

## INTRODUCTION

Sometimes sermons can be too long. A number of years ago a Bishop spoke in Chapel at Yale University. The four letters in YALE became his outline. He spoke for 15 minutes on how the Y stood for "Youth," then for another 15 minutes about how A stood for "Ambition." He devoted half an hour talking about how L stood for "Leadership" and the E stood for "Energy." After a long hour, everyone was bored to tears. As the Bishop finished his message, a student came and knelt in prayer at the altar. The Bishop was impressed and asked, "Son, what was it in my message that moved you so?" The student said, "Actually, I was just thanking God this isn't the Massachusetts Institute of Technology!"

Last week I planned to speak both on a Sabbath Parable and a Sabbath Miracle, but I realized it would be too long for one message, so I divided the subject into two parts. In part one I introduced the subject of the Sabbath and shared with you we should avoid two mistakes about the Sabbath. First, we don't have to obey the Sabbath rules like the Jews did; and second, Sunday isn't the Christian Sabbath. Instead, our "Sabbath" is resting in the finished work of Christ on the cross, instead of working for our salvation. We should also embrace a Sabbath principle that follows a healthy cycle of work and rest.

A number of people responded to my message on the Sabbath. In fact, on the way home from church last Sunday someone snapped this picture with his iPhone and sent it to me. In front of Broadway Square Mall there was a pickup truck with this message painted on it: "Jesus kept the Saturday Sabbath. Don't you want to be like Him? I certainly do. Sunday is another workday only!" Interesting.

Another one of our members wrote me that her elderly parents treat Sunday like the Sabbath—they never did any yard work on Sunday. They had fertilizer and weed killer applied to their lawn last Saturday and were hoping it would rain on Sunday to activate it. The daughter suggested they run their automatic sprinkler system, but the mother said, "Oh, no. We don't want the neighbors to think we're doing yard work on Sunday." And even though all she would have had to do was push a button, she felt like she would be violating the Sabbath by doing that. Of course, the daughter pointed out the inconsistency that her mom pushed buttons on the stove and microwave on Sunday with no guilt whatsoever. We need to make sure we don't substitute the traditions of men for the Word of God.

So let's continue our Sabbath study as we consider a Sabbath miracle recorded in Matthew 12:9-14.

"Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?' He 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? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.' Then he said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus."

The scribes and Pharisees comprised a holier-than-thou group I call the Religious Mafia. These strict legalists were the ones who pointed to the man with the shriveled hand and challenged Jesus, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" Jesus turned the tables and challenged them, "If your sheep falls in a ditch on the Sabbath, you'll lift it out. What's more valuable—a man or a lamb?" He says, "You treat your animals better than you do people around you." He had already declared He was Lord of the Sabbath. Then He asked the million-dollar question: "Is it lawful to DO GOOD on the Sabbath?" He didn't wait for their answer. He simply said, to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And the man was instantly healed. You would have thought the religious mafia would rejoice in this miracle. Instead, they begin to plot how they could kill Jesus. Remember, there is a miracle in every parable and a parable in every miracle. There are four lessons we can learn from this Sabbath miracle.

### **(1) SIN DEFORMS US**

We don't know exactly what was wrong with the man's hand, because the language used simply says it was "shriveled" or "withered." This probably means it was drawn up into an ugly fist and was useless. When Dr. Luke recorded this miracle he pointed out that the man's RIGHT hand was shriveled. This is an important observation because Jews performed "clean" or "kosher" functions with their right hand. They used their left hand for "unclean" functions. For instance, to be kosher, a Jew only used his right hand to eat bread. But if needed to blow his nose, he only used his left hand. And you would only shake hands with your right hand for obvious reason. Get the picture? This man was miserable, an outcast because nobody wanted to shake his right hand, and they would be appalled if he reached for them with his left hand. So this man was not only deformed physically, he was socially, psychologically, and spiritually disabled as well.

