

Mark 3:1-6
The Sabbath and the Heart of God (Part 2)
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Tonight, we come to the last conflict in a series of five conflicts that Jesus has had with the Pharisees. The first conflict came in 2:1, and the final one ends in 3:6. All five of these conflicts have been about Jesus' authority: His authority to forgive sins, His authority to decide who it is He will eat with, and whose company He will enjoy, His authority not to fast. But the key issue, the key flashpoint in the last two conflicts becomes the Sabbath. Two separate incidents allow us to see Jesus' heart, especially when it comes to the keeping of the Sabbath. And we learn really some profound lessons about the heart of God.

And that's where I want to take us tonight after we walk our way through the incident that we need to examine together. The paragraph runs from 2:28, I'm sorry, 2:23, down through 3:6. Just to remind you of the little outline we're following here: Jesus, first of all, deals with the Sabbath, and lets us know that there is room on the Sabbath for necessity. Where genuine human need exists, it's O.K. to see those needs met on the Sabbath. We saw that on the story that we looked at last time as the disciples are picking and eating heads of grain.

Tonight, we come to the second episode, the second account in this little Sabbath, the conflict. And this account tells us that there is room on the Sabbath for acts of mercy and kindness, for doing good to others. I told you that the theme of this passage is really found in 2:28 as Jesus makes this pronouncement: "The Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

Last time we looked at the first of these episodes, the disciples picking grain on the Sabbath. Tonight, we come to the second. Let me just remind of what, briefly, what we saw last time.

We saw, first of all, the question that wasn't a question. The Pharisees making a point to Jesus. "How could you let your disciples do that? Don't you know that's working on the Sabbath?" And Jesus responds in a way that they couldn't respond to, they couldn't answer. He gives them a series of arguments. He gives them an argument from biblical history in the episode with David; from the Mosaic law itself, that allowed the priests to work on the Sabbath; from the

prophets, that God desires compassion over the ceremonial law; from the purpose of the Sabbath, that it was made for man, not man for the Sabbath; and from His own personal authority, where He ends with that pronouncement: “Don’t you know that the Son of man (“That is Me,” Jesus said) is Lord of the Sabbath.”

We discovered last week that there is no such thing as a Christian Sabbath. The Sabbath has gone away for us as believers. There isn’t a Saturday Sabbath, and there isn’t a Sunday Sabbath. There is, however, the same existing principle in that fourth commandment that was always there. And that is, we’re to work six days and set aside time for worship on the first day of the week now. We don’t have the same laws that prescribe exactly what we can and cannot do on the Sabbath, or excuse me, on Sunday, which some people would say is the Christian Sabbath. We don’t have those regulations. Instead, the chief thing in that day, the Lord’s Day, is to be time set aside for the worship of God. What we do beyond that, is up to us; what’s appropriate on any day is appropriate on the Lord’s Day, as long as the priority of the day is the worship of God.

Now, that brings us, tonight, to the second part of this paragraph and the second conflict Jesus has here in Mark with the Pharisees over the Sabbath. It’s the story of the man with a withered hand. And from this account we see that there’s room to show mercy on the Sabbath.

Now, what’s interesting as we go through this brief story that begins in 3:1 and runs down through verse 6, there are series of contrasts. Let me read the paragraph for you. See if you can pick up the contrasts between Jesus and the Pharisees as we work our way through this passage. Chapter 3:1,

He entered again into the synagogue; and a man was there whose hand was withered. They were watching *to see* if He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. He said to the man with the withered hand, “Get up and come forward!” And He said to them, “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?” But they kept silent. After looking around at them with anger, grieved at the hardness of heart, He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The

Pharisees went out and immediately *began* conspiring with the Herodians against Him *as to* how they might destroy Him.

A series of contrasts that show us the heart of God and the heart of Christ, and that show us the heart of sinful man, in its best and brightest, the most religious, the Pharisees.

First of all, let's look at the contrasts between a caring heart and a sinister plot. You see this in the first two verses. Look at verse 1, "He entered again into a synagogue." Luke tells us that it was on another Sabbath that Jesus entered the synagogue and was teaching. So, this isn't the same Sabbath as the incident that comes right before it. It very well may be the following Saturday, a week later. And Jesus and his disciples go into a synagogue. In 3:7, you'll notice that Jesus withdraws from the synagogue and goes to the Sea of Galilee. So obviously, this was a synagogue near the Sea of Galilee. Very likely, it was a synagogue, the synagogue in Capernaum, his hometown. As we've so often seen Jesus, Luke tells us that He was teaching in the synagogue.

