

## Healing the withered hand on the Sabbath 1-6-2002

### Lk.6:5-11 (Mk.3:1-6, Mt.12:9-14)

Lk.6:5 **Then Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."**

6 On another Sabbath he went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled. 7The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath.

**8But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Get up and stand in front of everyone." So he got up and stood there.**

**9Then Jesus said to them, "I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?"**

10He looked around at them all (Mk.2:5 He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts), and then said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He did so, and his hand was completely restored. 11But they were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.

(Mk.2:6 **Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.**)

1.40

Last week we saw that the purpose of the Sabbath in the OT was: Ex.31:16 **The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant.** Like circumcision, it is a symbol of loyalty to the covenant.

We also found that the Sabbath was supposed to be a day of rest – given as an expression of God's love to man. The Sabbath was a gift to man, and it was given for man, not man for it.

Jesus connected the Sabbath w/ the tender heart of God. They had obliterated that illustration

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Lk.6:6 **On another Sabbath he went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled.** (His life was not in danger.)

**7 The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath.**

3

They should have been listening to the sermon. Instead they were focused on this poor guy with the hand. They cared absolutely zip about that guy. They were just hoping to get a chance to see Jesus break a rule (healing on the Sabbath was forbidden – it's too much like work).

Since it was not a life-threatening problem, this would be a clear cut violation of their rules.

3.37

It's interesting that it says they were watching to see if He *would* heal him. It doesn't say they were watching to see if He *could*.

They knew He could, and were banking on the fact that he would.

One of the great evidences that Jesus' had miraculous power was the fact that not even His opponents disputed it. They argued about where He got the power, but no one questioned the fact that He had it.

Only when you get hundreds of years removed do people begin questioning *whether* the miracles happened.

In fact, they had such confidence in Jesus' ability to do miracles that in order to catch Him breaking the Sabbath they just figure "Wait until the Sabbath, then put someone in front of Jesus who needs miraculous healing, and we've got Him!"

The Pharisees had more confidence in Jesus' power than many evangelicals today.

So they are watching...Jesus doesn't do anything, just keeps on going with the sermon. Teaching was always a priority.

4.40

So they press the issue...

Mt.12:10 **Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"**

That was not a controversial question. It had a very basic, very clear-cut answer: no.

Their law said that if a person was going to die before the end of the Sabbath day, you could help him hang on. But if he could survive until the next day, you weren't allowed to do anything. It could wait.

There really wasn't much debate about that. There was some debate, but it was mostly over what specific kinds of illnesses were emergent enough to actually be life-threatening. (Green)

But here we have a clear case of a problem that everyone would agree was not life threatening. For his hand to be atrophied he would have had to have had this condition for months or years, so healing could easily wait one day.

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Lk.6:8 **But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Get up and stand in front of everyone." So he got up and stood there.**  
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Now this is getting dramatic. Jesus doesn't heal the guy. Instead, He puts him right up in front of everyone, and then asks them a question.

They probably thought he would just heal him and they would have their charge. But Jesus draws it out. The man is standing there. There is a chilling silence.

**9 Then Jesus said to them, "I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?"**

7

Look at the question. There are hard theological questions and easy theological questions.

One of my commentaries said even a child would know the answer. Let's see (ask which is *better*). The commentary is right.

It's not hard. Yet no one in the synagogue would respond.

But you see I asked a different Question. I asked which was better. Jesus asked which was *lawful*.

I'll tell you why they didn't answer. It's because in their system, the answer was, it was lawful to do evil but not to do good!

## 8.2

In their legalistic system, evil was allowed in that case but kindness was not. Because they had made up a law that said when it comes to healing you are not allowed to do good on the Sabbath.

They were so dominated by externalism that in their system evil was OK as long as you followed the rules. The heart wasn't addressed, so there was nothing in their system that said you weren't allowed to be evil on the inside.

That's always the result of an external, legalistic system. You can sin in your heart, but you can't break the rules – even if breaking the rules is an act of kindness.

So Jesus, in His infinite brilliant mind, points out the utter absurdity of their religion to them with one simple question.

A tense moment. Jesus asks the question, and then doesn't continue on to immediately make a point. He just stands there silently and waits for an answer.

Mk.3:4 ...**But they remained silent** (!)

Jesus also asked if it was right to save life or to kill.

"But certainly they believed it was wrong to murder on the Sabbath." Most of the time, but not now. They were plotting to murder Jesus.

