

Jesus Heals the Infirm

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

Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man with the withered hand, "Come here." And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed, from Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon. When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him. And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him, for he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him. And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, "You are the Son of God." And he strictly ordered them not to make him known.

Background:

- In the teachings of Jewish legal scholars, minor cures were not permitted on the sabbath, although saving a life was a different matter. The rule against cures applied to physicians, but not healings done by God. Pharisees disputed among themselves whether prayer for the sick was permitted on the sabbath, so they are going beyond standard Jewish rules to try to convict him.
- Jesus might mean that "killing" is permitted on the sabbath (Mark 3:3-5), as it was during the Maccabean warfare (second century B.C.), but more likely he draws a legal analogy from the principle that one could violate the sabbath to save life but not to kill except in self-defense; by extension, one could do good, but not harm.
- Unintentional violations of the sabbath or issues of disagreement about what constituted work (matters that were debatable in Jewish courts) were normally treated lightly; capital punishment (Exodus 31:14; 35:2) was thought appropriate only for those who willfully rejected the sabbath. Jesus' opponents go far beyond their own traditional teachings here.
- Idumea was south of Galilee; Perea was east of the Jordan River, Tyre and Sidon were to the northwest. Like Galilee, Idumea and Perea were Jewish territories. Tyre and Sidon were Gentile cities, although it seems most likely here that Jewish residents of those cities are intended.
- As crowds press upon Jesus, he has to find another way to deal with the multitudes (Mark 3:9). Any prophet who was reported to perform signs drew large crowds in Jewish Palestine, and Jesus seems to have drawn larger crowds than most others. Other "signs prophets" sometimes tried miracles like making the walls of Jerusalem fall down (they failed), but no prophets since Elijah and Elisha had been reported as doing as many healing miracles as Jesus.

Questions:

- + Why did the Pharisees have a problem with Jesus healing a man on the sabbath?
Jesus is “grieved at their hardness of heart.” Why did the Pharisees have hard hearts?
What kind of things harden your heart toward God and others? How can it be softened?

- + Why did crowds follow Jesus? Why did disciples follow him? Why would you follow him?
Jesus tells unclean spirits who acknowledge him as “the Son of God” not to tell others. Why?
Do you believe Jesus is the Son of God? If yes, should you make him known to others? How?
How does Isaiah’s prophecy apply to Jesus? What part of his prophecy impresses you most?

- + Mark says that Jesus “called to him those whom he desired.” Why did Jesus desire them?
Why are the men Jesus appointed called apostles, and what mission did he call them to do?
What mission has God called you to do? How do you know, and what are you doing about it?