

Matthew 12:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him.

Analysis

'And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him.' The scene sets up conflict: a man needing healing encounters Jesus in the synagogue while hostile Pharisees watch. The man's 'withered hand' (ξηρὰν χεῖρα/xēran cheira) was paralyzed or atrophied—not life-threatening but significantly debilitating. The Pharisees' question—'Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath?'—appears sincere but is actually trap: they're seeking grounds to 'accuse him' (κατηγορήσωσιν/katēgorēsōsin, a legal term for formal charges). Their concern isn't theology or the man's welfare but catching Jesus in sabbath violation. This reveals the depth of their hardness: they valued theological system over human suffering, religious tradition over compassion. Reformed theology identifies this as dead religion: more concerned with rules than relationships, system than substance, appearances than reality. The contrast is striking: Jesus cares about the suffering man; Pharisees care about trapping Jesus. Which priority reflects God's heart?

Historical Context

Pharisaic sabbath tradition prohibited healing except in life-threatening emergencies. Since the withered hand wasn't immediately dangerous, healing could theoretically wait until after sabbath. The Pharisees had developed extensive case law about permissible sabbath activities. The Mishnah (codified around 200

AD but reflecting earlier tradition) contains elaborate sabbath regulations: 39 categories of prohibited work, subcategories for each, endless debates about borderline cases. Jesus repeatedly violated not biblical sabbath commands but Pharisaic traditions built around them. This conflict eventually contributed to His execution. Interestingly, Luke (a physician) adds detail: it was the man's right hand (Luke 6:6), making the disability especially problematic in a right-handed dominant culture. The healing would demonstrate Jesus's authority over sabbath and His priorities: mercy over ritual. The Pharisees' hostile surveillance ('they watched him'—Mark 3:2) shows premeditated attempt to entrap Him.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. When have you seen religious systems prioritize rules over people's genuine needs?
2. How do you maintain theological conviction while avoiding the Pharisees' hard-hearted legalism?
3. What does this scene teach about Jesus's priorities—how should churches balance doctrinal fidelity with compassionate ministry?

Interlinear Text

καὶ ἰδού, ἄνθρωπος ἦν τὴν χεῖρα ἔχων ξηράν,
And behold a man there was his hand which had withered
G2532 G2400 G444 G2258 G3588 G5495 G2192 G3584

καὶ ἐπηρώτησαν αὐτοῦ λέγοντες Εἰ ἔξεστιν τοῖς
And they asked him saying Is it lawful G1832 G3588
G2532 G1905 G846 G3004 G1487

σάββασιν θεραπεύειν ἵνα κατηγορήσωσιν αὐτοῦ
on the sabbath days to heal that they might accuse him
G4521 G2323 G2443 G2723 G846

Additional Cross-References

Luke 13:14 (Parallel theme): And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day.

John 9:16 (Parallel theme): Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them.

John 8:6 (Parallel theme): This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not.

John 5:10 (Word): The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed.

Luke 11:54 (Parallel theme): Laying wait for him, and seeking to catch something out of his mouth, that they might accuse him.

Isaiah 32:6 (Parallel theme): For the vile person will speak villany, and his heart will work iniquity, to practise hypocrisy, and to utter error against the LORD, to make empty the soul of the hungry, and he will cause the drink of the thirsty to fail.

Zechariah 11:17 (Word): Woe to the idol shepherd that leaveth the flock! the sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened.

Matthew 12:2 (Word): But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day.

John 5:3 (Parallel theme): In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water.

Luke 23:2 (Parallel theme): And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King.

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