So Jesus asked the experts if it was OK to heal the man, and He gave them a chance to speak up. If healing this guy was so wrong, they could have said so. If showing kindness to this guy is so bad – now's their chance to say something.

But they stand there in utter silence. In all their erudition and education and training in the Law and in debate over the law Jesus asks them one simple question and not a single one in the group could think of a thing to say.

It's going to awfully tough for them to accuse Him of doing something wrong when before He did it He expressly asked if it was lawful, and they didn't respond.

## 11:22

Mk.3:5 **He looked around at them in anger...**

In Mk. 10:14 Jesus was said to be "irritated." When He cleared the Temple He was clearly upset, even though the text doesn't come right out and say that He was angry.

But this is the only time when a Bible writer actually says He was angry. The word is ὀργή (wrath).

Evidently you could tell by the look on His face as He looked around the synogogue.

A tense moment.

A whole synagogue full of people on the Sabbath, their day of worship – all these people supposedly gathered there to worship God. And even in that context not one was even willing to admit that it's better to do good on Sabbath than to do evil.

13

Mark goes on to say that Jesus was **deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts**, Jesus could see people's hearts. And after He asked that question and then waited, He looked around and during those moments of silence He could just see what was happening inside them.

He made it so easy for them. He boiled it down to the simplest issue. Is it better to do good or evil on the Sabbath?

You can't get confused on that question. You can't miss the answer because of lack of education.

The only way to get that question wrong is to just harden you heart against good and against God.

You can claim to be confused, you can run to tradition, you can't cite varying worship style preferences or your childhood or your culture or your genetic makeup...

All you can do at that point is embrace the truth of what Jesus is saying, or willingly just harden your heart against it.

Jesus stood there and watched their hearts all crust over as a result of an act of their will to harden themselves against God.

That's what made Him deeply distressed and angry.

14.44

The man is still standing there. His hand is as shriveled as ever.

Mt.12:11 **He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? 12 How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."**

"Do you need help on this question? Is this such a difficult question for you? I'll give you the answer: it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. It does not violate God's law to do good on the Sabbath."

And He illustrates with something right out of their own rabbinical rules. Even with all their legalistic rules, they had an allowance for this.

They were allowed to rescue a sheep out of a pit. They had made an exception for a sheep but not for a man.

That's because they cared more about sheep than men. Remember last time we found that you can always spot legalism because it is devoid of love?

They were like certain sects of Hinduism who would rather let someone starve than kill a cow.

Or like certain activists right here in our own, beloved Boulder county, who would rather see a poor, hard working farmer lose his farm than allow for a kangaroo rat to perish.

Jesus rejected that kind of thinking in v.12 of Mt.12 -  
**How much more valuable is a man than a sheep!**  
People are more important than animals.

So Jesus gives them the answer. *It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath – even if it means work.*

17

So – we have seen how Jesus points out the true meaning of the Sabbath. And in doing so shows that the disciples were innocent even under the OT Sabbath restrictions.

But that's not all there is to this story. In fact, it's not even the most important part. There is another thread woven through here.

Jesus concluded last time by saying **Therefore the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.**

The term **Son of Man** does not just mean “human being.” It refers back to Dan.7 – the great, awesome messianic figure who is human and yet travels on the clouds like God, and approaches the Ancient of Days, and who receives authority, and glory and sovereign power, and all men of every language worship Him, and His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will never be destroyed. – *That Son of Man.*

I don't understand how anyone could read Dan.7 and draw any conclusion other than the great Son of Man who was to come would be anything other than Almighty God.

That's why Jesus used that title for Himself more than any other – it was not a lowly title but the highest of all messianic titles.

His point is that He has total sovereign authority over the Sabbath because as the Son of Man He has total, sovereign authority over everything.

He is the one who instituted it in the first place; He is God Himself in human flesh.

19

The force of Jesus' reasoning means that He, the Lord of the Sabbath, had the authority to allow activity on the Sabbath for His followers and that was exactly what He was doing.

I believe that in a veiled way Jesus is indicating that the time had come for external Sabbath observances to come to an end.

At the time of Moses, God created a picture designed to illustrate spiritual rest. Illustrations are not designed to point to themselves. They are to help us understand a greater reality.

One thing that is true of all illustration type laws is they are temporary. The principle and meaning is not temporary. The reality that the shadows point to is not temporary. But the shadow itself has a purpose that lasts for a limited time.

