



gracefellowship

Mark: Following Christ to the Cross  
April 26, 2020  
To Save or To Kill

Intro: As we continue in our study of the Gospel of Mark let me remind you of where we are- or if you're new with us- catch you up a little.

- Jesus has been baptized by John and has begun his public teaching ministry.
- To this point he hasn't left the region of Galilee. He is a local Rabbi, but as he does more miracles word is getting out about Him to surrounding regions.
- He has drawn the attention of the crowds with His teaching and miracles, but He has also drawn the attention of the Pharisees and the religious leaders in the region. So far, they don't like Jesus because He continues to do things that seem to them to go against their strict observance of the Law.

I hope this week you had a chance to read Mark 3 and 4 a few times to have an understanding of what is taking place as we continue to follow Jesus to the cross. This morning look at Mark 3:1-6 with me.

**:: Mark 1:1-6**

**1 Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there.**

**2 Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath.**

**3 Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone."**

**4 Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent.**

**5 He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.**

**6 Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.**

Mark begins this story by saying "another time" because he is connecting this story to the one he tells just before it. Remember, Mark isn't entirely concerned

with chronological telling of events; he is more likely to lump similar stories together in order to convey a point. In the first two chapters he has addressed a few things Jesus has done on the Sabbath that caught the attention of the Pharisees. In Mark 2:23-27 Jesus's disciples are walking through a grain field and as they walk they are picking heads of grain to eat. The Pharisees considered this work and complained to Jesus because he was letting his disciples harvest on the Sabbath. Jesus replies telling them a story about King David in the Old Testament about how David and his men were given bread out of the Tabernacle meant only for the Priests. The point was that the Priests relaxed the Law in order to take care of the needs of hungry men. Then Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

The Pharisees were strictly observing the Law and requiring everyone else to be so strict about Sabbath rest that it had become burdensome rather than restful! God gave the Sabbath for us to rest and reflect on Him and His goodness. The Sabbath is not just a day off, it's a day "of." It's a day of reflecting on God's provision. It's a day of thanksgiving for all God's goodness. It's a day of worship. It's a day of connecting deeply in your soul to the God who made you.

That brings us to Mark 3 where Mark says, "Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there." It's the Sabbath again. Mark is connecting these stories around this holy day and the way Jesus approached it. It was Jesus' practice to go to the Synagogue on the Sabbath to teach. This time, Mark tells us when Jesus arrived a man with a shriveled hand is also in the crowd. We don't know exactly what his issue was, but I have always compared this man to my Grandfather- we called him Pap.

Illustration: Pap's hands had terrible arthritis. His fingers were bent sideways and gnarled up unlike anyone else's hands I've seen. Watching him drink coffee was an adventure! He couldn't hold a coffee cup by the small handle, so he would pour the coffee out of his cup onto the saucer! Then with both hands, pick it up and drink from the saucer. He would tell us all the time, "No one has ever hurt like me!" I'm sure it was painful, to say the least- it hurt me to look at them! But I'm also pretty sure Pap was a hypochondriac. If you had a physical ailment, he had it too, and his was worse! I'm sure he would have gotten COVID-19 just by listening to the guys on the news describe the symptoms!

I'm not sure we are dealing with the same issue for this man and his shriveled hand, but that's what I always compare his situation with. So, when Jesus walks into the Synagogue, I don't think this was a trap set up by the Pharisees, but Mark tells us what they were hoping for as Jesus came to worship.

Look at verse 2.

**2 Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they**

## **watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath.**

Isn't that interesting? They weren't looking for a reason to celebrate Jesus and what he had been doing in their region- they wanted a way to accuse Him! As we do our services online I don't know who is out there watching, but I wonder if some of you know about Jesus, but only to accuse Him, not to genuinely know Him.

Maybe you only know the things you find wrong with Jesus.

- You don't like Jesus' stance on marriage being between a man and a woman, so you use that to condemn Him.
- You don't like what Jesus had to say about divorce, so you hold Him in contempt.
- You aren't a fan of Jesus saying there is only one way to heaven, so you write Him off.

Maybe all you know about Jesus is what you disagree with Him on, so you've never given yourself permission to do a thorough exploration into who Jesus really is. The Pharisees weren't willing to do an honest evaluation of what Jesus was doing and listen to what He was saying to see if He might actually be the Messiah they had waiting on. Instead, they wrote Him off because He didn't behave like them. They wanted to accuse Him, not bow down to Him. So they watched Jesus closely to see if He would heal on the Sabbath.

