

Mark 3:1-6 The Hardness of the Heart

Today we begin Mark chapter 3. Mark chapter 3, our focus this morning will be on verses 1 through 6, the curing of the withered hand. The word *withered* means *to shrivel up or dry up*. So today we are going to be introduced to a man whose hand was all withered and dried and he was in the temple area at the time. We will see what happens between he and Jesus.

You remember that back in chapter 2 verse 1 we began to see the opposition to the Lord's public ministry. But as we have entitled this section it is Religion versus Relationship. The religion of man teaches that man must take measures to reach God. Now people have actually made a religion out of Christianity. And that is what dominates the world in which we live, a man made religious system with Christian doctrine and Christian words and phrases. But religion of man teaches that man must take measures to reach God. That is what religion does. This is through good works or through good performance, in order that we are to attain a right standing with God through religious works. And we find the Jewish leaders in opposition to the very Messiah of whom they taught about and of whom they believed in, because they believed in the keeping of the law as the means to attain salvation. So while they preached about the coming of the Messiah their salvation was based on attaining through the law.

Jesus, in contrast to religion, came to seek and to save that which was lost. God came down to man. Religion is man reaching up to God for His graces. But the reality of the message of Scripture - the word of God - is that God reached down to man and sent His Son to seek and to save that which was lost.

And so Jesus ministered to them at the end of chapter 2 and told them that, first of all, according to the sabbath day, **Man was not created for the sabbath day, but the sabbath day was created for man.** That gives us an understanding that everything the Lord has given to us is not to put us in a jailhouse, or a prison, but it is for our benefit. The sabbath day is a gift for us. It was created for us, not us for the sabbath day. If the Lord did not give us a sabbath day, or give us a day of rest, and tell us to stop working, and tell us to start seeking Him, we would not do it; unless He stopped us and had us do it. But He told us to take a day to remember Him and that is for our benefit. And so Jesus said, **Man was not made for the sabbath, but the sabbath was made for man.** It is God's gift to us.

Secondly, he said on the last verse of chapter 2, that **The Son of Man**, meaning Jesus himself using His credentials of deity, **the Son of Man is Lord of the sabbath also.** He is in charge of the sabbath. Whatever He does on the sabbath it is God working. And that is basically what He is telling them using again His credentials of deity.

Remember in John chapter 5, we studied how that Jesus told the man at the pool of Bethesda to take up his bed and walk. He was lame, crippled, and the man picked up his bed and walked and took it to his house. And the religious leaders said that Jesus committed blasphemy by making the man work on the sabbath day. But Jesus said, **God works today and I am working**, and they became even more incensed because the Scripture says not only did He break the sabbath

day, but He made Himself equal with God. **God is working today, He said, and I am working.** That made Himself equal to God.

When He said at the end of Mark chapter 2, **The Son of Man is Lord of the sabbath.** Again is using His credentials of deity to show that He is in charge of the Sabbath. And that He represents God in the ministry to the people to what the sabbath day was originally for, it was to receive from God. And so we have a clash between the religious leaders and Jesus Christ.

And we see a clash between religion and Jesus Christ today. Even though many religions of the world believe in Jesus Christ, yet there is still a works oriented religious approach, that one must work their way or earn their way into God's graces. And so today in our text we have further example of the Lord's love and the Lord's goodness, yet found in resistance from the religious leaders.

Look at verse 1, **And He entered again into the synagogue; and a man was there having the hand withered.** The synagogue where He entered into was the temple. It is the place where the Jews would gather for worship.

We read in verse 2, **And they were watching Him, if He will heal him on the sabbaths; in order that they might accuse Him.** Interesting they are trying to catch Him help somebody. Trying to catch Him minister to somebody on the sabbath, and make them work or even do work on the sabbath. So they were watching Him closely. We will see at the end of this little section that it was the Pharisees, the religious leaders, who were watching Him.

And so, **they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the sabbath; so they might have something to accuse Him.** The word *accuse* is a legal term, *to bring an accusation before the courts*. They already knew by now that Jesus could not walk into any synagogue or any place where God's people worship and not minister to the needs of people. They insist He broke the law and that is what religion does. Religion teaches not only the law, but religion gives the interpretation of law.

