

Sermons on Matthew

Stretch Out Your Hand

Matthew 12:9-13

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999
pastorpaul@integrity.com
www.branchofhope.org
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Matthew 12:9-13

Now when He had departed from there, He went into their synagogue.
-¹⁰- And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, __“_Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?_”—that they might accuse Him.-¹¹- Then He said to them, “_What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift *it* out? -¹²- Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath._” -¹³- Then He said to the man, “_Stretch out your hand._” And he stretched *it* out, and it was restored as whole as the other. -

Now when He had departed from there, He went into their synagogue (Matthew 12:9).

In Their Synagogue

There must have been very little doubt in the mind of Jesus that He was heading into hostile territory when He entered their synagogue? He was continually offending people. He was an offense to their religion (Matthew 13:57) and a threat to their politics (John 19:12). That Jesus offended people played little part in His decisions, being more concerned with His Father than with men. Perhaps Jesus knew just who the synagogue actually belonged to.

How far does the jurisdiction of Christ extend?

The __earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein (Psalm 24:1).

Comparing the number of professing Christians in our current society against the ungodly nature of recent high-profile political decisions makes me wonder if we understand who owns the nations.

And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, __“_Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?_”—that they might accuse Him (Matthew 12:10).-

Pointless Precision

How easily people become guinea pigs. People are to be viewed with love, understanding and compassion, not merely as the object of arguments or gears in a machine. A man with a withered hand stood before them. Where was their sympathy for the weak? Where was their understanding?

We must be careful to take this into consideration as the stewards of God grace.

This can become an issue in the church service. There is a necessary orderliness to the presentation of the gospel, the worship of God and the advancement of Christ's kingdom (1 Corinthians 14:40). But adherence to a certain order must take into account purpose of that order.

Helter-skelter liturgies and random, spontaneous sermons in the name of the Spirit have proven to be nothing but Woodstock in the name of the Lord—empty hoopla. On the other hand, an overly bureaucratic, unexplained rock hard, formulaic, mass-like ceremony can leave the congregants in stupefied spectator-ville. There must be spirit and truth. We must understand the heart of the event.

We must also be careful not to dehumanize our theological discussions as if the Christian faith were a Mensa quiz granting kudos for mere intellectual acuity. We must take a look around the room and recognize that the love, power and grace of God is to be viewed as exceedingly humane and not a mere argument to be won.

Accusing Jesus

They were looking to accuse Jesus. The fame of Jesus as a healing had already spread (Matthew 4:24). Here they were testing whether or not He would heal at the expense of keeping the law of God. They were trying to trick and accuse Him. It is quite common for the ungodly to think they hold the higher intellectual and rational cards. They don't! And Christians should never grant that paganism or other forms of atheism are reasonable while Christianity is merely a matter of blind and irrational faith.

Hard Hearted Convictions

The text reveals that they weren't looking for an answer to their question "**is it lawful to heal?**" they were looking for an excuse to accuse. That brilliant people (theologians, philosophers, scientists, authors, etc.) come to radically different positions on major issues is vexing. Perhaps this happens because they embark upon their thesis with a rigid determination to prove the position they already hold rather than go where the actual findings lead. And since the natural mind is perverted by sin,

the findings at best are questionable. This is not primarily an intellectual problem by the way.

-This I say therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, -that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the -futility of their mind, _18_ being -darkened in their understanding, -excluded from the life of God, because of the -ignorance that is in them, because of the -hardness of their heart (Ephesians 4:17, 18 NASB).

Note the order: A hardness of heart turns into a futility of mind. Jesus doesn't shy away from their challenge. He answers it. Ought not we (especially clergy) to do the same?

Then He said to them, “_What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? -¹²- Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath_” (Matthew 12:11, 12).

Jesus makes a lesser to the greater logical argument. If we're willing to help a dumb animal out of a pickle, how much more should we help a man? The law required the proper care of animals.

_A righteous *man* regards the life of his animal (Proverbs 12:10).

