

Jesus Heals a Man With a Shriveled Hand

Matthew 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11

DIG: What causes the tension in the synagogue? Why was the man with the shriveled hand there to begin with? Why did Yeshua question the religious leaders as He did? Why did Jesus provoke the Pharisees' wrath by healing on the Sabbath? Couldn't He just wait one more day? What prompts the Lord's anger? What does the Pharisees' response show? What is the irony in Mark 3:4-6?

REFLECT: Is it easy or hard for you to admit you're wrong? What does it take to get you to change your mind about something regarding your faith? How do you handle stubborn people who you really care about, but won't change either their destructive thinking or actions? What is the "shriveled hand" that Jesus is healing in you right now? How is true righteousness gained?

As Jesus traveled around, members of the Sanhedrin went with Him (see Lg - **the Great Sanhedrin**). Like detectives, **they** trailed Him. Did **they** travel behind and keep their distance? Or did **they** travel with Jesus and talk along the way. We have no way of knowing because the Bible is silent on the issue. But like pesky mosquitoes that wouldn't leave Him alone on a hot summer's day, **the Pharisees** and **the Torah-teachers** were tenacious in their determination to find something to accuse Him of. **They** weren't really seeking the truth about Jesus, they were simply looking for a way to prove that His claim of being **the Messiah** was a lie.

On another Sabbath Jesus went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled. Doctor Luke always gives us more medical details, it was his right hand that was shriveled (Matthew 12:9-10a; Mark 3:1; Luke 6:6). The word **shriveled** is a perfect participle, speaking of an action completed in past time, but having present finished results. This means that the shriveling of **the hand** was due to an accident or disease. **The man** was not born with the deformity, but neither was it life threatening.⁴⁶⁹ This was no coincidence. **The Pharisees** chose **the man** to test **the Nazarene** because **his** healing would not be a life-or-death issue (see below). They reasoned that if **Yeshua** really were **God**, **He** would merely wait until the next day to heal **him**.

The Oral Law (see Ei - **The Oral Law**) dictated that all work was forbidden on **Shabbat**. **The Pharisees** were quite definite and detailed about this. Medical attention could only be given if a life was in danger. To take some examples - a woman in childbirth might be helped on **the Sabbath**. An affliction of the throat might be treated. If a wall fell on anyone, enough might be cleared away to see whether the person was dead or alive. If alive, the

person might be helped; if dead the body could not be removed until the next day. A fracture could not be attended to. Cold water might not be poured on a sprained hand or foot. A cut finger might be bandaged with a plain bandage but not with ointment. In other words, at most, an injury could be kept from getting worse - but not made better.

The best way to understand the strict orthodox view of **the Sabbath** is to remember that a Jew would not even defend his life on **Shabbat**. In the Maccabean wars, when resistance broke out, some of the Jewish rebels took refuge in some caves. The Syrian soldiers pursued them. Josephus, the Jewish historian, tell us that they gave them the chance to surrender and they would not, so "the Syrians fought against them on **the Sabbath** day, and they burned the Jews in the caves, without resistance and without so much as obstructing the entrances to the caves. They refused to defend themselves on that day because they were not willing to break the Sabbath even under such distress." So the attitude of pharisaic Judaism on this issue was completely rigid and unbending.⁴⁷⁰

The Torah-teachers and the Pharisees were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus publically before the Great Sanhedrin. No one could miss **them** because the front seats where reserved for honored guests and there **they** sat. **The Pharisees** were the ones who had repeatedly accused **Messiah** and **His talmidim** of breaking **the Sabbath** one week earlier (see Cv - **The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath**). **They** were not there to worship. **They** were there to scrutinize **Jesus'** every action, so **they** watched **Him** closely. Because this was **the second stage of interrogation**, they asked Him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:10b; Mark 3:2; Luke 6:7).

But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to the man with the shriveled hand: **Get up and stand in front of everyone**. So he got up and stood in the midst of all the people who were there (Mark 3:3; Luke 6:8). Yeshua answered the critical attitude of **the Torah-teachers and the Pharisees** with a miracle. **He** knew **the man's** life was not in the least danger. Physically, **he** would be no worse off if **his** healing were delayed until the following day. **The Lord**, however, brought everything out into the open, and threw out a challenge to them. **He** had nothing to hide.

Being a rabbi, **the Lord** answered **their** question with a question of **His** own. **Then Messiah** said to them: **I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil?** **He** put **them** in a corner. **They** were bound to admit that it **was lawful to do good**, and that it was a **good** thing **He** proposed to do. **They** were also bound to deny that it was **lawful to do evil**, and yet, surely it was an **evil** thing to leave **the man** in such a wretched condition when it was possible to help **him**. Then **He** asked them: **Is it lawful to save a life or to destroy it (Luke 6:9)?** **But they** remained silent (Mark 3:4). **They** didn't have a snappy comeback for that one! The verb is imperfect. **They** kept on being **silent**. **Theirs** was a painful, embarrassing **silence**. What could **they** say? Evidently nothing.

Based on **Leviticus 18:5** some of the commandments of **Shabbat** could be set aside under the concept of *pikuach nefesh*, literally *to save a life*. Since **God** gave the **Torah** to bless our lives, it is understood to this day that whatever is needed *to save a life* may be done even on the **Sabbath**. **Maimonides**, the great medieval commentator and physician, even called it a "religious duty" to break the Sabbath for such a need (**Yad, Shabbat 2:2-3**).