Exodus chapter 20 gives us The Ten Commandments. Do you realize that Jews, the Jewish people, the Jewish religion, they have thirty-two volumes of books on how to keep The Ten Commandments? For instance, just on the sabbath day alone it says, **You shall keep the Sabbath day, and you should keep it holy.** And you shall not work in it. And yet when it came to walking, for instance. They made rules and regulations concerning many things. And walking you could not walk three thousand feet from your house on the sabbath day, or else it is breaking the sabbath. Or, as soon as you reach 2,999 steps you had to stop right where you are at and sit down in the road and wait until the sabbath is over before you can move. These are rules and regulations set out by the law keepers, not by God's word. Religion dictates that you have to do certain things in order to earn your way into God's graces, and into His favor, and into His forgiveness.

They knew as soon as Jesus walked into their synagogue He would be looking to help someone. And they were trying to find fault with Him.

Look at verse 3, **And He says to the man the one having the hand withered, "Rise into the midst."** Literally it says, *rise into the midst*, that is, *rise into the middle*. Jesus had him come up in front of everybody. He already knew that they were trying to set Him up. Luke chapter 6 at verse 8, in this very instance, says that Jesus knew what they were thinking and knew what was in their minds. So He already knew that they were trying to set Him up. Do You think He would do something privately knowing this? No way. He did it publicly. He made the man come up and stand right in the middle of everybody upfront at the front of the synagogue, so that everybody could see.

Verse 4, **And He says to them**, Jesus said, **"Is it lawful to do good on the sabbaths, or to do evil? To save life, or to kill?" But the ones** (that is, the ones who were listening) **were silent.** I mean, they knew. When Jesus said, "I have a question for you, is it lawful on the Sabbath day to do good or to do evil, to save a life or destroy life?" Well, they were thinking, "Well, if we say to do good, then He will heal this man. If we say to do evil, nobody is supposed to do evil." So they could not answer either way.

But the interesting point about this is in verse 6. Notice verse 6, the last verse of this section, **And after having gone out, the Pharisees immediately were taking counsel with the Herodians against Jesus, how they might destroy Him.** That is working on the sabbath. Going out and taking counsel, that is working on the sabbath day. So Jesus said, "Is it lawful to do good or to do evil," and they are pondering their own actions and works on that day. If Jesus' questions are going to catch them. They saw that they could not answer it without getting caught. So they were silent, they kept silent. Their approach to Him is to destroy Him. Are they not working on the sabbath day? You see it takes a lot of work to plot to destroy people; and the religious leaders were putting forth a lot of work on a sabbath day to try to trap Jesus, especially if they are involved in the plot. So what Jesus is saying, "Are you not working on the Sabbath day? I am working to do good, you are working to destroy. What is the difference? What is lawful to do?" So I think it is kind of interesting also that when Jesus asked questions, He answered a question with a question. So He is telling them, "Is it lawful for you to work hard on the Sabbath to destroy a life? Or is it lawful for Me to work on the Sabbath and heal a life? You answer me, which is lawful."

Verse 5, **And after having looked around at them with anger, while being greatly grieved over the hardness of their heart, He says to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored whole as the other.** Notice: **He looked around at them with anger.** You ever think that the Lord does not get angry? Oh yes, He does. He gets angry. **When He looked around at them with anger, being grieved over the hardness of their hearts,** the word *hardness* is the Greek word **πῶρωσις** (*pōrōsis*) where we get our word *callous* or *callousness* from, like the calluses on the hands. He was grieved because of the hardness of their hearts. Did they not have a hard heart before? Had they not been up opposing Him in everything He did up to this point?

With your hand, after the calluses are formed you can use your shovel or your tool because the sensitive part of your hand is deadened. So if you go to use a shovel or use a hand tool and you get blisters on your hand, you have to wait until calluses to form; and then the sensitivity in that area deadens and you can go back to using the shovel and the tool.

Same thing with this situation. What happened here to their hearts? Their hearts had been hearing the good news from Jesus Christ time after time after time. To the point where their heart responds to the Lord and they develop a condition. Do you realize that a person can continually hear the good news, and continually hear the word of God, and their heart be continually rebelling against it and resisting, to the point that their heart develops callousness to where they cannot just be sensitive to the things of the Lord anymore?