Jesus came and gave us true spiritual rest, and fulfilled the picture. Now we no longer need the illustration, because we have the reality.

20

That's why the NT doesn't require us to follow the Sabbath. It was an illustration-type law (a shadow) that had the purpose of illustrating something until Christ came.

It's just like the sacrifices. They were a shadow of Christ's sacrifice. Now that we know about Jesus' death on the cross, we don't need that shadow anymore – now that we have seen the real thing, there is no need for the illustration.

The principle still stands. The principle behind the sacrificial system in the OT was that in order for us to be able to be forgiven, someone else's blood had to be shed in our place. That principle is as valid now as ever.

But we no longer need that principle to be illustrated to us with animals, because we understand the real sacrifice for our sins – the death of Jesus on the cross.

So any kind of ceremonial law that served as an illustration of Christ, while the principle is eternal, the illustration itself is no longer needed after Jesus came.

So we no longer have a physical Temple with the Holy of Holies, we no longer have the showbread, we no longer make animal sacrifices, we no longer keep the festivals, etc.

The book of Hebrews calls all those things shadows.

TT Col.2

21

Sabbath day observance was just like the sacrificial system or the showbread – it was an illustration law that was a picture, a shadow illustrating a greater reality.

Now we know the greater reality, and so there is no need to focus any longer on the picture.

The whole problem with these Pharisees is they were in love with the shadows and ignored that which was casting the shadow. They were in love with the illustration but ignored the point of the illustration (like someone today who raves about a great story that was told in a sermon but is oblivious to the point being illustrated by that story).

Some people today still want to keep the Sabbath. They want to focus on the shadow.

Suppose my wife went away for several months – I would miss her terribly. Finally on the day she returned, suppose I were sitting in my driveway working on something on a sunny day, and she came walking up behind me.

She doesn't say anything, but suddenly I notice her shadow and realize it's her. I would be thrilled to see that shadow, but if all I do is keep on staring at the shadow, and try to embrace it and kiss it and pay no attention to her – something's wrong.

24

"But how do we know that the Sabbath is in the category of a shadow?"

Col.2:16-17

**Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. 17These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.**

That's why of the 10 commandments, the Sabbath command is the only one that is not repeated in the NT – because it was the only one that was a shadow type command.

So you don't have to observe a Sabbath day each week.

Ro.14:5 – the one who is weak in faith thinks one day is more holy than the others - strong in faith regards all days the same, because all days are the same now.

In fact, it can be a serious sin to observe the Sabbath, if you do it as a ritual that somehow earns merit toward salvation. Paul harshly rebukes the Gal. In 4:10 - **You are observing special days**

26

Is it OK to work on Saturday? Absolutely. What about Sun? I hope so! It's my biggest work day.

It's not OK to get a job that makes you have to forsake the assembly, but there is nothing wrong with working on Sun. Every day is the same.

"Don't I need rest once a week?" I don't know – ask your doctor. Maybe you need rest twice a week. Maybe you need rest once a month. I think resting one day a week is usually a healthy pattern, but there is no ethical requirement on us from Scripture.

The purpose of the Sabbath law was not so people wouldn't become fatigued. It illustrated a spiritual principle of spiritual rest.

27

I don't think we have to worry about working too much in our culture. When God gave the Sabbath command He said we are to work 6 days. And in Mt.20 God is portrayed as a kind landowner who expresses his kindness by providing a 12-hour workday for his workers.

6X12= a 72 hour work week. So the biblical pattern is work 72 hours then take a day of rest. We work 40 and then take a whole weekend off, and every few weeks there's a holiday.

But the whole point of the Sabbath isn't how much physical labor you do or when you do it. The point of the Sabbath law was to illustrate a spiritual principle.

"So is the Sabbath abolished?" No. The principle it illustrates is still important.

We still celebrate the Sabbath day today. Which day is it? Not Saturday, and not Sunday, but it is a specific day.

Which day? TT Heb.3

28

God's rescuing of Israel from Egypt was another shadow – it illustrated the salvation offered through Christ spiritually.

The deliverance from the bondage of Egypt illustrates our being delivered from sin (conversion).

The wandering in the desert illustrates our life in this world – from your conversion until you enter heaven.

Entering the Promised Land illustrates our entrance into heaven.

So that pattern is, God rescues you from bondage, there is an interval of testing between that and paradise, and then you enter paradise provided you persevere through the interval.

The problem with Israel is they didn't persevere through the interval, and so most of them never entered the Promised Land.

