



A Withered Hand

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

Life of Jesus: Miracles

Begin with discussion about the Sabbath day. What day of the week is the Sabbath? It is the seventh day, Saturday. Why was the Sabbath day the seventh day?

It was because God rested on the seventh day when he created the world.

What were they not supposed to do on the Sabbath day? Work. How did the Jewish people view the Sabbath? Some answers may include: they thought it was holy, they were very respectful of the Sabbath day and did not do any work.

Who were the Pharisees?

They were not priests, but they were a group of religious Jewish leaders who were very strict in the way that they interpreted the laws of Moses. They knew ALL the rules of the law, all 613 laws, and then they created extra rules for all of the people to follow so that they wouldn't break the law of Moses. Sometimes when people follow all the rules they think they are better than everyone else, and it can make them *proud*. The Pharisees would pride themselves on doing everything right, and look down on everyone else.

The Pharisees were always trying to catch Jesus doing something wrong. They did not like Him because he did not operate by their rules.

Begin telling the story that Jesus and his disciples were walking through a field of grain on the Sabbath day. They were hungry, and so they picked some grain to eat. Some Bible translations say corn, and some say grain. It is believed that grain is the more accurate interpretation here. Talk to the kids about this process. First you would pick the grain, then you would have to rub off the kernels to eat it.

Can you guess who saw Jesus and his disciples pick the grain? The Pharisees. They accused Jesus, and told him he did something that was against the law to do on the Sabbath day. They said that what they were doing was harvesting - that picking the grain and removing it was work.

Jesus responds to the Pharisees by telling them that there was a time that David and his men ate the bread of the priests when they were hungry. David was not supposed to eat this bread, but God did not condemn him for it; they were not guilty. Jesus told the Pharisees that the priests in the temple broke the Sabbath laws because they had to work on the Sabbath, just like preachers do their work on Sunday. But they were not guilty, because someone had to do these duties.

The Sabbath was meant to help and bless people, not to oppress them.

The Pharisees were taking the things that God meant for good and twisting them; they used the law to oppress and condemn the people. Jesus was trying to show them that God's whole purpose of the law was to help people and bless people. Man made it all about the following the rules to the extreme, and missed the whole point of what God intended for the law in the first place.

Then Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord, even over the Sabbath!" Mark 2:27

Jesus tells them that the Son of Man is greater than the Sabbath and his disciples were not guilty.





A Withered Hand

It isn't completely clear whether the healing of the withered hand was on the same Sabbath that Jesus and his disciples picked the grain from the field. Regardless, all three of the gospels tell these as connecting stories. These stories show the attitude of the Pharisees towards the Sabbath as opposed to how Jesus views the Sabbath.

Jesus went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he taught there. **When he gets to the synagogue, he sees a man who has a withered hand.**

Discuss: What is a withered hand?

What does it look like?

Have you ever seen someone with a withered hand? A person's hand would be crooked and almost shriveled, and they would not be able to use it very effectively, if at all.

Luke tells us that it was his right hand.

The Pharisees are all watching Jesus very closely. Everyone seems to know about this man, and that he has a withered hand.

Ask the students why the Pharisees would be watching Jesus. What were they trying to see? They were watching to see if Jesus was going to heal him. What would be wrong with healing someone? It was the Sabbath day. Is it work to heal someone? Well, the Pharisees thought it was work and it was wrong. They are watching Jesus to see if he would heal the man, so they can accuse Jesus. They are trying to catch Jesus in the middle of doing something they believe is wrong so they can arrest him. At this time, the religious leaders had political power, and they could decide who was arrested and punished.

Jesus did not care about the rules of the Pharisees. He actually healed people on the Sabbath many times. He was trying to show the people that the Pharisees thought they had all the answers, they were doing everything right, and they were actually doing everything *wrong*.

After Jesus sees the man with the withered hand, the Pharisees asked him,

"Is it lawful (legal), to heal on the Sabbath day?"

Jesus does this a lot. He answers a question with a question. He doesn't always give answers, but he asks questions to try to get the people to think. Jesus says, if you had a sheep, and it wandered off and fell into a pit (a big hole in the ground) on the Sabbath day, would you go find your sheep, and lift it out of the pit? He did not get an answer; this was a rhetorical question and he wasn't really expecting an answer. Then he asks them, Isn't a man better than a sheep? Aren't people more important than sheep?

So, therefore, it is legal, it is okay *to do well* on the Sabbath day. The Pharisees did not like this answer. They would obey the law the way they wanted to.

Discuss: Talk to the students - have they ever obeyed what their parents told them to do, but not exactly what their parents wanted?

They knew they weren't doing what they were supposed to, but could say to their mom or dad, well, you didn't say not to dothis or that?

Pretty much everyone has done this and that's what the Pharisees did. They made their own rules and then let everyone know how good they were that they obeyed God's laws, but they weren't obeying what God really wanted them to do.





