we see when we look at this man.

C. What about your withered parts?

1. Inasmuch as there is sinful passion and lust in your heart, your soul is withered.

- A drunkard is a dead empty soul who, instead of caring for others, cares only for his next drink.
 - A porn user is a dead empty soul who, instead of caring for others, cares only to satisfy himself with his eye-candy.
 - So the glutton, so the greedy, covetous person, so the gossip, so the thief, so the bitter person, so the proud person, so the anxious person, so the person who is always focused on self and what others think of them, whether people like you, respect you, care about you... how they treat you.
 - All of that is characteristic of death in your soul—it is a withered soul—it is cancer in the soul.
2. A soul with life is a soul that looks outside and sees others.
- It is a soul that is like a hand that can serve more than itself—a hand that can reach out and connect to others—a hand that can care for the rest of the body.
 - It is not closed up and dead.
3. Oh my brothers and sisters, do you not see this body of death that you carry about?
- Even you who have been brought to life, are you not like Paul who said that even as a believer, he was bearing about a body of death?
 - It there not still so much death in you?
 - There is so much of this in me. More than any of you could imagine...
 - I am weary of it.
 - I want to live, but I find so much death.
 - So much is withered. So much is not functioning.
 - Do you not have warrant to cry out as Paul did in Romans 7:24: **“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”**
 - Is there not very good reason for you to come to the Lord and say, “Lord save me! Lord have mercy on me!”???

TRANS> So you see what this man does to us when we really look at him.

- We see a man in need because he has a lifeless, withered appendage.
- And in our struggle to really see him so that we truly care about him, we then see that we have death within our souls...
 - His withered hand is like the withered parts of our soul.
- It is not pleasant to see such things—especially for those who do not know what means to be justified and pardoned through Jesus.
 - It is especially hard if you are trying to be righteous by your own doing.
 - Jesus stands in your way. He exposes that you are not righteous.

II. The Pharisees in our text are opposed to Jesus.

A. It is clear from verse 2 that they are fully set against Him:

- Mark 3:2: **“So they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him.”**
1. Here you have men who are eager for another man to do something wrong.

- Isn't that an awful thing?
 - They are watching for anything.
 - Their malice is such that it would make their day if He would just do something that they could accuse Him of.
2. What kind of person would do such a thing?
 - Do you really want to know?
 - A person like you—a person like me.
 - Or do you mean to tell me that you have never looked for evil in other people and been glad when you found it?
 - Perhaps we should have you come forward and be an example for all of us, because the rest of us have done this—and if we are honest, we still do it.
 - Sometimes when there is a person that seems to be more righteous than we are, we get a kind of relief from finding fault with them... something...
 - And that was what was frustrating about Jesus—and is frustrating to many still... that He is completely without sin.
 - If you can see Him as Saviour and find hope in the fact that He is without sin, it makes it a lot easier to accept—but still—our flesh wants to be superior to Him.
 3. But these men had gone far in their malice against Him—it was entrenched.
 - They wanted to find something that they could actually bring charges against Jesus about... some violation that they could turn Him in for.
 - That is what is meant by the word *accuse* here.
 - Breaking the Sabbath could even be a capital offense, so because of their malice, they are hoping that Jesus will heal this man so that they can accuse Him of breaking the Sabbath.
 - That is the extent to which their malice had grown—
 - But be well advised... if you have even a drop of that malice (and of course you do), it has the potential to grow to the same extent that it is found in these Pharisees.
- B. Why are they so opposed to Jesus that they would be doing this to Him?
1. It is because Jesus has been exposing their false religion.
 - a. It was a religion that they had drifted into over generations and it was very comfortable to them.
 - It was a religion that made them look good before others and feel good about themselves in comparison to others.
 - b. There is a lot of religion that aims to do that today—in different ways.
 - 1) There is religion like Pharisees have where you do rituals more zealously than others—we saw how they fasted twice a week and took pride in it.
 - And they had special ritual washings things. The 'I do this and you don't,' mentality.
 - 2) And there is the religion of social media where you speak out against wrongs and stand up for things like justice,