Now, verse one goes on to say, "And a man was there whose hand was withered." It's so like Luke to add, by the way, it was his right hand. It's interesting to me, when you look back in early church tradition (and we don't know if this is true or not); but Jerome tells the story that was much earlier than he was from an apocryphal gospel, called the Gospel of Hebrews. He says, "The man who had a withered hand is described as a stone mason, who pleaded for Christ's help because he was being reduced to begging, because he could no longer work." Obviously, a stone mason would need both hands. We don't know if that's a true story or not. That's certainly tradition, it goes back a long way. It may be or it may not be.

We aren't told exactly what this man's condition was, but we're told his right hand was withered. That implies several things. It implies, obviously, that it was unusable, perhaps paralysis of some sort, perhaps withered, meaning misshapen, or deformed in some way. And, it may not have been a congenital condition, because the word, "withered" seems to imply that it was once usable but was no longer usable. It had "withered." As far as causes, we can only guess,

perhaps polio, a stroke, an accident of some kind. We really don't know the details of this man's situation.

But verse 2 says, "They were watching Jesus, to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath." Mark doesn't tell us right away who "they" are; but it's not difficult to figure out if you look down at verse 6. And Luke tells us from the front that it was the scribes and the Pharisees. It's interesting when you look at this word in the original language, this word, "watching him." It gives the sense of a bunch of vultures, sort of hanging nearby Jesus. The word literally means to walk beside, or to hang beside." And so here are these men sort of sticking close to Jesus, wondering what He's going to do. They wanted to see if He would heal on the Sabbath.

Now remember, just a month or two before, Jesus had gone to Jerusalem. (Remember, we studied this last week). Jesus had gone down to Jerusalem, (it's recorded in John 5) gone down to Jerusalem. And there He had healed on the Sabbath and had gotten into much trouble with the religious leaders of the nation for that healing. And these Pharisees had apparently been sent back to Galilee to keep a close eye on Jesus and His activities. And so there they are. They're watching, looking for their opportunity. Undoubtedly, if they could catch this wayward rabbi doing something He shouldn't do, it would insure their own advance up the ecclesiastical ladder. And so here they are, like a bunch of piranhas, waiting. "They were watching," notice verse 2 says, "so that they might accuse Him, so that they might accuse Him." They were looking for evidence that would allow them to make a formal charge against Jesus in the rabbinical courts for violating the Sabbath. These were ecclesiastical bloodhounds on the trail of an aberrant rabbi. Their approach to their faith was all about external rules. It's like, their whole approach was like keeping the speed limit. Their idea was, "As long as you kept the speed limit, it didn't matter that in your heart, in your heart of hearts, you wanted to go much faster." That was O.K., as long as you didn't break the speed limit. It was all about the external.

Now look at verse 2 again. Does anything strike you as really strange about verse 2? This is where my father-in-law, whose now with the Lord, used to say, "When you read the Bible, particularly the Gospel accounts, you have to read them with a sanctified imagination. You have to put yourself in the story, as it were". When you put yourself in the story in verse 2, does

anything strike you as strange? Notice that these men were not watching to see if Jesus had the power to heal. They are watching to see if he would use his power on the Sabbath. “It’s remarkable!” These men freely admitted that Jesus had the power to heal all manner of diseases. That was evident and plain all over Galilee. And they’d already seen the kind of heart Jesus had, His compassion for people. And so, they fully suspected that when the compassion of Jesus and His incredible power to work miracles, saw this man with a withered hand, that He would have to respond.

That’s remarkable to me. Because in spite of what they’d already learned about Jesus, about His power, about His heart of compassion for people, they still would not, for a moment, countenance His claims. Instead, they were looking for evidence to convict Him of breaking the Sabbath. So you see, Jesus’ caring heart. They saw Jesus’ caring heart. They expected Him to do something. And instead of being concerned about this man, all they’re concerned about is their little schemes and their little plot.