A Withered Hand

Now, Jesus looks at the man with the withered hand and says, "Get up, and stand in the middle." Now the man has a decision to make. Is he going to stand up and come to Jesus? Picture this - Jesus is there, calling on him. The Pharisees are there, disapproving of this whole situation. Do the people in the room know the Pharisees aren't happy about this? I'm sure they do. The Pharisees are not making it a secret that they disapprove of Jesus and his methods. Is the man going to stand up and get healed and risk being the source of a huge disagreement, or is he going to choose not to stand up? What does he want most?

The man stood up. He must have wanted desperately to be healed. Then Jesus looked around the room, and asked,

"Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good, or to do evil? To save life or destroy it?"

No one answered. The gospel of Mark tells us, **Jesus looked around the room in anger because of the hardness of their hearts.** Then Jesus told the man to stretch out his hand. Is this something the man could do before? Could he stretch out his hand? Well, he tried to stretch it out, and when he did, it became whole just like his other hand.

What should the response of the crowd have been? Do you think the man was excited that his hand was healed? Of course he was! Shouldn't the crowd have been happy for him? Shouldn't they have been praising God for the miracle?

Instead, the Pharisees were so angry that they were filled with madness. They left the synagogue and went to have a meeting to make plans on how they could stop Jesus; they wanted to kill Him.

What is wrong with this situation? The Pharisees were angry that Jesus did something *good*. What did people think about the Pharisees? They most likely respected them or feared them; they thought these were important men who did everything right and knew all the answers. Jesus tells them how wrong they are in their heart, and that they think they are so holy but they missed the whole point of the law. They think they are obeying "the law of Moses" but the whole point of the law was to help people. The law was meant to help people do the right things until Jesus could come into the world and give them the Holy Spirit who helps them do the right things.

Jesus in the Story



Jesus' ministry was continuously exposing the motives of people's hearts.

From the very beginning, God's plan was always for people to walk with him by faith. He wanted a relationship of trust with man, but this was dependent on the condition of their hearts. Until Jesus came, we were all under sin, and man's heart was only evil. People turned it into a religion of rules, and that was never what the Lord intended. God gave the law by Moses to protect the people until Jesus could come into the earth. Now through faith in Jesus, believers have received the a new heart and the Holy Spirit.



Jesus in the Story



Is there a conflict, then, between God's law and God's promises? Absolutely not! If the law could give us new life, we could be made right with God by obeying it. But the Scriptures declare that we are all prisoners of sin, so we receive God's promise of freedom only by believing in Jesus Christ. Before the way of faith in Christ was available to us, we were placed under guard by the law. We were kept in protective custody, so to speak, until the way of faith was revealed. Let me put it another way. The law was our guardian until Christ came; it protected us until we could be made right with God through faith. And now that the way of faith has come, we no longer need the law as our guardian. Galatians 3:21-25 (NLT)

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. Ezekiel 36:26 (NIV)

It could be explained to the students that when you are little, you are told not to touch a stove, or an electrical outlet. You are not allowed to use these things because a very small child does not understand how fire works, or how electricity works. But as you get older, you have an understanding and you are allowed to use the stove for its purpose to cook, and you are allowed to plug things into outlets as you understand how they work. The law was like this. It protected us until Jesus came so we could understand how to be right with God through faith.

Now we are not under the law, but under grace. Now we have a counselor in the Holy Spirit to guide us in our relationship with Jesus instead of a set of rules to follow.

The Pharisees were doing all the "right things," and Jesus tried over and over to tell them that they were missing the point. Jesus was harsh with the Pharisees; he called them snakes and hypocrites, and these were supposedly the most important leaders of the day. A hypocrite is someone who pretends to be something they are not. Their acts may have been good, but the hearts of the Pharisees were proud and hardened.

Did the Pharisees care about the man with the withered hand? Not at all. They were just looking for a way to catch Jesus breaking the law. We have to understand that what Jesus was trying to show people is that obeying the rules is not what makes your heart right. What makes your heart right is having a relationship with the Lord, and giving him all the praise and glory in everything.

When you give glory to the Lord, it keeps you in a humble position knowing that the Lord is the one who keeps you, loves you and provides for you, and you cannot do these things without Him. The Pharisees did not praise God for this amazing miracle, or give any glory to God, they just got angry. When we praise and look for ways to glorify God in everything we do, that changes the condition of our hearts.

To be clear: children should obey their parents, and obey God's commands. However, believers are not under the law of Moses, but under grace.