Heb.3:7-5:1

**7So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, 8do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, 9where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did. 10That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, `Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.' 11So I declared on oath in my anger, `They shall never enter my rest.'"**

So entering God's rest equals entering the Paradise.

30

**15 "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion." 16Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? 17And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? 18And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? 19So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.**

If you revert to unbelief during the time of testing in this life, you will be like the ancient Israelites who were not allowed to enter God's rest.

Now let's make sure we understand the concept of God's rest. On the 7<sup>th</sup> day He ceased His work of creation, but that's not to say He became idle.

**Jn.5:17 Jesus said, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working."**

On the 7<sup>th</sup> Day God didn't create a Lazy Boy and just doze off for the rest of eternity.

God is constantly active. So when it says He rested from His work, it's only talking about one specific kind of work.

So the Sabbath rest the people were to enjoy on Saturdays, and the Sabbath rest the people were to enjoy in the Promised Land was not a situation where they would sit around and stare at their navels.



Life in the Promised Land was an active life. It was a life of work and activity.

So Sabbath rest is ceasing from one specific kind of work.

You understand that. Anyone with a desk job understands that rest does not mean inactivity. A couple weeks ago I couldn't work anymore, and so I rested by going golfing.

Sitting still in my chair was work, but carrying my golf bag around 18 holes was a wonderful, rejuvenating time of rest.

So what is the application for us?

#### **4:1 Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands...**

(The promise still stands for us. God hasn't yet said to the readers of Hebrew, "OK that's it – no more chances for you. You will never enter My rest." like He finally did with Israel in the desert),

**1 since the promise of entering his rest still stands let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. 2 For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. 3 Now we who have believed enter that rest...**

There is one sense in which you enter that rest on the day you believe.

When is the Sabbath Day? It's not Saturday. It's not Sunday. It's the day you became a Christian. That was the day you entered God's rest. That's the fulfillment of the picture.

**34**

Up until then, you were toiling in spiritual hopelessness. You were laboring at an impossible task – trying to save yourself.

But then the day came when you heard Christ say to you, "**Come to me, you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you... and you will find rest for your soul.**" (Mt. 11:28,29)

That verse sounds paradoxical. You find rest by taking on a yoke? A yoke is what you use to hitch up an ox to a load – to do work.

**35**

But it's not as paradoxical as it sounds once you understand that the word **easy** literally means useful. The idea is that the yoke is fitted so well to you that it makes what is a heavy burden seem light.

If you put an ill-fitting yoke on an ox, it won't be able to pull much of a load. If that yoke is pulling against his throat, or jabbing sharply into the side of his neck, or chaffing... he won't be able to accomplish much, and it will be a painful ordeal.

But God has designed oxen such that if the yoke fits well, they can pull a very heavy load with ease. And they don't mind it. They were designed for it.

Being a Christian is not a life of effortlessness or idleness. It is a life of arduous effort.

But it's a different kind of effort than what you have as an unbeliever. It's effort you were designed for. It's work that is so well suited to you and your makeup and the way you were designed by God, that it seems light.

Christ's yoke is an enabling yoke.

37

I could tell you countless stories of Christians who have done incredibly difficult things – lived in inhuman conditions, suffered unimaginable physical pain, worked relentlessly at a hard task... and all the time rejoiced in their easy yoke – even having a sense of amazement about how fortunate they are!

That's that easy yoke.

So resting on Saturdays in OT times was a picture of the spiritual rest we now enjoy as Christians.

We don't have to work our way to heaven. The religions of the world labor and are heavy-laden trying to work their way up.

Man made religions bury God's love under rules. There are people in legalistic systems who are staggering under the load of sacraments, prayers, rules, rituals, never knowing if they have done enough.

They are heavy laden, burdened, tired and need rest.

38

That's an impossibly heavy load. But there is a lightness to serving Christ. It is demanding, but at the same time light.

Picture a kid who runs away from home so he can experience total freedom. He's 10 years old.

Out in the world by himself he finds nothing but difficulty. He throws all his ability into just getting by and the result is nothing but complete failure.

He's not old enough to get a regular job, he can't drive, he has not idea how to set up a budget, he can't get a checking account or a credit card, it doesn't occur to him to get insurance or pay his taxes.

He's just not suited to adult life.

So he works harder and harder, and the harder he works the more obvious it becomes that it isn't working.

Then he gets to know a man who shows him tremendous kindness. The man grows to dearly love this boy, and so he says, "Come work for me, and I'll adopt you into my family and take care of your every need."