Pure and Unfiled Religion

Pure and undefiled religion consists of people who care about widows and orphans (James 1:26, 27). Strict adherence to even the most properly laid out ceremonial ordinances of God do nothing more than fatten the portfolio of incriminating evidence against those who lack compassion. No wonder Mark's gospel records the anger of Christ when confronted with these icy priests (Mark 3:5).

Lawful to do Good

It fell upon deaf ears when Jesus explained that it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. That statement revealed both the truth and compassion of Christ—a true and substantial goodness! It was not love at the expense of law or law at the expense of love; but a recognition that true love is expressed through a proper adherence of the law.

_For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments (1 John 5:3).

It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath is a pretty sweeping statement and should not be understood in an overly subjective manner. I can say that it is good for me to sleep in, miss church and watch football all day but I don't think God is going to buy it. It is more likely that doing good includes the worship of God, visiting the sick, seeking to grant relief to the poor, helping the distressed and so on.

Then He said to the man, “_Stretch out your hand._” And he stretched *it* out, and it was restored as whole as the other (Matthew 12:13). -

True Healing

Observe the power of true healing. The withered hand was restored as whole as the other. This was done by Christ publicly, thoroughly, without prayer or pushing the guy's head. This is a different kind of healing than what we pray for today. This was an authoritative display of the power of God which revealed, among other things, the authority of the one performing the miracle (Matthew 9:6).

Why did Jesus provoke the Pharisee and not just wait till the next day? It would have been perfectly acceptable to the Pharisees for Jesus to have waited a day to heal; after all a withered hand isn't fatal. Was Jesus causing these Pharisees to stumble by performing in their presence an action they found unscrupulous?

At some level we Christian certainly should be sensitive to their environment. If out to lunch with your friend who just had open heart surgery you may want to avoid ordering the deep-friend mozzarella sticks. On the other hand, the lunatics should never run the asylum. The weakness of the profane and ungodly should not determine the actions of those seeking to obey God.

Stretch Out Your Hand

Let it not escape our attention that the man with the withered hand had a decision to make as well. He would either be subdued by fear, surrounded by the seething Pharisees, who had the power to ruin his life, or he would obey the Truth. What would he do? Would he stretch out his hand and bring the weight of his current culture smashing down on his infirmed but perhaps peaceful life, or would he leave the room as withered as he entered but at peace with his surroundings?

Matthew had already made the connection that the healings performed by Jesus served to illustrate the true spiritual healing whereby He washes away our sins. Matthew had connected the healings of Jesus with Isaiah 53. We learn there that Jesus would be bruised for our iniquities, smitten, afflicted and wounded for our transgression. And this all culminates with Isaiah's glorious announcement that the Messiah would bear the sin of man and make intercession for our transgressions (Matthew 8:17; Isaiah 53).

Anybody reading this story would surely assess it to be the height of folly for this man to buckle under the austere frigidity of those who had already revealed their lack of concern for his welfare. Would we not all, if we detected hesitancy, shake our heads and in chorus sing, "What are you thinking man! Stretch out your hand!" Yet in the gospel Christ ever bids us to come to Him. Matthew had just recorded an invitation extended by Jesus to all.

Come to __Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ⁻²⁹⁻ Take My yoke upon you __and learn from Me, for I am _gentle and _lowly in heart, _and you will find rest for your souls. ⁻³⁰⁻ __For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light (Matthew 11:28-30).

If it would be foolish to reject the healing of a mere hand, how much more foolish to reject the healing of an eternal soul? Let us come to Christ that our souls might be healed by His stripes.

Questions for Study

1. Was Jesus welcomed in the synagogues? Why / why not (page 2)?
2. How far does the jurisdiction of God extend (page 2)?
3. Is it important for the Christian faith to be orderly? What must be taken into consideration as we pursue orderliness (page 3)?
4. How were the Pharisees trying to trick Jesus (page 4)?
5. How did Jesus respond to these accusations (pages 4, 5)?
6. What is it lawful to do on the Sabbath (page 5)?
7. What did the physical healings performed by Jesus convey (pages 6, 7)?