- And think you have done quite well even though you don't treat the people in your own house with justice or compassion.
- 3) And there is a strange religion today that has infested the church, where people talk about how God tells them that they have what it takes.
- That is just what the Pharisees thought about themselves, only with theirs you had to do rituals but with the new form you just have to be you.
 - And when other people don't admire you so much, you can know that God does because He knows the truth about you.
 - The true religion tells you that you don't have what it takes and that you need God to help you and to save you by His grace... and that you desperately need His forgiveness.
2. Jesus, since He had been in the public eye, had been exposing the falsity of the religion of the Pharisees.
- a. He had been repeatedly exposing the fact that it was a religion that taught you that you should be too holy to care about other people.
- Now of course they would not say that about their religion, but Jesus was exposing that that was in fact *true* about their religion.
 - Their idea was that they were so concerned with ritual purity, with keeping the Sabbath, with avoiding defilement, with the things of God...
 - that they were too holy to care about the tax collectors or about a man with a withered hand.
 - They were concerned about the things of God—prayer, purification, fasting.
 - And they had been effective in getting other people to be impressed with them and to accept this form of religion.
- b. But here was Jesus who came to minister to needy people.
- He is among sinners, and when the Pharisees try to shame Him for defiling Himself, He says things like, "It is not the healthy but the sick who need a doctor," or "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.
 - The Pharisees liked it much better when they could use the defilement word or accuse you of breaking the Sabbath and cause you to be unnerved.
 - You know how it is today... all you have to do is say: you are racist, or you hate women, or homophobic, or unscientific... and your opponent will melt into carpet and start apologising.
 - And from the other side of the aisle you can say, that's Marxist, or liberal...
 - And in religious circles, depending on your position, you can say, that's legalistic, or that's pharisaical, or that's unloving, or that's Roman Catholic or Baptist or Liberal or whatever.
 - But Jesus did not melt when the Pharisees used their most effective accusations against Him.
 - He was not unnerved and that made them unnerved.

- He turned their accusations around and exposed the wrong that was in them.
 - This was unacceptable!
- c. One of the reasons there are so many causes today is because you can get on board with a cause and that is all you have to do to be righteous.
 - You don't have to do the most important thing in the world which is to love your neighbour as yourself.
 - You just have to be opposed to the right things and then you are okay.
 - It can be things of the left or things on the right—but you are in.
 - We all feel guilty because we don't love our neighbour as we should, so these causes are very attractive to us.
 - They are way to get easy righteousness... even if they require some effort—at least they are doable.
 - Again, I can be respected as a person that is too “holy” to care about people—
 - I am so consumed with women's rights that I don't care if babies die;
 - I am so concerned with my prayer ritual that it doesn't matter if I ignore my wife and her needs, or my aging parents.
 - I am so concerned about transgenderism that it doesn't matter if I curse someone out who doesn't use the right pronouns.

TRANS> Jesus exposes the hypocrisy and shows us how much we need Him.

C. And I say, what a terrible way these men had of keeping the Sabbath.

1. The Sabbath is a day for us to come apart from our regular activities during the week to seek the Lord.
 - It is a day to remember the riches of His grace and of His kindness toward us.
 - A day to rest in His promises and to encourage others to do so as well.
 - It is a day to worship the Lord with our brothers and sisters and to lift up our prayers together.
- But these Pharisees had a different way of keeping the Sabbath.
2. Their way of keeping the Sabbath was to catch people breaking the rules they had come up with about the Sabbath... and now especially by catching Jesus in some violation.
 - There are such terrible things that we can do on the day...
 - Maybe you have bitterness or malice and you focus on finding fault like that with others.
 - Or maybe you are so self-focused that your main concern at church is how other people treat you—if they like you—if they admire you—if you they notice you...
 - It ruins the day for you!
 - Instead of looking to worship God and to be a blessing for others, you turn it into a day of feeding your flesh—which is the same as withering up your soul.
 - That is what these Pharisees were doing.

- They might have been feeding on the bread of life, but instead they were feeding their souls with more malice and more bitterness.

III. Jesus calls the man with the withered hand to come forward where people can see him.

- V. 3 tells us, **And He said to the man who had the withered hand, “Step forward.”**

A. Why does Jesus do this?

1. Obviously so that people can see Jesus heal him.
 - He wants them to know that He has the power to put life into what is withered and worthless.
 - What a marvellous thing to see a shrivelled up hand turn back to normal by the word of command from Jesus!
 - It assures us of His power to put life into our withered souls and bodies.
2. But Jesus also sets him in the midst of them because He wants people to know that He is not too holy to care about this man on the Sabbath.
 - That kind of holiness was the accepted standard that everyone bowed to.
 - But Jesus wants everyone to know that He is too holy not to care about this man and heal this man on the Sabbath Day.
 - He is promoting a different kind of holiness that cares about our neighbour and reaches out to him in love.
 - Jesus wants it to be conspicuous because He wants us to know that He will have mercy on us if we will come to Him.
 - He wants us to know that this is more important to Him than following man-made rules about the Sabbath.
 - He is not too holy to care about us, He is too holy *not* to care.

B. You can tell that this is His concern by the question that He asks after He has the man step forward.

1. In verse 4, He asks them: **“Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?”**
 - In other words, should you, on the Lord’s Day, be looking to bless your neighbour or to hurt him?
 - To impart life to him, or to leave him withered?
2. The answer to this question is quite obvious... in a way... but it had depth.
 - Jesus is asking if the way they had been looking at the Sabbath and at all of religion was right.
 - Is religion supposed to make you indifferent to your neighbour or is it supposed to make you care more about your neighbour?

C. Jesus is angry when these Pharisees are silent.

1. They were silent when He asked this obvious question if we ought to do good or evil on the Sabbath
 - Their silence was an ugly silence of refusing to see the truth, of refusing to accept the obvious.

