

Prayer

Dear Lord, why do we suffer so much in this world? We ask You to relieve us of the pressure of sin and the burden of the world's failures, yet too often, we feel as if we are following Your pathways unaccompanied. Forgive us, dear Lord, for those of our own sins that prevent us from seeing what You are doing in us and through us, and show us the truth about Your love and care for us. Then, with hearts renewed, may we face life refreshed and ready for anything. All praise to You, Lord God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Open your Bible and read it. Think about what it means to do this and think about what you mean by 'God's Word'?

On-going prayers

- **Pray for the people you know** *Pray for friends and neighbours of yours who are in need of God's care and Salvation. Pray they will be blessed*
- *Praise the Lord for those who work tirelessly for justice and peace*
- *Pray for Afghanistan and the people of that war-torn country*

Meditation

For gentleness, see the joy and care
with which a grandparent plays with a grandchild;

For faithfulness, see the endless romance
of two lovers lost in the pathways of passionate love;

For patience, see the self-control of a parent
who never gives up hope on a lost or struggling child;

For kindness, see the reassuring smile
of one who visits you unexpectedly when ill in hospital;

For graciousness, see the honesty and love
which holds together true and lasting friendships;

For goodness, see those who are all these things
who show in their lives the fruit of the Spirit of God;

For all that's best in life, follow the advice of the Creator.

Bible passage - Luke 6:6-11

⁶ On another Sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught, and there was a man there who had a withered right hand. ⁷ The scribes and the Pharisees watched him closely to see if He would cure on the Sabbath, in order to find some accusation against him. ⁸ But He knew what they were thinking, so He said to the man with the withered hand, 'Get up and stand in front of us.' He got up and stood there. ⁹ Then Jesus said to them, 'I ask you, is it right to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to destroy it?' ¹⁰ After looking around at them all, he said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He did so, and his hand was fully restored. ¹¹ But they were filled with fury and began to discuss with each other what they might do to Jesus.

Bible Study

Review

Luke tells the story of the healing of the man with a withered hand immediately after Jesus dramatically said, *'the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath'* (6:5). He performed the healing in order to give a public demonstration of the truth of this important claim. In general, Luke tells us about the miracles of Jesus when he wants to illustrate Jesus' power and authority, and although Jesus had already won His argument with the Pharisees about the laws of the Old Testament, He had yet to demonstrate His authority over them in a miracle of power. On a previous Sabbath, Jesus had evicted demons from a man who shouted at Him, and this deliverance showed that Jesus had authority over evil, as the Messiah. So in this healing miracle, Jesus demonstrated His authority over the religious laws that might prevent people doing good on a Sabbath.

The story is certainly tragic. Jesus went to the Synagogue (see also 4:16, 6:6, 13:14 etc.), and became aware of the man with a withered hand. He was presumably there as one of the worshippers, but possibly because he had been following Jesus, like so many others (4:42, 5:15), looking for healing. In this situation, Jesus knew that if He healed the man and did not defeat His opponents in public as well, then the man would receive unwelcome attention from the Pharisees, and possibly be rejected by his own community; such was the power and influence of the Pharisees in those days. It is extraordinary that people who regarded themselves as defenders of true religion should be unconcerned about the need of the man with a withered right hand; for the Pharisees were clearly set on catching Jesus out, but Jesus' heart was set on both healing the man and defeating the Pharisees.

Jesus knew the Pharisees (6:8) were watching him, because they controlled the Jews by applying hundreds of supplementary laws (quite literally), which defined what work could be done on the Sabbath day. They were watching to see if he would overstep their mark, and were prepared to pit their encyclopaedic knowledge of rabbinic law against Jesus' grand Messianic claims. They believed that if they could catch Jesus out in just one way, they would be able to say to the Jews something like this; 'He's not what you think, you know!'

Jesus rose to the challenge by openly defying the Pharisees. He knew that both the Old Testament and the rabbinic law said that 'saving life' was a higher principle than 'rest' and was allowed on the Sabbath (see later in 'Going Deeper'). It was right to 'do good' on the Sabbath (6:9), because doing good was a fundamental principle of life reflecting the nature of God the Creator, and it could not be set aside for the Sabbath. His question *'is it right to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or destroy it?'* (6:9) was all that was required. The Pharisees had no answer.

Almost imperceptibly, Jesus had introduced something new to the situation. His words imply that not healing the man meant harming him (6:9). This is a crucial insight, welcomed by all who suffer. People can assume that if life is not in danger it is wise to leave things alone, without perceiving the deadly effect of unattended disease or injury. Jesus knew that the man before Him did indeed need a working hand, and to leave him without healing was tantamount to destruction (6:9). These are strong words, which are aimed at those who debate healing yet will not attempt it.

