

Introduction

1. My dad had a lot of sayings that he shared with me during my growing up years.
 - a. He would share these sayings at appropriate times:
 - 1) When I made a mistake or failed, I might hear: “When at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.”
 - 2) If I did something well or that made him proud, I might hear: “Your stock just went up.”
 - 3) When I needed to make a decision or faced a difficult choice, I might hear: “Son, you never go wrong, doing right.” For me, that last one was one of his most memorable sayings. I believe he was right.
 - b. I try to live by that last saying. I hope that I do the right as God shows me the way to do it even if others think it is wrong. God is my judge. May I always do what is right in God’s eyes.
 - c. I think Jesus agrees with that saying, and in this passage said almost the same thing himself.
2. In this text, Jesus was accused by the Pharisees and teachers of the law of doing the work of healing on the Sabbath, which was a violation of God’s law. Let’s see how he responded to their charge.
3. **Read Mk 3:1-6.**

A. The Question (1-4)

1. This is the fifth confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees recorded in Mark 2:1-3:6.
 - a. In Mk 2:1-12 the Pharisees complained about Jesus’ apparent blasphemy of God when he declared the forgiveness of a paralytic’s sins before healing him physically.
 - b. In Mk 2:13-17 they complained about Jesus’ association with sinners and believed that he had defiled himself based on the company that he kept with them.
 - c. In Mark 2:18-22, their complaint implied that Jesus and his disciples were less righteous because of their failure to practice regular fasting.
 - d. In Mark 2:23-28, they objected to Jesus’ disciples doing what they defined to be work on the Sabbath as the disciples picked grain to eat. They held Jesus accountable for their sinful actions of his disciples since he was their teacher/rabbi.
 - e. In this encounter, the Pharisees tested Jesus to see if he would break Sabbath regulations himself.
2. Jesus again went to the synagogue on the Sabbath. (1)
 - a. Perhaps it is the synagogue at Capernaum (cf., Mk 1:21-28). We don’t know which one for sure.
 - b. Going to synagogue on the Sabbath and teaching there was a regular part of Jesus’ ministry.
 - c. Remember that Jesus’ primary purpose was to proclaim the good news and the coming of God’s kingdom (cf., Mk 1:15).
 - d. The place is not as important as the day. It is the Sabbath, the day of Jewish rest and worship.
 - e. The Pharisees held Jesus accountable for what they believed to be sinful work by his disciples on the Sabbath. Now they tested Jesus directly to see what he would do on the Sabbath.
3. There is a man with a shriveled hand. (1)
 - a. Perhaps the man was there because he had heard that Jesus would be present.
 - b. We don’t know exactly what was wrong with his hand, but it was some type of deformity that most likely kept him from full acceptance in the community. Perhaps the Pharisees believed that he or his parents had sinned and the result was his withered hand.
 - c. Perhaps he was there at the invitation of the Pharisees who wanted to test Jesus.
4. The Pharisees were looking for a reason to “accuse” (Gk., *katagoreo*) Jesus. (2)
 - a. They were not listening to his teaching or marveling at his miracles. They were more concerned with finding fault with Jesus than with worshipping.
 - b. How often do we drift into a critique of the worship service or leaders instead of attending to our real purpose of worship?
 - c. The Pharisees watched Jesus closely and with malicious intent to catch him in a sin of working on the Sabbath if he dared to heal this man.
 - d. The Pharisees would have allowed for medical intervention in certain life threatening cases on the Sabbath but not for healing of a shriveled hand. That could wait for another day.
 - e. Akin concludes, “When you have a legalistic spirit, you become critical, always on the lookout for what is wrong and seldom on the lookout for what is right” (Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, 65).

5. Jesus said to the man, “Stand up in front of everyone” (Gk., *Egeire eis to meson* - lit. “stand in the midst”). The synagogue walls were usually lined with stone benches with the speaker/teacher seated in the middle of the room. (3)
6. As usual, Jesus turned the question/test around. The Pharisees meant the test to be one for Jesus, but Jesus asked them a penetrating and insightful question: “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” (4)
 - a. Of course, if the Pharisees answered to do good and to save life, then they would not be able to condemn his good work of healing a man and restoring him to full life.
 - b. If they answered to do evil, or at least not to do good by failing to heal the man, then they would be seen as harsh and callous in the eyes of the people.
 - c. Jesus equated doing good with giving life and doing evil with killing. He elevated the allowable actions on the Sabbath above the letter of the law prescribed by the Pharisees.
 - d. The Pharisees were confronted with an unanswerable question and remained silent.