That word "would" is interesting to me! The Pharisees weren't asking if Jesus COULD heal the man...they wanted to see if he WOULD! By this time Jesus has already performed many miracles and it is documented that God is working through Jesus to heal the sick, restore sight to the blind and drive out demons. They knew Jesus could heal this man, they just wanted to see if he would, which in their understanding would make him a law breaker.

God had commanded in the 10 Commandments that His people should honor the Sabbath and keep it holy. There was to be no work done on the Sabbath. But what does it mean to work? What could you do before it was considered work? So traditions had been passed down to say what was appropriate and what was not. For instance, you could only walk so far (about 1,200 yards) on the Sabbath before it was considered work. There was a long list of things that were considered improper to do on the Sabbath. But to ensure no one did anything wrong, the Rabbis put more rules around those tasks to ensure you didn't come close to doing an unlawful activity on the Sabbath. One source I studied this week said, "The Rabbis decreed that one not only should avoid forbidden acts but also must not do anything that (1) resembles a prohibited act or could be confused with it, (2) is a habit linked with a prohibited act, or (3) usually leads to performing a prohibited act. The rabbinic enactment of measures to prevent these possibilities was termed "putting a fence around the Torah" ([Avot 1:1](#)). For example, ripping up a piece of paper was forbidden since it resembles 'cutting to shape' or could be confused with it." (myjewishlearning.com)

Here's how that might have worked. Say you go to the grocery store and buy milk. The milk has an expiration date of May 7<sup>th</sup>, but to make sure you don't drink it past the expiration date, you mark that date out and write May 4<sup>th</sup> on the milk jug. Here's the real issue with these extra firm rules around the Sabbath, the Pharisees had elevated these to the same level as God's Law. And that really sets the stage for what is happening in this moment as Jesus stands to teach in the Synagogue: would he heal the man on the Sabbath?

Look at verse 3.

**3 Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone."**

I can imagine this caused some anxiety in the man Jesus was talking to. First, I've learned over the years that if the Pastor calls someone up on stage with him and it wasn't discussed ahead of time, that makes people nervous! A few years ago I wanted to use an illustration that involved folding a fitted sheet- something I can't do! So I asked to congregation, "Does anyone know how to fold a fitted sheet?" A few people raised their hand and I invited one up on stage. All of a sudden she didn't know how to fold a fitted sheet any more! She did not want to be on stage!

Second, if you have a physical abnormality and you are already self-conscious about that, being asked to stand up in front of everyone *because* of your abnormality tends to cause you to start sweating! This guy had no idea what Jesus was going to do. He just knew all of a sudden he was the center of attention and it was an uncomfortable place to be!

Check out what Jesus says in verse 4.

**4 Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent.**

Within the system of rules the Pharisees had put around the Law it was acceptable to help someone and bring healing if it was a life or death situation. Healing wasn't necessary on the Sabbath- it could wait. In fact, one commentary I read this week said if you cut your finger on the Sabbath you could stop the bleeding, but you couldn't put ointment on it to begin helping it heal! Jesus is asking these men, is it better to do good or evil on the Sabbath? To leave this man unhealed when He had the ability to do something was actually evil!

**Jesus would say letting a human need go unmet when you can do something about it is evil! There is never a wrong time to do the right thing!**

There are all kinds of needs around us right now as people are losing jobs and dealing with sickness and fighting anxiety. What can you do to bring good to people around you? As you meet people's needs, whether big or small, you are shining the light of Jesus into our world.

**Meeting the needs of people, whether small or great, is the purest form of our faith.**

The man with the shriveled hand was not in danger of dying, so the Pharisees want to see what Jesus is going to do. Now, here is what's interesting, there are other times in the gospels when Jesus waits until after the Sabbath to heal people. In fact, if you read in Mark 1 you see Jesus handle healing on the Sabbath differently when in private and in public. Mark 1:29 tells us that Jesus left the Synagogue and went to Peter's house where they found Peter's Mother-in-law sick with a fever. Jesus took her by the hand and the fever left her...so she started serving food to everyone. Then after sunset (the start of a new day on the Jewish calendar) the people of the village bring the sick to Jesus for healing. So, for the masses Jesus waits until after the Sabbath to heal people.

Part of the reason healing was considered unlawful was because it took work to gather spices and things necessary for use in Jewish healing practices. It took work to mix those ingredients for ointments and medicines.

When Jesus asked, what's lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or kill, the Pharisees remained silent. This made Jesus furious!

**5 He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts...**

Jesus was testing their hearts. They were looking to accuse Jesus, but He was just as active in finding out what was in their hearts when it came to their role as the shepherds of God's people. And seeing that they weren't willing to do good for a person in need when it was right in front of them made Jesus respond in this righteous anger we will see from Him throughout His life when the leaders of God's people aren't willing to serve in love, but are more interested in observing the Law.

**If you're using religious beliefs or practices to condemn other people, you may have the heart of a Pharisee.**

Jesus never asks us to practice religion outside the context of relationship. As Christians Jesus calls us to lay down our lives for others. He modeled that for us on the cross when He literally gave up His life to save ours.

In order for Jesus to do good to this man with the shriveled hand, Jesus heals him. Look again at verse 5.

**5 (He)...said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.**

Here is what I love about this part of the story: The Pharisees wanted a way to accuse Jesus- would he work on the Sabbath by healing a man? So Jesus heals Him without lifting a finger! He just speaks to the guy, "Stretch out your hand." The man is healed and the Pharisees can't point to a single thing Jesus did that could be considered working on the Sabbath!

Last week we said Jesus asked Levi to do what was possible for anyone to do: Follow Him.

This week we see Jesus do what is only possible for God to do: restore a man to health by speaking to him!

**Jesus did what is only possible for God to do: restore a man to health by speaking to him!**

You might think at this point the Pharisees would look at each other and say, "Guys, we may be dealing with a higher power than we originally recognized. This may be a good time to reevaluate how we look into this guy. Maybe we need to take an honest look at who this guy is and what He is claiming. But they don't want an honest examination of Jesus, his actions or His claims. They want to get rid of Him. It's easier to get rid of Jesus than to deal with Him.

- I don't know if that describes you or not. If you are not a follower of Jesus and haven't tuned me out so far, let me ask you to give Jesus an honest look. Put your preconceived ideas about Him to rest and read the Biblical account with fresh eyes and an open heart to discover who Jesus is.
- Knowing Jesus won't just change your life today, it will change your eternity!

Or you could be like the Pharisees. Look at what they do.

### **6 Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.**

That's some serious hate right there! They skip right past going out to discredit Jesus; going out to defame Jesus; trying to exile Jesus; they go straight to kill him! It makes Jesus's question ring more powerfully: "What is lawful on the Sabbath, to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill it?" They are mad about Jesus healing someone, but seem to have no problem wanting to kill someone. They even plotted with the Herodians to make it happen. The Herodians were Jews who aligned themselves politically with Rome. They were outcasts and hated by the religious parties. The Herodians didn't have any use for the Law and were what we might call the extreme left politically. But they had the ear of Herod and if the Jews wanted to kill someone they needed permission from Rome. The Pharisees were so hateful of Jesus that they went to their rivals to help get rid of Him.

The Pharisees and the Herodians were unlikely allies against Jesus and you

might find yourself saying, “I can’t believe they would partner each other just to keep from bowing to the rule of Jesus. But think about it, even as Christians we do this sometimes. We will partner with sin in order to bring something that is opposed to Jesus into our relationship with Jesus.

- I know Jesus saved me, but I need the drugs/alcohol.
- I know Jesus saved me, but looking at pornography seems okay.
- I know I’ve been saved by Jesus but choosing to divorce my spouse is a better option for me than honoring my marriage covenant.
- I know Jesus saved me, but I’m going to hold on to my hate toward my co-worker, spouse, or parent instead of letting the love of Jesus take control of your life.

Sin causes us to partner with things that Jesus has come to set us free of. There is a worse condition than having a shriveled hand- having a shriveled soul. But Jesus knows how to speak to the condition of your soul and bring health and wholeness to it, so stretch your hands out to Him asking for His power to remake you into His image. Jesus doesn’t just want to heal hands, when we submit to Him and follow Him we become new creations! The old is gone- the new has come.

If you want to know how to be made new today text the word “New” to the number at the bottom of the screen and we would love to talk with you about what it means to be a Christian.

- Pray

### Life Group Discussion Questions

Ice Breaker: What has been the most rewarding thing that has happened to you this week? Or how have you seen God at work around you this week?

Read Mark 3:1-6

1. What stands out to you as most important in this passage?
2. Is there anything in this passage that troubles you?
3. In verse 5 Jesus looked at the Pharisees in anger. What type of response do you think He would have wanted instead of their silence?
4. The Pharisees were upset about the things Jesus was doing. When was a situation in your life that you have been frustrated with God and wish He had worked differently?
5. Where are there opportunities for you to do good in the coming week? Where is God giving you opportunities to be His hands to help others?

6. In reading chapters 3 and 4, what was God teaching you that wasn't covered in the message this week?