In an instant, Jesus spoke to the man and he was healed as soon as he did what Jesus said. I wonder whether the Pharisees noticed that Jesus did no actual work when healing the man; He did not touch him, or do anything dramatic, He simply said to the man, *'stretch out your hand'* (6:10). With this demonstration of power, Jesus made His authority over the Sabbath clear, and the Pharisees were *'filled with fury'* (6:11). Jesus' ministry was falling into place, and the Pharisees began to gather evidence with which to charge Jesus with blasphemy.

Going Deeper

The Bible study goes deeper to look at these issues:

- Further comments about Old Testament law and rabbinic law on the Sabbath
- The true nature of Jesus' healing ministry
- Salvation and healing

Notes on the text and translation

Important words

V9 'is it right ...'

The Greek word here is 'exesti', meaning *'is it right ...'*. However, we should remember that this word refers not just to what is right or wrong in a moral sense, but what is permitted or forbidden by the law of God, and this is why some translations have *'is it lawful ...'*. I prefer to retain the full general sense of the word and keep in mind its more technical meaning.

Significant phrases

V8 'get up and stand in front of us'

Other translations:

'get up and stand in front of everyone' (NIV)

'come and stand here' (NRSV)

The Greek says literally, 'Get up and stand in the midst'. The various Bible versions indicate different attempts to make this sound more natural in the flow of the sentence. I prefer not to go down the route of the NRSV, which leaves out 'in the midst' altogether. The phrase 'in front of us' captures the sense of Jesus' command, which requires the man to stand in the sight of everyone present.

Going Deeper

Further comments about Old Testament law and rabbinic law on the Sabbath

At the time of writing, the author had an allergic reaction and was unable to complete the work. It will be done as soon as he is able to work again at this

The true nature of Jesus' healing ministry

Salvation and healing

Application

It is sad that people even today will place their regulations about what Christians should and should not do above the humanitarian need for help, whether it is for healing or for time and support, or other godly forms of action. In this story, Jesus shows contempt for those who do this and oppress God's people rather than liberate them into the service to which they are called, and He clearly toys with the Pharisees and makes a mockery of them. When will we learn that the way we create rules, customs and standards for doing things in the life of the church are secondary to the principles of the Gospel and the nature of God as found in the Bible, and we need to constantly check what we do against the fundamental standards God has revealed in His Word.

For example, many churches have such a tightly regulated concept of Christian ministry that they are unable to offer any other formal vocation than that of being a minister or deacon. In an age when God is clearly

calling people to a wide range of ministries, the church is unable to find a way of structuring its formal ministry that relates effectively to either the needs of the world or the way in which God is calling His people today. This is a big subject but an important one. Moreover, like the healing of the man in our story today, it is not a casual matter even if it may appear to be so. As long as our churches think only in terms of full time ministry for priests, ministers deacons and the like, then the church fails to develop the gifts God has given to His people to extend the Kingdom in new exciting and refreshing ways. There are signs that churches are becoming more open to the ways of the Spirit, but too much is held back by argument, division, questioning and suspicion, and those who follow the Spirit too often have to move outside of the suffocating environment of church regulation.

Healing ministry lies at the heart of the Gospel and the proclamation of the Gospel to our world today. Medicine does a powerful work of God for many people, but it can never offer the complete 'shalom' of the soul granted by God to those who are healed. We may be complete novices in terms of performing this ministry, but all that is required is a heart of love for those who suffer, and the desire to bring them to the Lord in prayer. I am naive enough to believe that God will guide people from there to do the works of power by which people are healed and saved, and the Gospel is declared by deed as well as word.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What can we learn from this passage of Scripture about the healing ministry of the church today?
2. How do we stop the Holy Spirit from working in our midst by adhering to outmoded rule and regulation?
3. How can we save life today, and bring hope to thousands of people living all around us? Is it reasonable for us to imagine that the Gospel can break through in power through us and our own ministry?

Topics covered by this text

- *Healing on the Sabbath*
- *Healing and salvation*
- *Opposition to the work of God and the Holy Spirit*

Personal comments by author

All of us struggle to understand the way in which our accumulated rules and regulations hinder the ministry of the church. It is obvious that rules and regulations have their place within the life of the church at any time and place, but why do we have such difficulty moving on? How can we find godly ways of determining what is right for us to retain and what must be left behind? Who will address these issues without prejudice and offence, and with care and integrity? All things are possible in Christ, we say, but do we really believe this when it comes to the 'tough stuff' of organising the church for what lies ahead?

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Read this passage carefully several times, and let it speak to you about what can do through you and through the life of your church. Let God speak to you through the Holy Spirit and be ready to hear His Word.*
 - *Pray for people, perhaps people you know, who find it hard to let go of those things of the world and of the past that are not required by the Lord for His mission in the future. Pray for yourself, and for your own difficulties in this. Pray for the Holy Spirit to break through in power.*
-

Final Prayer

Jesus, You can see the truth within each situation and You can perceive the rights and wrongs of each moment of our lives. Help us to seek Your judgement on all we experience in this life so that what we say and do is aligned with Your Gospel and Your Kingdom. Make us worthy of our call, we pray, and make us 'doers' of Your Word. AMEN