B. The Answer (5-6)

1. Jesus was righteously angered (Gk., *orge*) not just by the Pharisee’s lack of a response but by their uncaring and unmerciful response to the man with the shriveled hand. (5a)
 - a. James Brooks notes, “Jesus’ anger was not sinful, however, because it was directed toward evil and because it was controlled” (James A. Brooks, *Mark*, 68).
 - b. Jesus was also “deeply distressed” (Gk., *sullupo*) by their “stubborn hearts” (Gk., *porosei tes kardias auton*). (5a)
 - c. Wiersbe writes, “Our Lord never became angry at the publicans and sinners, but He did express anger toward the self-righteous Pharisees (Matt. 23). They would rather protect their traditions than see a man healed!” (Wiersbe, *Be Diligent*, 41).
 - d. Akin adds, “Their hardness of heart is almost overwhelming, and Jesus’ frustration has reached a boiling point. Undoubtedly He is overtly inviting their critical judgment by what He is about to do!” (Akin, 64-5).
2. Jesus did not answer his own rhetorical question with words but with action. (5b)
 - a. Jesus focused his attention not on the scheming Pharisees but on the disabled man.
 - b. William Lane notes, “In the name of piety they had become insensitive both to the purposes of God and to the sufferings of men. Jesus’ anger was tempered by a godly sorrow for men who could no longer rejoice in the tokens of God’s goodness to men. When Jesus restored the man’s hand he demonstrated what it means ‘to do good’ and ‘to preserve life’ on the Sabbath. Moreover, he provided a sign of the true observance and joy of the Sabbath. As Lord of the Sabbath Jesus delivers both the Sabbath and man from a state of distress” (William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 123-4).
 - c. Jesus called on the man to “Stretch out your hand.” (5)
 - 1) Typically, the man could not have done what Jesus commanded. It would have been impossible.
 - 2) Note the faith response of the man. He did not claim disability or respond that the request was not possible. Instead, he acted on faith, like the paralytic that Jesus had healed (cf., Mk 2:1-11), by doing exactly what Jesus commanded.
 - 3) The man’s hand was completely restored.
 - 4) He was healed by Jesus on the Sabbath.
 - d. In the minds of the Pharisees, Jesus had sinned by working a miracle of healing for a non-life-threatening illness on the Sabbath.
 - 1) In the process Jesus had also snubbed them by putting them on the spot with his question.
 - 2) Jesus was a dangerous man—testing the limits of the law, asserting his own authority, and defying their legalistic powers and pronouncements.

3. The Pharisees joined forces with the Herodians with the goal of killing Jesus.
 - a. The Pharisees were strict Jewish religious sect who followed the letter of the law as exactly as they could. They tolerated Herod at best and reluctantly followed his laws and paid his taxes.
 - b. The Herodians were supporters of King Herod, the non-Jewish puppet king appointed by the Romans.
 - 1) The Herodians are only mentioned here and in Mk 12:13 (cf., Mt 22:16).
 - 2) They were not a religious sect but more likely powerful, wealthy supporters of Herod and the *status quo*.
 - c. The Pharisees and Herodians were more enemies than friends.
 - 1) The old sayings, “Politics makes strange bedfellows” and “The enemy of my enemy is my friend” are both true in this case.
 - 2) These two disparate groups were united by a common threat to their power and ways—Jesus.
 - d. James Brooks observes, “The first explicit reference to Jesus’ death is in v. 6. The verse concludes not only the present pericope but all five conflict stories. The Pharisees’ plot to ‘kill’ (*apolesosin*, which literally means *destroy* as one would do to an animal) one who not only saved a life but who came to give life to all exemplifies Markan irony” (Brooks, 69).
 - e. They would gather their forces again to test Jesus five times on the last week of his life in Jerusalem (cf., Mk 11:27-12:47) after which they persuaded Pilate, the Roman Governor, to execute Jesus.

C. Lessons for Us

1. Be sensitive to the needs of others above the opinions of others.
2. Be ready to be criticized for doing the good God shows you to do. Jealousy, envy, and evil are always at work. Some people will criticize you no matter what you do. So, always do the good that God shows you to do.
3. Don’t put God to the test as the Pharisees did. You will be the one tested.
4. God is always faithful and good.
5. Don’t have a legalistic spirit that looks for what others are doing wrong. Instead look for what they are doing right and encourage them. If you must look for faults, seek out your own and fix them.
6. Do what is good and especially what brings life whenever and wherever it is needed.
 - a. Wiersbe observes, “Since evil is at work every day, including the Sabbath day, why should good not be at work as well? Death is always at work, but that should not hinder us from seeking to save life” (Wiersbe, 41).
 - b. Akin adds, “It is always right to bless others and do good, no matter what the enemies of God’s kingdom might say or do” (Akin, 63).
7. When the Lord tells you to do something, don’t remind him of your limitations—He already knows them—but respond with faith. A miracle may be just around the corner as you obey and follow God’s instructions.
8. The world may question our motives and plot to trip us up in our faith. However, we must continue to respond as God commands and leads us. They may kill the body, but they can never kill the eternal spirit of the resurrected Christ that lives in us.