In the Bible, sickness is used as a metaphor for sin. If you get sick, it doesn't necessarily mean you've sinned, but the reason sickness exists is because of the presence of sin in our world. God spoke through the prophet Isaiah to the sinful nation of Israel with these words "Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness." (Isaiah 1:5-6)

God has a perfect design for a hand: four fingers and an opposable thumb to grasp objects. This man's hand was deformed. In much the same way, we have been deformed by sin. God had a perfect design for human beings as well. We can see His original design in Adam and Eve; people who were created to live in perfect harmony with their Creator. But when they sinned, they disrupted that perfect communion with God. And from that day until this, we're all born with a sinful nature.

God created you to have a personal love relationship with Him. But your sin deformed this original design. Physically, you may be in great shape, but a soul without Jesus is infected with a deadly disease. The only cure for this sin deformity is to allow the Great Physician to heal you. And the first step to being healed of your sin sickness is to admit you have a problem, which leads to our second lesson:

### **(2) DON'T HIDE YOUR IMPERFECTIONS, LET GOD HEAL THEM**

In Mark's account, Jesus called the man with the withered hand to step forward in front of the entire synagogue. Then Jesus said, "Stretch out your hand." That meant the man had to stand up and walk up in front of the assembly, then He had to display the hand that was shriveled and misshapen. Like most people with deformities, he would have preferred to keep his weakness hidden. He was probably one of those people we call "Back-row Baptists" who want to sit in the back and see but not be seen. But Jesus invited him forward to display his weakness. In other words, the man had to present his deformity to Jesus to be healed. He could have kept his hand hidden and denied that he had a problem, but then he would have missed out on the miracle.

It's human nature for us to want to cloak or hide our deformities. How many of you have ever seen a picture of Napoleon? I'm not talking about Napoleon Dynamite, but the French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte. In one of the most famous paintings of Napoleon by Jacques-Louis David, Napoleon is seen hiding his right hand inside his coat. Through the years I've read he was hiding his hand because it was deformed. However, that's just a myth. There was nothing wrong with his right hand, and it can be seen in other paintings. The reason he posed that way was simply because that was a popular way for royalty to pose in those days. It's like the typical Hollywood Portrait pose of someone leaning over with their chin on their closed fist!

So Napoleon wasn't trying to hide anything, but many of us are! It's human nature to want to hide our sins. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, they felt shame and guilt, a totally new emotion. For the first time they realized they were naked, so they tried covering their nakedness with fig leaves. In Israel we usually go to a spot where there is a large fig tree, and one year a woman blushed as she said, "Pastor, I always imagined that fig leaves would be larger!"

Then when God came looking for them, Adam and Eve hid themselves in the trees. Genesis 3:9 records the first question God ever asks in the Bible. He said, "Where are you?" Of course, God knew where they were. He knows everything. He wanted them to admit where they were, and stop hiding from Him.

When Adam came out of hiding the blame-game started. Adam said, "It's not my fault. It's that woman that YOU gave me; SHE gave me the fruit to eat." Eve said, "It's not my fault, it was the serpent's fault. He deceived me." Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent and the serpent didn't have a leg to stand on!

The point is it doesn't do any good to try to hide our sins from God. But like the man with the withered hand, we are reluctant to display them. The Bible says, "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy." (Proverbs 28:13) If you want to truly experience Jesus' forgiveness you must come clean and confess your faults to Him.

I'm a big fan of our Celebrate Recovery Ministry that meets in the Student Center on Monday nights. One of the things you often hear at CR is "Denial isn't just a river in Egypt. Denial is the tendency we all have to cover up our hurts, habits and hang-ups." The first step to healing is admit you have a problem too big to heal yourself. These folks in CR have learned that in order for Jesus to start healing them they must stop denying and be willing to admit that they have a problem they can't handle alone.

That's the first step, because only when you present your spiritual deformity can the Great Physician begin to heal you. A few weeks ago I told you about a new ministry Dr. Grace English leads in our church for both men and women who have been the victims of an abortion. There are always three victims when there is an abortion. There is a child who is aborted and then there is a man and woman who had a part of that decision. Many people are still carrying the secret of an abortion from their past. This ministry is called "Surrendering the Secret." Since we started promoting this ministry we've had over 30 people come forward and seek to find healing from the invisible wounds they've been hiding for years.

