

Bible Notes

Substance

The Man with the Withered Hand

Matt 12:10-15

9And when he was departed thence, he went into their synagogue:

“No feature of the Jewish system was so marked as its extraordinary strictness in the outward observance of the Sabbath, as a day of entire rest. The scribes had elaborated, from the command of Moses, a vast array of prohibitions and injunctions, covering the whole of social, individual, and public life, and carried it to the extreme of ridiculous caricature” (Shotwell 59).

“When Jesus ignored or took issue with these irksome and spiritually unnecessary restrictions he was accused of Sabbath-breaking. This offense was a flagrant sin in their eyes, second only to that of the blasphemy of his Messianic claim” (Shotwell 268).

Healing was permitted on the Sabbath only if a life was in danger (Ex. 22:2; 23:13); however, Jesus often healed people on the Sabbath who were not imminently dying. The man at the Pool of Bethesda had been lame for thirty-eight years. The man born blind had been blind since birth and both of these healings happened on the Sabbath day, as did the healing of the man with the withered hand.

“The rabbis were increasingly incensed at Jesus’ continued infraction of their Sabbath prohibitions, but they never brought a formal charge of Sabbath-breaking against him: the mercy of his works and the sympathy and approval of the people restrained them” (Shotwell 268).

10 And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him.

In the Gospel of Hebrews (65 – 100 CE) the man with the withered hand is described as a mason, who begged help from Jesus, saying, “I was a mason earning my living with my hands. I pray Thee, Jesus, restore me my health, that I may not disgracefully beg my bread” (Dummelow 667).

Another commentary states that the “Lucan addition probably stresses what is for most people the hand for work, and it thus heightens the condition of the unfortunate person” (*AB Luke i-ix*. 611).

“Withered” in Greek is *xeros* and means “wasted, withered, dry land, atrophied, stunted” (Strong # 432).

The Pharisees were just waiting for Jesus to make some kind of overt mistake so they would have evidence to accuse him in a formal way. According to Jesus, it was always lawful to do good no matter what day of the week it was. The malice and hatred of the Pharisees towards Jesus prompted them to set him up in this way and see if he would take the bait.

11 And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?

The Pharisees were fixated on the letter of the law, hundreds of tiny irksome and unnecessary restrictions, some of which determined what could be done or not done on the Sabbath. They were known to argue incessantly over these points of the law.

“The schools of Hillel and Shammai differed on this point, but it is clear from our Lord’s way of referring to the practice that it was generally allowed” (Dummelow 667).

12 How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days.

Is a sheep more valuable than a man? Are we allowed to do well on the Sabbath day? If the restriction regarding the Sabbath was lenient toward an animal, then it follows that the law should be *at least* as compassionate towards a man.

13 Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other.

Jesus turns from the crowd in the synagogue and from the Pharisees and speaks to the man, thus showing his authority over the Sabbath. “The man might have said that he had no strength; that it was a thing which he could not do. Yet, being commanded, it was his duty to obey. He did so and was healed” (Barnes 57).

14 Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.

Jesus withdrew because of the intense hatred of the Pharisees, but nevertheless many people were attracted to his teachings and followed him.

“The appeal of Jesus to his opponents to be more concerned for compassion toward the ill than for observing the law strictly falls on deaf ears. Not only did the onlookers not see in his action the hand of God; they also took counsel together, how to destroy him. The miracles of Jesus do not convince unbelievers; they merely arouse deepened hostility” (*ICB* 6. 624).

15But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all.

“The Pharisees took counsel to find some accusation, that Jesus might be condemned to death. Aware of their design, as his time was not come, he retired from that place” (Matthew Henry Commentary).

“But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself ... - He knew of the plot which they had formed against his life; but his hour was not yet come, and he therefore sought security.

“By remaining, his presence would only have provoked them further and endangered his own life. He acted, therefore, the part of prudence and withdrew.” (Barnes' Notes).