39

So now the boy has an ideal life. He is working hard, but it's work perfectly suited to a 10 year old boy. He's good at it; he loves it.

For the first time in his life he is actually accomplishing something meaningful. And all the strain of having to worry about caring for himself is lifted off his shoulders because he has full confidence that his new father will provide everything he needs.

That's rest.

Rest is always a function of trust. The reason a child sleeps so well in his own parents' arms is because of trust. He can so completely trust them that he can afford to relax.

40

Which day is the Sabbath? It's the day you first believed.

But that's not the only Sabbath Day. There remains another Sabbath day – a far greater one.

The day of your conversion you entered into a spiritual rest in a partial way. You are free from the impossible struggles of trying to make yourself acceptable to God, but still there remains remnants of your old struggle.

You still fight against sin, and there is still an element of seemingly futile toil. That's because you have only tasted a tiny piece of the real promise of rest.

**9There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; 10for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. 11Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.**

The ultimate Sabbath Day is the day you enter heaven. That will mark the end of futile, burdensome toil.

That's not to say it will be the end of the blessing of fruitful labor and meaningful work. But it will be the end of the futility of spinning your wheels toiling at impossible tasks you are not equipped to do.

41

Notice what we are going to enter into: *God's* rest. The kind of rest God enjoys. He can enjoy any kind of rest He wants, so rest that is satisfying to Him must be something wonderful beyond our imagination.

Kent Hughes: "To catch something of the idea here, imagine yourself invited by Prince Charles to enjoy his rest. You are picked up by the Royal limo at Heathrow and whisked into London and through the gates of Windsor Palace where you are shown its glories. Then the two of you motor north in his 1968 Aston Martin to Balmoral Castle where you relax before a fire and then go out to explore the royal trout streams. You are sharing what Prince Charles calls "my rest" – his own personal rest. The sublime fact that we share God's personal rest, the rest *he* enjoys, ought to set our hearts racing!"

42

Well, meanwhile this poor guy with the withered hand is *still* standing there. I suppose we better do something about this poor guy before the rest of him withers.

10 and then said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He did so, and his hand was completely restored.

At that moment Jesus Christ caused the muscles in this man's hand to instantly reappear.

Sometimes Jesus heals with a touch. Sometimes with a word. Here neither. He doesn't even so much as say "be healed." The man's holds out his hand and it's suddenly better.

How did Jesus do it? With a thought. He just willed it.

Aside from being astonishing proof of His deity, this really makes it tough for them to pin a crime on Him.

They are accusing him of *working* on the Sabbath. What work did he do? He thought a kind thought. He did it that way to make it obvious that the only one doing any work was God (the Son).

So Jesus is guilty of having a kind thought on the Sabbath.

They were having thoughts of their own. They were planning a murder.

44

**Mk.3:6 Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus**

**the Herodians** point: unlikely bedfellows. The more urgent your goal, the more willing you are to relax your standards as to who you will work with.

Why? Because He was good and they were evil.

It becomes obvious to them at this point that in order for their system to remain in tact, Jesus would have to be eliminated.

Jesus always exposed people's hearts. These men that had devoted themselves to appearing holy – here they are saying that for Jesus to think a kind thought on the Sabbath was a capital crime, but to arrange a murder on the Sabbath – perfectly OK.

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It's not legalistic to focus attention on external actions. Our external actions are important. Legalism is the neglect of the heart.

Perhaps you are sitting there stunned. Maybe for the first time you now realize that up until now your religion has been completely external with no concern for the purity of your heart.

And you realize you are burdened and weary and tired of the impossible load of a dirty heart and guilty conscience.

Maybe you are buckling under the load of worrying about your future, because you can't just rest and trust God to take care of you.

**Heb.4:7 Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts**

Today is the day that is supposed to be your Sabbath Day. It's not too late. Someday it will be, but as of today there is still a chance.

Whether you are a Christian who needs to mature in your understanding of how to rest in God, or someone who is ready to enter God's rest for the very first time, feel free to come forward immediately after the benediction and someone will pray with you.

Communion

48

BENEDICTION:

This benediction applies in a partial way to those who have died with Christ and now live a new life, and in an ultimate way to those people when they die physically and enter paradise:

Rev.14:13 **Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."**

- Cards
- Fellowship meal
- Pick up your newsletter
- Bulletin inserts
- Deacon's meeting tonight (get an agenda)