

The Sabbath Conflict – Part 2 – Mark 3:1-6

- Introduction, outline
- Scripture reading: Hebrews 4:1-11; Mark 2:23-3:6.
- Teaching text: Mark 3:1-6 (NASB1995)

He entered again into a synagogue; and a man was there whose hand was withered. **2** They were watching Him *to see* if He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. **3** He *said to the man with the withered hand, “Get up and come forward!” **4** And He *said to them, “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?” But they kept silent. **5** After looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He *said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored. **6** The Pharisees went out and immediately *began* conspiring with the Herodians against Him, *as to* how they might destroy Him.

- At the end of the day, the reason why the Pharisees rejected Jesus was because of their deep-rooted spiritual pride. Beware of this sin. Spiritual pride is very stubborn, very powerful, and subtle, hard to see. The more religious a person is, the easier it is to fall into spiritual pride. Spiritual pride manifests itself in numerous ways, and one of the most typical ways is to create all kinds of strict external rules, do this and don't do that. The more one follows their rules, the more "spiritual" he is, so he can feel very good about himself.
- Spiritual pride is like alcohol, it intoxicates a person with a sense of spiritual superiority. For the Pharisees, the Sabbath is the day when their spiritual pride reaches its height. On this day, they make laws to abstain from everything they can, and one can hardly do anything except to breathe. Why do they treat themselves so harshly? Because it gives them the highest sense of spiritual superiority. They have become so drunk with this sin.
- Outline:
 - Title: The Sabbath Conflict – Part 2
 - 1. Pervert Motivation of the Pharisees (vv1-2)
 - 2. Proactive Confrontation of Jesus (v3)
 - 3. Provocative Question of Jesus (v4)
 - 4. Painful Indignation of Jesus (v5a)
 - 5. Powerful Demonstration of Jesus (v5b)
 - 6. Passionate Reaction of the Pharisees (v6)

Pervert Motivation of the Pharisees (vv1-2)

- “entered again into a synagogue”: gathering on the Sabbath to listen to God’s word. There were Jesus’ disciples, Pharisees, and the crowd.

- “and a man was there whose hand was withered”: Figurative way to describe paralyzed limbs, where muscles become shrunken and joints become stiff, unable to move. The perfect tense indicates that the hand has completely withered, completely dry and stiff, totally useless.
- “they”: Not everyone presents, but specifically the Pharisees. They must be sitting in the front rows (Matthew 23:6). Their motive to show up here in the synagogue, from the beginning, was to “watch” Jesus.
- “watch”: The original text literally means to keep by the side. They stalk Jesus all the time just to get something to accuse him with. On the surface, they pretend to be curious learners, but all their questions are intentionally-devised traps. They don't want to learn the truth at all

【Application】 Know that there will be watchers in the church who don't want to learn the truth at all! They think they've mastered the truth of life, and once the Bible starts to contradict what they want, they immediately go into watching mode, ready to find fault and attack the church! If Jesus being perfectly sinless was constantly watched by people, wouldn't it be much easier for us Christians in the process of sanctification to be watched by the world? Words like "People in the church are hypocrites. They say nice things, but they act like the world" can be a good reminder, but don't take it too seriously. It may come from professional “watchers”!

According to the Jewish oral law "*Talmud*", if you see a sick person on the Sabbath, you can only do some basic treatment so he won't die; but you cannot do any additional treatment to improve his health. Bandages can be used to cover wounds, but no medication can be used. Obviously, a withered hand is not life-threatening and thus not allowed to be treated.

Proactive Confrontation of Jesus (v3)

- “Get up and come forward!”: Jesus could've avoided this conflict easily. “Do you want to be healed? Come back tomorrow. Let's wait for God's timing. I'll heal you tomorrow.” Not only did he not avoid it, he even made a confrontive move by asking the patient to come forward!

【Reason】 To save lives! Not the life of the handicapped, but many in the audience are on their way to hell! The Sabbath was a deadly thing in those days! Legalism is one of Satan's most heinous tricks, for it gives a false sense of spiritual superiority, making people feel good about themselves, so that they can run cheerfully toward hell without even knowing it!

【Consider】 Should we always confront others, like Jesus here, every time we feel someone might be wrong? Of course not! Even when your motive is to care for souls, if you don't have Jesus' authority and you're not doing public teaching, please live out the character of humility and patience. Don't make a big deal of every issue! However, if a pastor never points out the traps that endanger souls in a direct confrontive way, may we say that he is definitely not a pastor who truly cares for souls?