That brings us to the next sort of contrast. And it’s a biblical defense versus a stubborn silence. Jesus defends what He’s about to do, and the Pharisees keep their mouths shut, which is refreshing, for a change. The Pharisees apparently noticed this man first. And they decide to use him to advance their cause and their case against Jesus. Because Matthew says this, in Matthew 12:10, “A man was there whose hand was withered. And they, (that is, the Pharisees) question Jesus.” So, they see this man and, and they think, “Here is a perfect opportunity to put a trap for Jesus. He has the power to heal. He has the compassionate heart. Let’s ask Him about that man.” “Is it lawful,” they said to Jesus, “to heal on the Sabbath?” “And they did all of this so that they might accuse him.” They apparently pointed out this man, and asked Jesus a theoretical question. To their shock, Jesus calls their bluff. Jesus intended to demonstrate to everyone’s satisfaction that He was, in fact, the Lord of the Sabbath. And so, verse 3 of Mark says, Mark 3: He said to the man with the withered hand, “Get up and come forward.”

Now the last thing that someone with a physical disability wants is to be singled out and to have their disability pointed out. What Jesus literally says to this man in the Greek text, is this, “Rise into the middle.” That’s what he said. “Rise into the middle. I want you to come right here into

the middle of the synagogue, a packed Jewish synagogue on Saturday, major trade city on a major trade route, filled with people.” (We’ve been in that synagogue, that is, on the foundation of that synagogue. And it would have held a large number of people.) “Rise into the middle.” Jesus is purposely going to seize the circumstance to make a very clear and very public point. He’s designing His actions to make the maximum public impact. The synagogue is packed, and He tells this man with the paralyzed hand to stand and go to the very center of the synagogue where everyone there can see him.

Matthew tells us that Jesus began with a question that would have been absolutely obvious in an agricultural area, like Galilee. This is what Matthew says He said first, after He asked the man to come to the middle of the room. He said to the Pharisees, “What man is there among you, who has a sheep? And if he falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable, then, is a man than a sheep? So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.

Now, as obvious as this might be to you, this was not obvious to the rabbis and Pharisees the first century. They had spent a great deal of time arguing about this very situation. “What do you do if your animal falls in a pit on the Sabbath?” The Talmud, which was the collection of Jewish thought, came sometime after Christ. But certainly, the thoughts that it pulls together were contemporary with the time of Christ. Some of the rabbis argued that if an animal fell into a pit, all you could do was give it food until the Sabbath was done. So, you just kind of threw food down in the hole with it. Others said, “No, you could put something under it for a bed. And if it managed to use that something you put under it for a bed to get out, well, that’s O.K. It’s alright.” There was even one rabbi (and this is shocking) There was one rabbi who said (and this is in the Talmud), who said that you could take it out of the pit, if you said you intended to kill it. And then, once you got it out, it was O.K. to change your mind and say, “O.K., well I’ve changed my mind; I’m not going to kill it, after all.” Mind Games! But to any poor farmer, with common sense, the answer to Jesus’ question was absolutely clear: you get the animal out of the pit!”

And Jesus says that man is infinitely more valuable than a sheep, because he's made in the image of God! By the way, can I just, kind of, put a pause button here and give you an aside? If Jesus lived today, He would not be a member of PETA. PETA's founder, Ingrid Newkirk, once said, "There is no rational basis for saying that a human being has special rights. A rat is a pig, is a dog, is a boy." But the One who made us said, "Absolutely NOT!" How much more valuable is a man! Why? Because we are made in the image of God. That sheep was not.

Mark picks up what Jesus said next. Look at verse 4. Says, "He said to them, let me ask you a question. Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath? To save a life or to kill?" Now what's interesting about this is there really are two distinct questions here. And they're directed two different ways. At first glance you might think Jesus is asking the same question in different ways. But they're really two questions.

The first question is about what He should do, regarding the man with the withered hand. "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath?" Now that means there were only two possibilities. Either Jesus can help this man, or if He refuses to help him, then He's harming him. Healing would be doing good. Not to heal would be doing harm. You see what Jesus does? He takes a legal question and turns it into a moral question. If I have the power to help someone, NOT to do so is what? SIN! That's throughout the Scriptures! Proverbs 3:27, "Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it!" In Luke 10, Jesus told the parable, you remember, of the Good Samaritan. And He made the point, that, if it's in your power to help someone, do it! That's the way you love your neighbor! And in Galatians 6:10, Paul reminds us, "So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of faith." But what Jesus is saying here, essentially is, "It's O.K. to do good! If I don't help this guy, I'm doing harm to him, because I'm not helping him when I have the power to do so."