After our Sanctity of Human Life Rally, a lady emailed me that she had been hiding the secret of her teenage abortion for decades. She hadn't even told her husband. But the testimonies of some of the women gave her the strength to surrender her secret. Her email was full of joy, because since she has stopped hiding her secret, she has experienced a new level of grace, mercy, and forgiveness. She said that God had long since forgiven her, but she had never truly forgiven herself. If you want to know more about this ministry just go to [surrenderingthesecret.com](http://surrenderingthesecret.com).

There are all kinds of things we might be hiding from God. Are you hiding anything from your past? Why don't you stretch out your hand to Jesus today? You can say, "Here, Lord, it's not very pretty. I try to keep it hidden most of the time, but here it is. Please heal me."

### **(3) ATTEMPTING THE IMPOSSIBLE, RELEASES GOD'S POWER**

When Jesus told the man, "stretch out your hand," it also carried the idea of stretching out his fingers. His hand was shriveled into a deformed fist. Stretching out his fingers was the one thing he *couldn't* do! Jesus told him to attempt the impossible. And the man trusted the Word of Jesus and before his very eyes he watched as his fingers stretched out.

Have you noticed in many of Jesus' miracles He simply told the person to DO the very thing they couldn't do? When the four men brought the paralyzed man to Jesus and lowered him through a hole in the ceiling, Jesus didn't touch the paralyzed man. He simply said, "Stand up, pick up your bed and walk home." The man could have said, "Look at me! I can't do it! That's my problem!" But instead, He trusted the *word* of Jesus and tried it. He found He could walk!

Jesus told Peter to walk on water, which was totally impossible. But it wasn't until Peter stepped out onto the impossibility that he found he could stand on Jesus' Word! It is only when we trust the Word of Jesus to believe we experience His healing power. Salvation is impossible for us, but God's power makes it possible. The Bible says, Jesus said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26)

Charles Spurgeon was a great Baptist preacher in London in the late 1800s. He preached to thousands of people in the Metropolitan Tabernacle. He used flowery oratory that was popular at the time. I love reading Spurgeon, but I don't often quote him because of his verbiage. But his comments on this miracle bear quoting. He compares what this man did in stretching out his hand to what we do when we allow Jesus to save us. Spurgeon says: "It must, indeed, have been a very beautiful sight to see that poor, withered, wilted hand, first clenched tightly and then

stretched out before all the people in the middle of the synagogue! Do you not see the blood begin to flow, the nerves gaining power and the hand opening like a reviving flower? Oh, the delight of his sparkling eyes! As at first he could only fix them upon the little finger and the thumb to see if they were really all alive! Then he turned, looked at that blessed One who had healed him and seemed anxious to fall down at His feet and give Him all the praise! Even so, we cannot explain conversion and regeneration and the new birth and all that—but we know this—Jesus Christ says, ‘Believe,’ and we believe! By our own power? No! But as we will to believe (and He gives us that will) there comes a power to do according to His good pleasure. I look around me, wondering where is the man with the withered hand, today, or where is the woman with the withered hand. To such I would say, in my Master’s name, ‘Stretch out that hand of yours.’ It is an auspicious moment. A great thing shall be done unto you. Believe now! You have said before, ‘I can never believe.’ Now trust Jesus. Sink or swim, trust Him—and you can be saved!” (Message delivered on May 22, 1879 at the Metropolitan Tabernacle)

I often like to ask this question to stir people up a little: What have you attempted to do for God in this past week that would have been absolutely impossible without the supernatural power of God? Only when you step out in obedience and faith will you find God’s power there. Has God asked you to do something you think is impossible? You won’t experience His power until you step out in faith and obey Him. Stretch out your hand!