Provocative Question of Jesus (v4)

- “do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill”: The Pharisees forbade others to do good on the Sabbath, but what were they doing on the Sabbath? At this very moment, their heart was actively planning to kill Jesus!
- “Is it lawful”: What does the Bible say? You can't do good on the Sabbath, but you can do harm? Isaiah 1 clearly says: "Cease to do evil, Learn to do good!" Though the way of doing good on the Sabbath might be a little different, not by working but by resting and worshipping, in essence, nevertheless, the Sabbath is for people to do good!

【Analysis】 This question exposes the vice evil of the Pharisees from three aspects: 1. Their rules directly oppose God's law; 2. Their legalistic heart is cold and cruel, seeing the sick person as a tool to attack Jesus with, having no compassion at all for his suffering; 3. Their mind is full of murderous thoughts, that they'd even plan to kill Jesus on the Sabbath day!

- “But they kept silent”: That's the only thing they could do. What else could they say? Of course, they couldn't say "do evil and kill!" But they couldn't say "do good and save life" either, for that would mean they had no reason to accuse Jesus. They could only keep silent.

Painful Indignation of Jesus (v5a)

- “looking around at them with anger”: "Anger" is a powerful word used of God's judgment of sin (1 Thessalonians 1:10). When the Pharisees resisted truth so stubbornly that they couldn't even answer such a simple question, it revealed what a wicked heart they had! When Jesus saw such unrelenting wickedness, it stirred up the wrath with his holy nature.
- “grieved”: Righteous anger is always accompanied by grief—grieving over the miserable state of the sinner's soul. For God is not pleased with any to perish but for all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9; Ezekiel 33:11).
- “hardness of heart”: Stubborn, apathetic, impenetrable, unable to be moved. As Jesus looked around, all he saw were a bunch of cold faces, cold like stones, rock-hard, running their race to hell. A scholar once says that “*The greatest enemy of the Divine love is not opposition, nor malice, but hardness of heart and indifference to divine grace.*”

Powerful Demonstration of Jesus (v5b)

- “said to the man, “Stretch out your hand””: Jesus only said a word. He didn't do any "work", not even moving a finger. Unless if you can't even say a word on Sabbath, even the Pharisees wouldn't be able to accuse Jesus.

- “he stretched it out, and his hand was restored”: Instant and complete recovery, like all healing miracles of Jesus. Miracles prove that Jesus is God, and wouldn't this be reason enough for them to consider Jesus' teaching?

Passionate Reaction of the Pharisees (v6)

- “The Pharisees went out”: Luke says they were "filled with rage," describing a state of utter madness and loss of mind. If there was any residual mind at work, they'd have to face the obvious fact that Jesus is God, and that they need to repent of their sins. However, in order to continue to resist the truth, they'd go so far as to throw their mind away completely.
- “the Herodians”: A political party that supported Herod's regime. Their interest is politics, not religion, and so they have nothing in common with the Pharisees. Why did the Pharisees go to them? Simply, because they knew that in order to kill Jesus, they had to suck up to the Roman government, for they had no right to execute criminals themselves (John 18:31).

In the end, God used their tricks to crucify Jesus. For God's will is to use His atoning sacrifice to completely solve the problem of sin for all those who trust in Him, and to bring about the heavenly peace as the perfect fulfillment of the original meaning of the Sabbath as God defines it.

Concluding applications

1. **Don't let your heart harden.** Hard-hearted people tend to go to extremes and make things absolute when they should not be. Think about it, when was the last time you humbly admitted your fault to someone and made a change?
2. **Imitate the humility and meekness of Christ.** The Lord Jesus was meek and humble in heart, and truly sympathized with people's sufferings. Do you have the heart of the Lord Jesus? Always remind yourself to be sympathetic to the real needs of others, and to serve others self-sacrificially. This is what the Sabbath should be about.
3. **Do not judge according to appearance.** Don't judge the spiritual condition of others simply by how much they abstain from or how much they sacrifice. Closed eyes do not mean someone's sleeping; coming to church does not mean someone's worshipping; doing lots of ministry does not mean superior spirituality.
4. **Examine your heart and repent.** If we are honest enough, we must admit that we often behave like the Pharisees. In ministry, especially, we're often more like them than we're like Jesus. We need the saving grace of Jesus every day.