But that isn't what the rabbis thought. That isn't what the Pharisees believed. The Pharisees' position is explained in the Talmud. Here's what they said. They said that first aid was permissible to keep a wound from getting worse on the Sabbath. So, if someone gets hurt on the Sabbath, and you need to render first aid to keep the wound from getting worse, that's O.K." But

all attempts to cure someone would be considered “work.” So, just to kind of give some application to that. If someone broke a limb on the Sabbath, broke an arm, you could splint that arm to keep the break from getting worse. But you couldn’t actually set the arm. The Talmud says, and this is a quote, “One who has a sore throat must not gargle with oil. But he may swallow oil for food. And if that cures him, all right.” So, in other words, it would be work to gargle; it would be healing; that would be work. You’re seeking to cure yourself. But if you want to take some oil, and go ahead and swallow it, and it helps you, great!”

There were a lot of differences in interpretation among the various rabbis. But they agreed on this. This is what they all agreed on, “Healing was only allowed on the Sabbath if the life was in danger and waiting might risk death.” And clearly, a paralyzed hand was no threat to this man’s life. And so, by all of their law, by all of their regulations, this man should not be helped on the Sabbath. It could wait ‘til the next day.

You said, “Did they really believe that?” Well listen to Luke 13:14, a different time in Jesus’ life. The synagogue official was indignant, because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath. And he began saying to the crowd in response: “There are six days in which work should be done. So, come during them and get healed, and not on the Sabbath day.” Are you kidding? This is where it’d come. I love what one of the commentators that I use regularly, Edwards, says on this passage of Mark. He says this, “The test of all theology and morality is either passed or failed by one’s response to the weakest and most defenseless members of society.” Is that biblical? Absolutely! You remember James 1? What does James say? “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to take care of the orphans and the widows in their distress.” Be concerned about those that are needy. This is real religion. What the Pharisees had wasn’t.

Now that was Jesus’ first question. It was a question about what he should do regarding the man with the withered hand. “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath?”

But the second question Jesus asked them wasn’t about what he was going to do. Instead, (because, as Luke says in a parallel passage, he knew what they were thinking), His second question is about what THEY are going to do. And He asks this question. “Is it lawful on the

Sabbath to save a life, or to kill?” Jesus wasn’t planning to either save a life or take a life on that Sabbath. He was just talking about healing a withered hand.

But these Pharisees were about to deal with this very choice. On that Sabbath, they were going to decide whether Jesus should continue to live or whether He should die. And so, what this is (really, I have to agree with several commentators, that this) was a call to repentance. This is a less-than-subtle way to say to them, “I know what you’re thinking. And let me ask you what’s more appropriate: for Me to heal on the Sabbath, as I’m about to do, or for you to plot My death on the Sabbath, as you’re about to do?”

This question wasn’t a shot across their bow. It was a direct shot into the bow. But undoubtedly, Jesus’ point, his intention, was to stop them short, to give at least one of them, or some of them, the opportunity to think about what was really going on. What was their response? Verse 4 said, “But they kept...silent.” They had no other choice. If they agreed with Jesus on the first question, their position and their hold on the people’s consciences went away. If they disagreed with Jesus, they were clearly contradicting both common sense and the Scripture. And they were, therefore, undermining people’s confidence in them and their spiritual leadership.

So, picture the scene at this point in the synagogue. Here’s a crowded synagogue, maybe upwards of 500 people crowded in the synagogue. This man has been called to the middle. Jesus has asked them this question. Here stands this poor man with his withered right hand, and Jesus has confronted the Pharisees as they’ve been hanging over Him like vultures. And now they’re standing there absolutely silent. There’s a chilling silence. The people are waiting with bated breath to see what’s going to happen. The atmosphere would’ve been absolutely electric at this point in this synagogue. The new rabbi is taking on the Pharisees from Jerusalem.

That brings us to the third contrast: The Lord’s heart versus the sinner’s heart. Look, first of all at the Lord’s heart. You see it in verse 5. There was anger and grief at their sin. Verse 5 says, “After looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart....” Luke, by the way, makes this look that Jesus gave even more piercing, because Luke puts it like this. He says, “After looking around at them all.” It’s like Jesus goes from face to face, from Pharisee to

Pharisee, after asking them that question. And His look, you'll notice, is one filled with anger. The Greek word is "orge." It's a slow, burning anger, like lava building up inside of a mountain: the righteous indignation of God.