So everybody's heart is being conditioned by hearing the word. Either being receptive to the word, or developing a resistance and a callousness towards the hearing of the word. And the problem is people will resist it. Every time they hear it, they will resist. They will get angry and they will resist and resist. And they will develop a callousness in their heart and in their spirit to the point that they cannot even sense or feel God's Spirit ministering to them anymore.

There is another kind of person that can come for a month, two months, nine months, ten months, or a year. And as they continually hear the word they just continually keep resisting it and rejecting - it is a heart condition - until that person just cannot receive and be sensitive anymore. Then they just get tired of it, they just quit, they have to give up.

Hebrews chapter 5 tells us that when you are hearing the word of God you are being exercised by the word of God and becoming more sensitive to the truth of God's word if indeed your heart is right with Him.

Jesus was angry at them, being grieved. And so it is kind of interesting, He was not angry at them like, "Well, you will not join My movement here." It was not a human, personal anger. He was angry out of grief. Have you ever gotten angry with someone because you really care about them? You get grieved and you are kind of angry you are so grieved over their continual rejection and resistance. Notice what the text says about what happened to this man at the end of verse 5, **his withered hand was restored as whole as the other**. It was perfectly whole, perfectly sound. No gradual change, it happened immediately. That is the work of Christ when He heals.

Again, verse 6, **And after having gone out, the Pharisees immediately were taking counsel with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him**. They plotted with the Herodians. Who are the Herodians? They are followers of Herod the Roman Emperor and governor. They were loyal to the Roman government. They were not a religious group, but they were Jewish people in political support of the Roman government. They were considered as committing treason against their own people by their political support for Rome.

The Roman government was holding the Jews as sort of a slave-hostage relationship, though they allowed the Jews to function religiously with religious freedom, yet they held them hostage. So now all of a sudden the loyalists to Rome and the religious leaders of the Jews were now coming together to plot against Jesus. So these two factions - the religious leaders of the Jews and the political supporters of Rome - now decide to join forces and plot how they might kill Jesus and destroy Him. Religion is concerned about people keeping rules and regulations, and the religious leaders are like policemen.

When Jesus came He did not call people to join a religion; He called them to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. He did not start a religious movement, that is to say, He did not start a religious system called *Christianity*. He called people to Himself. He called people to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. He asked people to follow Him and become servants of Christ.

The Lord's point was that true righteousness begins on the inside. Outward conformity to the law is not sufficient to save anyone. Just going through the performance, going through the methods, going through the traditional practices of a religious system, does not save anyone. It is on the inside; one's heart response to Christ in submission to Christ.

Even in the Old Testament law God expressed His frustration over the Israelites in the keeping of the law. In Isaiah chapter 1 verses 10 through 17 this is what God says when the Jews were fulfilling the law that God prescribed, but God had a complaint. In Isaiah chapter 1 verse 10 it says, **Hear the word of the LORD, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the law of our God, You people of Gomorrah:** (verse 11) **"To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?" says the LORD. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats.** (verse 12) **When you come to appear before Me, Who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts?** (verse 13) **Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies - I cannot endure iniquities and the sacred meeting.** (verse 15) **When you spread your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood.** (verse 16) **Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil,** (verse 17) **learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow."**

In other words, God, even in the Old Testament, even when He gave the law of religious practices for the Jews to do. We know in the New Testament in the book of Hebrews it tells us that these practices were just shadows of the substance which was to come, which was the person of Jesus Christ. God did not intend people to continue to practice them, but rather to now have a relationship with Jesus Christ, rather than performing for a religious system.

But even in the Old Testament when God did give these religious practices for the Jews to do, their heart was far from Him. It did not come from an obedient heart, it came from a heart of evil. They had no compassion for their fellow man. They had no compassion for the Lord God. They were just going through the movements and going through the hoops, you might say.

So as we continue to go through the Gospel of Mark let us continue to remember that there is a constant comparison and contrast between religion practices of religious systems and the relationship with Jesus Christ. Just participating in a religious system and its practices does not mean anything to God. In fact, as we just studied from Isaiah chapter 1, He just got through saying, "I cannot stand it. You are just going through the motions. I want your heart. I want a heart change. I want a heart relationship."

Let's close with prayer.