



Stretch forth thine hand

1 And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand. 2 And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him. 3 And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, **Stand forth.** 4 And he saith unto them, **Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill?** But they held their peace. 5 And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, **Stretch forth thine hand.** And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other. 6 And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him. (Mark 3:1-6)

Other accounts of this miracle of our Lord appears in St. Matthew 12 and St. Luke 6.

Have you ever considered how adamant the world is against the mere mention of the mere mention of the Name of the Lord in any and every place? Have you wondered why the mention of God's Word in schools is so violently opposed by those same people who promote the teaching of pornographic sex education, the provision of prophylactics to little children, or the philosophy of homosexual marriage? Do you suppose that their concerted efforts to ban God and prayer from every public forum are being orchestrated by a higher intelligence? What power is it that controls the media of most daily discourse? *"Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: 3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were*

by nature the children of wrath, even as others." (Eph 2:2-3) The devout believer ceases to walk and converse in marked time with that old serpent prince of the air, but the world still reveres him. It is his will they will do believing it to be their own.

We are struck with the simple, yet profound, compassion that Jesus had for every cripple, every leper, every blind, every deaf, and every sinner that He encountered in His daily fare. Unlike the Pharisees and Jewish leaders who judged others to be sinner while they, themselves, were the most desperate of sinners, Jesus, who was sinless, was very kind to the sinner and the cripple. The one characteristic that Jesus despised in man was prideful hypocrisy! Anger and indignation are not out of place when exercised against wickedness and sinful hearts. It is for this reason that Jesus labelled the Pharisees, to their face, as *children of their father the devil* (John 9:44) and a *generation of vipers* (poisonous, old snakes). (Matthew 3:7, 12:34, 23:33, Luke 3:7)

"And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand." It just so happens that there was a man present in the synagogue, found in the way of Jesus entry, who had a deformed and withered right hand. It may have been coincidence, or it may have been a planned encounter engineered by the Jewish leaders and Pharisees to find fault in our Lord. There "just happened" to be a man who was afflicted with dropsy who sat directly across from him when he was a guest in one of the chief Pharisees' house. The encounter then in Luke bears an eerie resemblance to the present one under consideration today. These buggers were always trying to arrange a setup in which to trap Jesus. See how our suspicions should be aroused by the circumstances that are so common to both the account of the man with the dropsy and this account of the man with a withered hand? *"And it came to pass, as he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the sabbath day, that they watched him. 2 And, behold, there was a certain man before him which had the dropsy. And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day? And they held their peace. And he took him, and healed him, and let him go; And answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day? And they could not answer him again to these things."* (Luke 14:1-6)

In BOTH cases, it is the Sabbath Day. In both cases, the afflicted man is found to be before our Lord's presence. In both cases, the Pharisees were keen to "*see what He would do.*" They desired to charge the Lord with abuse of the Sabbath in healing on that day, but the Lord, knowing their hearts, raised a question that made them seem cruel and ridiculous to oppose the healing of the hurts of man on the Sabbath.

"And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him." There was no interest at all in the discomfort of the man with a withered hand – the religious leaders were simply looking for a flimsy excuse to entrap Jesus on trumped up charges.

Our Lord was never One to be intimidated by the eyes of the authorities or of the crowd. He always did that which was right regardless of government policy or public opinion. That one quality of our Lord is almost extinct in our day. *"And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth."* It is as if the Lord is saying to the doubters and antagonist, "Fine, you came to see what I will do on the Sabbath – I will SHOW you!" When Christ commands, the only option is immediate obedience.

"And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill?" What were these phony brigands to say to such a

question? They were, as the French saying goes, "*hoisted upon their own petards!*" Since they dared not speak a word to condemn healing on the Sabbath, they certainly refused to speak any words of approval. So they kept a wicked silence. To fail to speak out in support of righteousness is to side with its opposing corollary – wickedness. It is the smug hypocrisy and deceit that arouses anger in the heart of the Lord. "***But they held their peace.***"

The same love that aroused compassion for the man with the withered hand was that love that aroused anger in the heart of our Lord for the insincere and uncompassionate Jewish rulers. "*And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, **Stretch forth thine hand.***" The brand of Christianity being preached by the wimpy wonders of the modern church is an anger-less Christianity. If you never have a righteous indignation and anger aroused at the rape and abuse of little children, or a hundred other evils of man, you do not belong to that Gospel taught by our Lord. There was no dramatic display of healing we see in the modern TV evangelist – just a straight-forward and simple command: "***Stretch forth thine hand.***" He did not touch the hand. He did not strike the man on the head. He did not even pronounce the cure, but it was immediately and silent wrought from the vast ocean of love abiding the heart of Jesus. "***And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other.***" I would even risk the speculation that the cured hand may have even been BETTER than the other since it was the RIGHT hand of labor.

What was the reaction of those who sought to entrap Jesus by witnessing EXACTLY what they came to witness for the purpose of entrapment?

"And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him." Very much like the ACLU and every other opponent of the free exercise of religion, these zealots fled to the government to do their work in darkness and secrecy. Luke, describing the same reaction on the part of these miscreants, says: "***And they were filled with madness; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus.***" (Luke 6:11) Isn't the level of animosity the world has for Christ appalling in comparison with the freedom the Christian faith allows others to believe as they choose without force or threat. Religions that must be advanced at the point of the sword must be wretched and poor indeed.