2. Verse 5 tells us of His anger.
 - It says, (v. 5): **And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, ...**
 - That **He looked around at them** means that He looked at each one of them... from one to another.
 - The word **anger** is a very strong word that refers to God’s wrath on the Day of Judgment... it is used of what we call “hot anger.”
 - And of course it is pure and holy anger, not like our anger often is.
 - He is angry because of the hardness of the hearts of these men.
 - He is grieved by this hardness...
 - It is so contrary to the way that He created us...to be responsive creatures that are alive to care about others and to love them.
 - But here were souls that were cold and withered like this man’s hand...
 - only this man wanted to be healed while these Pharisees were committed to death—they were like stone even when the Son of God had brought them life-giving truth.
 - In the name of religion, these men who ought to have been shepherds did not care about the plight of this man... about relieving him.
 - They had the rules about the Sabbath—and healing a withered hand was not permitted.
 - They were saying that in the name of true religion, Jesus should not care about this man.
3. This was so contrary to all that Jesus was about!
 - He had come here from heaven to save sinners in His great love.
 - If He was like these men, true religion would have meant that He remained in heaven and never let Himself be defiled by coming to this sinful world.
 - He would have kept Himself pure and left us to utterly perish—including these Pharisees.

TRANS> Clearly there are two religions here and they are not compatible with each other.

- One is too holy to care, the other is too holy not to care.

IV. See what each of these religions does on the Sabbath.

A. Jesus does good on the Sabbath Day and imparts life to this man’s withered hand.

- Verse 5 tells us (starting from the middle of the verse): **He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other.**
1. Jesus’ power is in the command and so is His love.
 - Jesus does not even touch the man.
 - He only speaks the word.
 - Clearly, this is not the work of a doctor applying remedies that could have been applied just as well on another day.
 - This is a work of God—it is beyond criticism.

- That hand that was without life is given life again—like the other.
 - What a marvellous thing it must have been to see life come into it!
 - To see the man obey the command to stretch out the hand that he could not until Jesus told him to.
2. Christian, take heart!
- Jesus cares for you and He has the power to put life into whatever is dead in you. He is both willing and able to do so.
 - You know that if you have been born again because His command to come to Him and to believe could not be obeyed without Him giving you life.
 - You can be sure that He will do to you what He did to this man if you present yourself to Him for His mercy.
3. But you will say to me, then why doesn't He relieve me now if He really cares?
- If He is willing and able, why do I still have so much that is withered up and lifeless both in my body and my soul?
 - Why doesn't He relieve me?
 - ANS> For the same reason that He did not come down from the cross.
 - He did not come down because He needed to be there for a while.
 - And now you need to be where you are for a while.
 - Jesus definitely wanted to be relieved, and He very much wants to relieve you and He will... but not until tribulation has done its work.
 - He cares about you more than anybody else does.
 - He is too holy not to care
 - He proved that by staying on the cross for us.
 - He is angry and grieved with those who don't care.
 - And rest assured, the day of healing and deliverance will come.
 - He wants to hasten it and it will come soon.
 - He will make us completely whole—
 - Whatever about us is lifeless, whatever about us does not work, will work again.
 - Jesus is risen and the day will come when we are risen also.
 - What a glorious day that will be.
 - He wants to come and He will.

TRANS> But what about the Pharisees.

B. The Pharisees do evil on the Sabbath Day. They determine that they must eliminate Jesus.

1. What might they have done instead?
 - They might have accepted what Jesus exposed about them.
 - They might have cried out and said, like I hope that you did today,
 - "My soul is withered up in me like this man's hand."
 - "I do not care for others or reach out to them the way I should."
 - "Lord have mercy on me. Stretch out your hand and heal me."
- How good that would have been!

2. But instead they dug in deeper and made their heart even harder.
 - That is what you do when you resist truth... you go deeper into death.
 - You wither up your soul that is already withered up.
 - To them, Jesus was attacking their religion so now they had to attack Him.
 - Verse 6 says: **Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him.**
 - This is not so much that they were making an actual plan of attack, but that they were coming to the conclusion that they needed to get rid of Jesus—that they will find a way to do so.
 - This is what they were doing on the Sabbath Day.
 - Jesus was doing good on the Sabbath and they were planning evil.
 - What a way to observe the Sabbath!
 - They will find a way to destroy Jesus.

C. Be glad that the Pharisees did not win in the end.

1. If they did, the religion that stands would be the one that makes you too holy to care about other people.
 - It would be the religion in which God is too holy to care about people.
 - That would be the religion of heaven—where we are all isolated and absorbed with God alone.
2. But Jesus wins... with religion that makes a person too holy not to care...
 - With religion that has a God who is too holy not to care when those who have withered parts present them to Him.
3. Satan and hardened Pharisees will not be raised up to live in glory, they will be cast into the pit.
 - But those who are in Christ and look to Him to put life into all that is withered about them will be completely infused with life and will dwell in His house of love forever and ever.
 - Do not harden your heart, but bring what is withered and ask Him to give it life.