But at the same time, He was angry, the text says, He was also grieved. As one Greek lexicon, defines this Greek work for grieved, it means to "feel sorrow or grief together," to "feel sorry for." So, at the same time that He was angry, He also felt a grief and a sorrow for these men. What created that emotion in our Lord? Notice it says, "He was grieved at their "hardness of heart." To us, what does "hardhearted" mean? If you say, someone's "hardhearted," you mean they are cruel, insensitive. That's not what the Hebrew expression "hardhearted" meant. In the Hebrew mind, "hardhearted" meant (go back and trace it in the Old Testament) To be "hardhearted" means to resist the will and purpose of God, to be unteachable and proud. Jesus felt both anger and grief because of their hard heartedness.

But that isn't all Jesus felt. Notice, verse 5 goes on to say He felt compassion for the hurting. After He looked around at the Pharisees, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." Jesus intended to heal this man. But as He so often does, He calls on this man to express his faith. Think about what Jesus asked him to do. He's standing in the middle of a crowded synagogue on the Sabbath; his physical disability apparent and obvious. And then Jesus asked him to do the worst thing for a person with a physical disability, especially in the less-sensitive times that they lived in. He asked him to expose his withered limb for everyone to see. What was going on here? It was a call to trust Jesus, to obey Him when it didn't seem to make sense. As one commentator says, "Faith is not a private wager, but a public risk, that Jesus is worthy of trust when no other hope can be trusted."

Allan Cole writes, "If a man truly desired healing, he must be willing to confess his need, and to show his faith in the power of Jesus, by standing up in the face of the whole congregation and displaying his need." It was a cup of shame, bitter to drink.

But our Lord is compassionate toward this man. The third thing we see about our Lord's heart is that He delights in doing good and saving a life on the Sabbath. Look at verse 5 again. The man

stretched out his hand. And his hand was restored. Stretching out his hand was a picture of his faith. And when he did, his hand was restored instantaneously, completely, publicly, unquestionably! He was healed! It was restored. Whatever his condition had been, his right hand is now exactly like his left, in full and perfect health, and even healthier. Did you notice the genius of our Lord? There was no question in anybody's mind there that Jesus healed this man. But he didn't touch him. He didn't apply any medicine. He didn't do anything to him. He merely "willed" this man to be healed.

By the way, Jesus doesn't promise us that He will do this for us, at all, certainly not every time. But He still has the power to do it, doesn't He? So, Jesus healed this man on the Sabbath, but technically, He did no work, and cannot be accused even of breaking their silly little rules. So, do you think that the Pharisees were glad when Jesus didn't work on the Sabbath? You think the Pharisees were glad when this man and his infirmity was healed? If you do, you better think again, because that's not how a sinner's heart works.

We've seen the heart of our Lord, the heart of God. Now let's look at the heart of a sinner, really our heart. Notice, first of all, there's anger at God. You don't see that as clearly in Mark's account. But in Luke's account, listen to what Luke writes. After Jesus did this, Luke 6:11 says, "But they themselves were filled with rage." The Greek word for "filled with rage" here is "anoia." "Noia" is the word for "mind; and "a" is the alpha privative; it negates it. Like "a-muse." "Muse" means to think. "A-muse" means "not to think." "Amusement" means to do something that doesn't require any thinking. "Anoia, then, is the opposite of using your mind.

One lexicon defines it like this: "It is a state of such extreme anger, as to suggest an incapacity to use one's mind; extreme fury; great rage; mad out of their minds!" What kind of reaction is that? Jesus didn't break their rules. And yet, Jesus saw this man healed. This is anger at God. They were so angry; they were out of their minds. And their anger was directed at Jesus Christ, who had just verifiably healed the man in front of them. Folks, this is how unbelievers react to God, to the righteousness of God.

Martin Luther, you remember the account of before he came to faith in Christ, as a monk, he says, “Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that He was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love. Yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners. And secretly, if not blasphemely, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God.” Folks, this isn’t an anomaly. People don’t want to admit this reality. But it’s simply true.