After a long silence **Jesus** said to them: **If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out (Tractate Shabbat 117b)?** Any Jew, including a **Pharisee**, would find some way to rescue his **sheep** in such a situation. If there were a regulation permitting him to do such a thing, he would certainly take advantage of it. If there weren't, he would find some way of circumventing or bending the law in order to save his **sheep**. So either within the Oral Law or in spite of the Oral Law, he would find some way to **take hold of his sheep and lift it out of the pit**. The **Pharisees** did not argue that point with **Yeshua**, proving they assumed answer was correct.

The Lord was using a *kal v'chomer* rabbinic principle, meaning *from lesser to greater*. If some of the laws of **Shabbat** could be set aside to help a needy animal, how much more valuable is a person than **a sheep**! **Jesus** then summarized His point, saying: **How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath**, anytime the situation arises, not just in life-threatening situations (**Matthew 12:11-12**). No **Pharisee** would have admitted that **sheep** were as valuable as men, who knew they were created in the image of **God**. But in reality, the **Pharisees** treated other people with less respect than they treated their own **sheep**, because in their hearts they didn't respect, much less love, anyone else, including their fellow Jews. The only thing that mattered to the **Pharisees** was their self-righteous sect of Judaism and their precious traditions of men.

Christ looked around at them all in righteous anger. It was a swift, sweeping glare. There are three Greek words for anger. The first is *thumos*, indicating a sudden outburst of anger that cools off quickly. Secondly, *orge*, defining tolerant habit of the mind, not being used all the time, but only when the occasion demanded it. But the qualification is that no sinful motivation be included with it. And thirdly, *parorgismos*, which speaks of anger in the sense of exasperation, which is forbidden in Scripture. **Mark** uses the word *orge* because **Yeshua's** anger was a righteous anger. But our Lord's anger was still tempered with grief.⁴⁷¹

And, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, He said to the man: **Stretch out your hand**. **Jesus** had been zealous when He cleansed the Temple to start His public ministry (see **Bs - Jesus' First Cleansing of the Temple**), and He was also zealous here. So he stretched it out and his right hand was completely restored, just as sound as the left hand (**Mt 12:13; Mark 3:5; Luke 6:10**). He did not ask the man to display any faith. At this point in **Messiah's** ministry, miracles were to authenticate His messianic claims. But

that will change after His rejection (see [En - Four Drastic Changes in Christ's Ministry](#)). By proceeding to heal his hand, Jesus continued to show His disdain for the Oral Law.

The Pharisaic responses to this incident, and to the Sabbath controversies in general are three fold. First, **The Pharisees and the teachers of the Oral Law were furious, literally filled with madness (Luke 6:11a)**. Their emotions controlled them. Secondly, **the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus (Matthew 12:14; Luke 6:11b)**. They were getting desperate and would have killed the troublemaking Rabbi on the spot had Rome not taken away their ability to issue the death penalty by stoning, and had they not been afraid of the many people who followed and admired Him.⁴⁷² The Sanhedrin had not yet come to an official conclusion from **their second stage of interrogation**, but it seemed like many Pharisees had already come to their own individual conclusion. It was like, "My mind is made up, don't confuse me with the facts!" Thirdly, **the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill the rebellious Rabbi from Galilee (Mark 3:6)**.

The Pharisees and the Herodians were really strange bedfellows because they were on the opposite ends of the political spectrum, and usually archenemies. **The Herodians** were theologically in agreement with the Sadducees and politically both of these parties would have been the opposite of **the Pharisees** who were anti-Hasmonean, anti-Herodian and anti-Roman. **The Pharisees** looked for a cataclysmic messianic Kingdom to remove the rule of the Herods and Rome, whereas **the Herodians** wanted to please the Romans and preserve **the Herodian** rule. However, **the Herodians and the Pharisees** worked together to oppose **Yeshua**, because **He** was introducing a new Kingdom that neither wanted. Therefore, in the final analysis, **they** could agree on one thing - **Jesus** needed to be killed.⁴⁷³

The Pharisees and Torah-teachers were self-righteous hypocrites (**Matthew 23:24-27**), who loved to justify themselves in the sight of others (**Luke 16:15**). They had cold, calloused hearts and their acts of piety only served to glorify themselves, not **ADONAI**. A disciple of **Yeshua ha-Meshiach** must go beyond self-righteousness that was often characterized by external pious acts (**Matthew 5:20**). We don't need external boasting, but internal change. Rabbi Sha'ul wrote of the condition of the human heart: **There is no one righteous, not even one (Romans 3:10)**. The only righteousness that is possible is that which is given to us by **God** through **His** grace, as a free and generous gift (**Ephesians 2:8-9**). It is righteousness gained through the cross of **Messiah** and does not come from ourselves, but rather, through **faith** and baptism of **the Holy Spirit** (see [Bw - What God Does for Us at the Moment of Faith](#)).

As we start to understand this truth, we begin to understand that on our own, we cannot please **God**. Our self-sufficient lives must be put aside in favor of a childlike trust and reliance on our loving **Father**. Only those who have put their wills to death in this way can truly follow **Jesus**. Renouncing all self-righteousness, we rejoice with Rabbi Sha'ul and say: **I**

have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in my body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me (Galatians 2:20).⁴⁷⁴

Lord Jesus, by the power of your Spirit in us, help us to follow You. Teach us to love as You love, so that we may build Your Kingdom on the earth. Amen