For sin shall not have dominion over you: for you are not under the law, but under grace. Romans 6:14

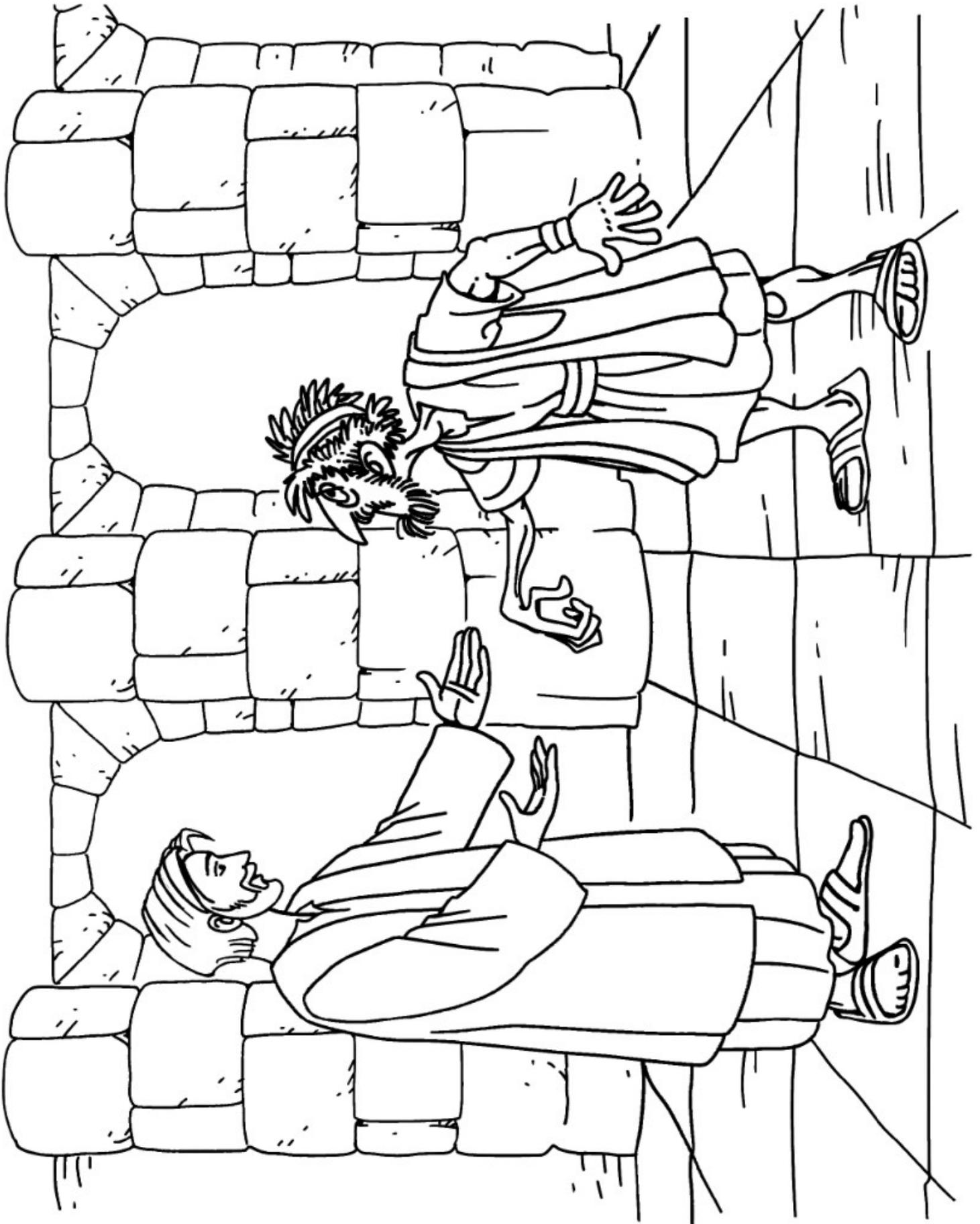
Jesus fulfilled the law. (Matthew 5:17) Pride gets in your heart when you let obeying the laws determine your identity and value. Our attempts to be "good" or righteous are like dirty rags to God. (Isaiah 64:6) The only righteousness we have is a gift from Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:17)

Later in that same chapter in Matthew some teachers of the law asked Jesus which was the most important commandment. This is how Jesus responded:

Mark 12:30-31 (NIV)

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."





Lesson Questions & Memory Verses

9. So You May Know

Compare Matthew, Mark & Luke

1. Which writer tells how many people carried the man?
2. Which writers tell how the men got in the house?
3. What do all three writers say that Jesus was able to see?

Romans 5:17

For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ.

10. A Withered Hand

Matthew 12:11-12

1. If your sheep fell into a well on the Sabbath, what would you do?
2. What does Jesus say about people compared to sheep?
3. What does Jesus say the law allows us to do on the Sabbath?

Mark 2: 27-28

...the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.

11. Finding Great Faith

1. Why did the Jews tell Jesus he should go to the centurion?
2. What did the centurion say about Jesus coming to his house?
3. What did the centurion say he understood because of the soldiers that served under him?

Psalm 10:17

Lord, you have heard the desire of the humble; you will prepare their heart; you will cause your ear to hear.

12. Who Is This?

Read Psalm 107

1. What does it say would happen in verse 25?
2. What does it say the people will do in verse 28?
3. What will the Lord do in verse 28?
4. How should the people respond (verses 8, 15, 21, 31)?

Psalm 107:31-32

Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! Let them exalt him also in the assembly of the people, and praise him in the company of the elders.