Romans 1 says, “For even though they knew God, they did not ... [glorify] Him as God or give thanks...” And how does that express itself? Down in Romans 1:31 it says, “... they became ... haters of God....” One of the most interesting illustrations of this hatred that comes out of the heart of man toward God is found in the book of Revelation. I won’t turn there with you. But sometime read Revelation 16:9, 11, and 21. As God pours out his wrath and fury upon the earth, you would expect men to want to repent. But what do they do, instead? It says they blaspheme the God of Heaven. They gnaw their tongues in anger at God. This is how sinners respond. Folks, this how we respond, naturally to God. You say, “I don’t remember being angry at God.” If you weren’t angry at God, it’s because you didn’t understand what God was really like. When you see God and you’re a sinner, and you understand His standard, the natural heart is to be a hater of God, not to glorify God, not to give thanks, to blaspheme God.

Our world is filled with people who blaspheme God. My daughter and I were sitting at lunch today, because my wife is home with a couple of sick kids. And, we were sitting at an area restaurant, and heard a couple of families nearby. And the kids were constantly using the name of God in vain. You say, “Well, what does that show?” Well, for some, it’s merely a habit. But for others, it is an expression. And I’ve seen and heard it and witnessed it, myself. It’s an expression of anger and hatred at God, for various things that He’s brought in our lives. The sinner’s heart continues to be revealed. Instead of concern for others, there is concern only for oneself.

Notice, that from the beginning, their only concern had been about themselves and their agenda. They evidenced absolutely no concern about the man with the paralyzed hand. And they seemed to be untouched by his healing. It’s just like Jesus said of them in Matthew 23, in that list of

woes about the Pharisees. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders. But they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger. This is how false teachers are. They're uncompassionate and unconcerned about people. But that's not just true of false teachers. It's true of people at large.

Titus 3:3 tells us, "This is how we used to be. We also once were," and it lists a number of things, and then it says, "We were hateful, and hating one another." Unbelievers are all about themselves. And they are hateful and hating one another. You also see the heart of a sinner here in that there is doing evil and even plotting to take a life, in this case, on the Sabbath. Verse 6, "The Pharisees went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against them as to how they might destroy him."

Luke explains that as soon as they left the synagogue, they discussed together what they might do to Jesus. And soon they also made contact with the Herodians, a group called the Herodians. Now, I'm not going to take a lot of time here, but just because they're mentioned so rarely. We know very little about this group. You see the word Herod in the name. That's because they were probably supporters of Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great. There is an interesting possibility. If you look at how the high priests were selected, Herod's family selected the high priest before 6AD and again after 37AD. The Romans did in the middle. And most of the appointments that the family of Herod made was one family, the House of Bothus. And it's very possible, some think, (and Harold Honer takes this view), that the Herodians were Bothusians. They were part of that family that was part of the high priests, except when the Romans were choosing them. But regardless, the point you need to get is that they were political. They were not very religious. They supported the corruption of the Jewish culture with Greek culture. They were willing to support a pawn of the Roman Empire, Herod. So, these are strange bedfellows: the rabidly Jewish ultra religious Pharisees and the Hellenistic political Herodians. Henrikson says, "a strange coalition between the sanctimonious and the sacrilegious." But they were bound together by their hatred of Jesus. They wanted Jesus dead. Look at verse 6. It says, "They began conspiring as to how they might destroy him." They wanted Him dead. Because they were convinced that, regardless of what had happened, that He was actually a lawbreaker, and He ought to be put to death. Don't miss the irony of what's going on here. They believed

Jesus had broken the Sabbath by healing. And yet, on the very same Sabbath, they are plotting Jesus' death, amazing!

Folks, the Pharisees hated Jesus. Why? Well, religiously because they'd created a false system, and Jesus was showing it for what it was, its moral bankruptcy. They also hated Jesus for a personal reason, and that was envy. He was undermining them in their position and their authority. And several texts make that clear in the New Testament. False religion always hates the real Jesus.

But the Herodians also hated Jesus. And the Herodians hated him for different reasons. Politically, they wanted to maintain the status quo. They wanted to see Israel rule itself. (That's Herod Antipas, on the coin, by the way, if you're curious.) They also hated him for a personal reason. They wanted to preserve their lifestyles: the money, their power, their luxurious lives. They were nominally religious, but they were really secular. And Jesus confronted their personal goals, desires and agendas.

The point is this. Listen carefully. All men, religious, irreligious, are united in one thing: their hatred of the true Jesus, whether they are ensconced in false religion, or whether they are rank secularists. Almost two years before His death, the religious and political leaders of the nation are plotting Jesus' death. Jesus has to conduct the rest of His time on earth in the shadow of the cross.