#### **(4) WHEN YOUR HAND (or heart) IS CLOSED YOU CAN’T RECEIVE OR GIVE**

Think about all the things the man had missed out on because of his shriveled hand. He couldn’t receive or give anything using that closed fist. But when Jesus opened his hand, He also opened his heart to receive a blessing. And in response, the man was now able to give a blessing to others. Now he could touch his children’s face, take his wife’s hand or deliver a gift to his neighbor.

I read once that it’s fairly simple to catch monkeys in the wild. The natives take a coconut and hollow it out. Then they’ll drill a small hole in the bottom and string a rope through the hole and tie it to a tree. Then they hollow out a hole in the top of the coconut just large enough for a monkey to reach inside. Then they place some morsel of food inside the coconut. A monkey comes along and sticks his hand inside the coconut and grabs the treat, but with its fist holding the food, it can’t extract its hand. It’s caught. All the monkey has to do is to release the treat and it can escape, but it doesn’t want to let go, so it stays there until it’s captured. That’s a picture of a lot of people today. Their fists are firmly clenched onto something that shouldn’t be a part of their lives. It has them trapped.

Listen to what Jesus is saying today, “Stretch out your hand.” Or it may be that you have closed your heart around something or someone other than the Lord Jesus. He can’t fill a closed fist or a closed heart. Will you open your heart to him today? When Paul was writing to the church at Corinth, he knew that their hearts had become hardened to his message, so he wrote them these words, “We have spoken freely to you and opened wide our hearts to you...As a fair exchange—...open wide your hearts also.” (2 Corinthians 6:11-13). Will you open your hand and your heart to the Lord today?

## CONCLUSION

Your hand may be normal, but you might need the Great Physician to straighten out your twisted and broken life. He is still performing miracles, even on Sunday! Do you remember when we studied about the woman who touched the hem of Jesus' garment? Jesus said He felt "power" go out of Him. I reminded you that every miracle comes at a personal cost to Jesus. And the greatest miracle of all was the cross when Jesus took our sins in His body on the tree.

Let me just finish by telling you a parable to illustrate what salvation really is. We're all sinners by nature and by choice. Try to visualize your sinful condition like being stuck in a pit. Imagine that you're in this deep, dark, slimy, stinking pit. You can't escape, and to make matters worse, there's a hideous, poisonous snake in there. This represents the penalty for our sinful condition. This snake is waiting to strike you dead at any moment. An optimist comes along and says, "Cheer up! There are worse pits than that!" A pessimist comes along and shakes his head and mutters, "You know that's what life is—one pit after another, and then you die." A scientist comes along and looks at you and says, "I could analyze the viscosity of that mud for you." An engineer comes along and says, "I could design a much better pit than the one you're in right now." An animal rights activist comes along and says, "Shame on you for bothering that poor snake." A managed health care professional comes along and says, "Sorry, your pit is not on our approved list." A personal injury lawyer comes along and says, "You look like you were injured when you fell into that unsafe pit. Let me help you get all the damages you have coming to you. Here's my card." A group of Japanese tourists come by and say, "Oh, there's the man in the pit. Stand there and let me get your picture." Your mother comes along and says, "I told you you'd get your clothes dirty in that pit. I just hope you have clean underwear on!" A preacher comes along and says, "There are three reasons why you should never fall in pits. They are dirty, they are dark and they are decidedly dangerous."

But, you're still in that pit...in trouble. And that's when Jesus comes along. He says, "Got a problem there?" You might be tempted to say, "Oh, no, I'm fine. I can handle this myself. I'm working hard to climb out of this pit; I just haven't made it yet." But then you hear the rustle of that serpent, and you say, "Actually, Lord. I do have a problem. I need your help, please." Then with love and tenderness, Jesus climbs down into your pit and lifts you out. He saves you! And then He courageously turns to the serpent and takes the poisonous bite Himself—but in the process He crushes the head of the serpent. Then He jumps out of the pit alive forevermore.

That's how much Jesus loves you. Like the old song says, "From sinking sand, He lifted me! With tender hand, He lifted me! From shades of night to plains of light; Oh, praise His name, He lifted me!"

## OUTLINE

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"Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness." *Isaiah 1:5-6*

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes