

MAN WITH A WITHERED HAND HEALED ON THE SABBATH

Matthew 12:1-14; Mark 2:23-28, 3:1-6; Luke 6:1-11

STRUCTURE

Key-persons: Jesus, Pharisees, and teachers of the Law

Key-location: Galilee

Key-repetitions:

- Pharisees accusing: disciples for picking grain on the Sabbath (Mat 12:2); looking for a reason to accuse Jesus (Mat 12:10).
- Lawful: Pharisees accused that it was unlawful for disciples to pick grain on the Sabbath (Mat 12:2); Jesus asked if it were lawful to do good on the Sabbath (Lk 6:9).
- Jesus defended what was lawful to do on Sabbath: for hungry disciples to pluck grain to eat (Mat 12:3-8); for David and his hungry men to eat sacred bread that only priests were allowed to eat (Mat 12:3-4); for priests to work in the temple on the Sabbath (Mat 12:5-6); to rescue animals (Mat 12:11); to do good (Mat 12:12).

Key-attitudes:

- Pharisees' criticism of Jesus and his disciples.
- Hostility between Jesus and the religious leaders.
- Jesus' criticism of religious leaders.
- Religious leaders' fury with Jesus, desiring to kill him.

Initial-situation:

John the Baptist was imprisoned at the beginning of Jesus' second year of ministry. The multitudes that once followed John the Baptist began following Jesus. Jesus' popularity with the people grew; however, religious leaders began their opposition. Jesus invited four fishermen and Matthew to follow him, and the crowds observed Jesus performing a few miracles.

Initial-problem:

One Sabbath, Jesus and his disciples walked through a field of ripe grain and his hungry disciples pulled off the heads of grain and munched on them.

Final-situation:

The religious leaders were furious and started plotting what they might do to Jesus.

BIBLE STORY

Disciples Pluck Grain on the Sabbath

One Sabbath, Jesus and his disciples walked through a field of ripe grain. His disciples were hungry. They pulled off the heads of grain, rubbed the husks off with their hands, and munched on them. Some Pharisees told Jesus, "Look! Your disciples are picking grain on the Sabbath, and that is unlawful!"

Jesus answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he was hungry? He entered the house of God, and ate sacred bread that no one but priests were allowed to eat. You've read in the Law of Moses that priests are allowed to work in the temple on the Sabbath. But no one accuses them of breaking the law of the Sabbath.

"You wouldn't condemn these innocent disciples of mine if you understood God's words, 'Instead of offering sacrifices, I want you to be merciful to others.' The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" (Mat 12:1-8; Lk 6:1-5).

Jesus Heals a Man with a Withered Hand

Jesus left the field and entered the synagogue, the Jewish meeting place (Mat 12:9). A man was present who had a shriveled right hand. The Pharisees and the teachers of the Law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus of doing something wrong. They watched to see if Jesus would heal on the Sabbath. The religious leaders asked Jesus, "Is it right to heal on the Sabbath?"

Jesus answered, "If your sheep fell into a ditch on the Sabbath, would you lift it out? People are more valuable than sheep. It's right to do good on the Sabbath (Mat 12:9-10).

Jesus told the man with the shriveled hand, "Get up and stand in front of everyone." The man stood up.

Then Jesus said to the religious leaders, "I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil; to save life or to destroy life?"

Jesus looked around at everybody. Then Jesus said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." The man held out his shriveled hand, and his hand was completely restored (Lk 6:6-10).

The religious leaders were furious. They started plotting to kill Jesus (Mat 12:14).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. What catches your attention in the story? | 5. How did the characters face their problems? |
| 2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand? | 6. How have you faced similar problems? |
| 3. Who are the main characters in the story? | 7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you? |
| 4. What problems did the characters face? | 8. What does the story tell about God? |

SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why was plucking wheat and healing on the Sabbath so offensive to the Pharisees?
2. What do these two stories teach us about God's viewpoint of legalistic rules?

3. What did Jesus mean by, “Instead of offering sacrifices, I want you to be merciful to others”?
4. What does Jesus mean by his claim to be Lord of the Sabbath?
5. What did Jesus say is lawful to do on the Sabbath?
6. Why did the religious leaders want to kill Jesus?
7. What kinds of legalistic rules today give more importance to rules than to people?
8. How does God want us to spend our Sabbath day?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. **Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath.** Jesus claimed to be Lord of the Sabbath (Mat 12:8; Mk 2:28; Lk 6:5). Jesus being Lord of the Sabbath opened the way for the early Church to change the obligation from keeping the seventh day as the Sabbath into celebrating Christ's resurrection on the first day of the week. (See Rom 14:4-6; Gal 4:10.) The Law of the Sabbath didn't restrict Jesus Christ, who is the “Lord of Time.” And, it doesn't restrict the person who is a servant of the Lord from doing God's will on the Sabbath.
2. **Legalistic religious people swap what is right for evil and what is evil for right.** The religious people called Jesus' healing on the Sabbath a transgression. They conspired to kill Jesus and considered their plans a lawful action (Lk 6:6-11; Mk 3:6).
3. **Christ gave guidelines on keeping the Sabbath holy:**
 - **Works of necessity are lawful on the Sabbath.** The hungry disciples were walking through the grain field and pulled off the heads of grain, rubbed the husks off with their hands, and ate the grain. The Pharisees accused them of doing an unlawful act (Mat 12:2); Jesus called the disciples innocent (Mat 12:7).
 - **Works that promote worship are lawful on the Sabbath.** Priests in the temple worked on the Sabbath--killing sacrificial animals, flaying, and cooking the sacrificed animals. The priests' work did not violate the fourth commandment, because the temple service required and justified it.
 - **Works that respond to an emergency are lawful on the Sabbath.** Jesus did not condemn those who rescued sheep that fell into a ditch on the Sabbath (Mat 12:9-10).
 - **Works of mercy are lawful on the Sabbath.** Christ, by healing the man with the withered hand on the Sabbath, showed that works of mercy are lawful and proper even if done on the Sabbath (Mat 12:13).
4. **A religious group that refuses to accept anything that does not fit into their system will find themselves in opposition to God.** The Pharisees thought their religious system was the only right one. They had established thirty-nine categories of actions forbidden on the Sabbath, based on their interpretations of God's law and Jewish customs. Harvesting was forbidden on the Sabbath. The disciples picked

grain because they were hungry and not for a profit. The Pharisees were more loyal to their petty rules than they were to God. The disciples broke their rules, so the Pharisees determined Jesus was wrong when he allowed his disciples to violate their rules by plucking and eating the grain on the Sabbath (Mat 12:1-2; Lk 6:2).

5. **People are more important than rules. God is the God of people, not the God of rules.** The Pharisees' Sabbath rule taught that people could only be helped on the Sabbath if their lives were in danger. Jesus had the attitude that failure to do good is the same as doing evil (Lk 6:9). The best time to help someone is when he needs help.
6. **Only when a person has the right attitude toward God can he correctly observe religious regulations and rituals.** Jesus accused the Pharisees of not understanding the biblical teaching, "Instead of offering sacrifices, I want you to be merciful to others" (Mat 12:7). That teaching is found throughout the Old Testament (1 Sam 15:22; Psa 40:6-8; Isa 1:11-17; Jer 7:21-23; Hos 6:6).

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Role-playing Drama:

The storyteller tells the story once. Then the storyteller designates people to stand in front of listeners and dramatize the story while he retells the story.

- One dramatizes Jesus.
- Two dramatize two of the disciples.
- Two dramatize two of the Pharisees.