But this passage isn't primarily about the hatred of the Pharisees. This passage is about God. Specifically, it's a revelation of the heart of God. Be encouraged, because here we get a glimpse into God's heart. And I want you to see how practical it is. We see the heart of God in His creating the Sabbath for man. He made the Sabbath as a way that man wouldn't have to work every day! There would be a rest and a break for him to think about things eternal, to recharge physically and spiritually. This was an expression of God's goodness to His creation. You see the heart of God in His concern for the daily needs and regular issues of man's life, whether it's having food to eat, as we saw in the account last week, or whether it's needing your body healed. Jesus was concerned in both cases.

Folks, Jesus is concerned, as well, about our needs in the same way. That's why we're taught to pray, you remember in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread." "Your Father knows," Jesus says, "that you have need of these things." Listen, we live in difficult financial times. Don't imagine for a moment that your Father doesn't care about your situation. If you want to know Jesus' heart and the heart of God, look at His response to these human needs. Where there was human need, He desired to meet those needs.

But we also see the heart of God in His concern for those that were affected by the fall; affected physically, with sickness. You know, it's so important to keep the right perspective about sickness and illness. Listen, folks, God permitted sickness and disease. God uses sickness and disease. God directs it to ends that meet His purposes. But make no mistake; sickness and disease are a direct result of the fall. They're part of the curse on the earth. And some day, they'll be gone. Revelation describes a day when there will be no more death and no more pain. They are enemies. And you see in Jesus' response to the pain and suffering that he meets, the heart of God toward the pain and suffering that we experience physically. Have you ever wondered how Jesus would respond to you in the suffering that you experience? There are people in our church who are in various degrees of physical suffering. You want to know the heart of God? Look at Jesus' response to the people he met.

But God is also deeply concerned about the spiritual results of the fall and the place of sin. Did you see Jesus' response to it in the Pharisees? There was anger. And by the way, that person, the person who doesn't know Jesus Christ, just as with these Pharisees, God is angry with. Don't kid yourself if you're not a Christian, that God is O.K. with that, God is O.K. with your sin. Just as Jesus was angered by the sin of these Pharisees, He is angered by your sin. If you're not in Christ, and even if you are, if it's a hardhearted rebellion against Him and you're unwilling to turn, there is anger in the heart of God, when there's sin. But at the same time, he was grieved, grieved.

You sense, in Jesus' look at these men, in His questions of them, that He was offering Himself to them; that He wanted them to repent; that He wanted them to wake up. In fact, do you remember that whole chapter, Matthew 23 that's an indictment of the Pharisees? You remember how it

ends? Jesus is looking over the city. And he says, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! How often would I have gathered you as a hen beneath, chicks beneath her wings! But you would not.” You see the heart of God for people...even for these Pharisees. Listen; have you ever wondered how Jesus would respond to you if you don't know Him? Just as He did with these Pharisees, He would offer you Himself. But you would have to turn from your sin.

It's amazing to see the heart of God in the life of Christ. You want to know how God would react to the physical suffering in your life or the lives of those you love? Look at Jesus' response. You want to know what God's response would be to the sinners who will repent and turn? Look at how Jesus responded to those who were willing to come. And if you want to know how Jesus would respond to hardhearted rebellion, look at how He responded to the Pharisees. Here we see the heart of God.

But the story isn't over because the day comes when Jesus gets a trophy Pharisee. Fast forward a few years, just a few years, less than five years from this incident. And Jesus shows up from heaven on the Damascus road. And He gets the fairest, the best and the brightest Pharisee. And He changes him. There's the heart of God.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for opening up your heart to us; for revealing Yourself in the person of Your Son. Father, thank You that we see Your compassion and Your tenderness and Your care for this man with his withered right hand. And we see Your grieving and anger at sin, and the invitation that was really offered to these Pharisees. And there we see Your heart, as well.

Father, I pray that You would help us, who know and love You, to worship You for the gracious, merciful, compassionate God that You are.

And Father, for those who are here tonight, who, like the Pharisees, are hardhearted in their response to You, who are unsubmitive to Your Word, who will not bow their knee, Father show them themselves in the mirror of this passage. And show them, oh God, how You think of them even tonight. And may (before they lay their heads on their pillows tonight), may those here

who have never bowed the knee to Jesus Christ, seek His mercy and grace, before their hard hearts become impenetrable stone.

We pray in Jesus' name and for His sake. Amen