

It is Lawful to do Good on the Sabbath

Call to Worship: Psalm 112

1st Scripture: Luke 6:6-11; Luke 13:10-17

2nd Scripture: Matthew 12:9-14

Introduction

Recognizing the importance of dealing with the contentions that had existed between the religious leaders and the Lord Jesus Christ, concerning the proper observance of the Sabbath Day, Matthew records two important historical events, within which, this matter comes to a head. We have considered one of these events last time, when the Pharisees had accused the Lord's disciples of breaking the Sabbath, for picking and eating heads of grain. This morning then, we move on to consider the second of these events, where the Pharisees accuse Jesus of violating the Sabbath Day for healing a man who had a withered hand.

I. The Accusation (vs. 9-10)

“Now when He had departed from there, He went into their synagogue” (vs. 9). In Luke's account of this event, we find that this actually takes place on a different Sabbath Day, which again, affirms Matthew's desire to intentionally put these two events together, not to satisfy chronological purposes, but rather, to highlight our Lord's righteous understanding of the Sabbath Day, contrary to the abuse of the Pharisees. And so, here we find that, following the previous event on the Sabbath, at a later time, the Lord had intentionally entered the synagogue which was overseen by these same Pharisees, to teach there.

And what's worthy of note here, brethren, right from the outset, is that, while the Pharisees are plotting to catch our Lord in some violation of the Law of Moses, the Lord does not avoid them. In fact, He intentionally goes right into their own domain, knowing what they are up to, so as to expose and deal with their treacherous ways. We are told that, “He went into *their* synagogue.” And so, this was intentional on our Lord's part. He was not caught off guard. They were setting a trap for the Lord; they thought they could craftily catch Him off guard and put Him on the spot, but He, in fact, knowing their hearts, yet had other plans. Is it not a sad

reality that people actually think that they can pull one over on God? This is a common trend among sinful men, isn't it? But, God not only always knows the foolish plans of men, but He often times leads them to fall into their own traps. What happened to Haman, in the Book of Esther, who was hung on his own gallows, is a textbook example of how God causes the wicked to get caught in their own snares.

“And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”—that they might accuse Him” (vs. 10). Now, upon reading Luke’s account, we find that it was not simply the case that this man with the withered hand was there, but rather, the Pharisees, unbeknownst to the man, were seeking to use him as a pawn for causing the Lord to stumble into what they thought was a violation of the Sabbath. And to this end, brethren, we peer once more into the wicked heart of man, and if we are honest, into the natural tendencies of our own wicked flesh. These religious leaders, having absolutely no concern for this suffering man, were prepared to use him as a means of accusing Jesus. Imagine that! Can we not see, once again, the clear disregard for the overarching Law principle of, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice,” portrayed so clearly here? What a tremendous testimony to the utter corruption of the human heart, that we could be so flippant and careless toward the sufferings, pains and needs of other “image bearers of God,” to the extent that we might even further take advantage of them, when it serves our own selfish purposes.

And consider this, brethren. In Luke’s Gospel, we are told that it was this man’s *right* hand which was withered/paralyzed. In most cases, the stronger and more useful hand is the right hand. And yet, this man’s was paralyzed and useless. Did this not affect his ability to work efficiently? Did this not affect his ability to freely participate in many basic activities? Did it not serve to hinder him in many significant ways? And yet, the *religious leaders* of Israel could not search for even a hint of compassion for this dear and precious, ailing soul. They would rather use his ailment as a means of trapping the Lord in some form of an alleged Sabbath violation. Such is the natural heart of our fallen race, brethren. And so, like lions waiting for the deer to dip its head into the creek for a drink, they prepare to pounce on the Lord, as they set this man before Him, and ask Him if it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath. For, in their wicked and corrupt hearts; in their defiled souls, which sought to adhere to some plastic observance of the

letter of the Law, not in accordance with the pure and righteous intentions of God, they had considered even healing to be a work that would violate the Sabbath day. And so, pretending to be sincere in their inquiry, but really with ulterior motives; again, taking advantage of the poor man with the withered hand, they pose the question, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”

II. Our Lord’s Response (vs. 11-12)

“Then He said to them, “What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath” (vs. 11-12).

Once again, our Lord uses a lesser to greater analogy here, just like He did in the previous text. And in doing this here, it ought to have exposed the utter wickedness of the hearts of the Pharisees. Notice, He says, “Look, if you had a sheep (which is of far lesser value than a human being), and it happened to fall into a pit on the Sabbath, would you leave it there in the pit to suffer and potentially die, to allegedly avoid doing any strenuous work on the Sabbath? Of course not! You would immediately take hold of it and lift it out of the pit to safety.” “That being the case, of how much greater value is a human being than a sheep? And if a human being is suffering in some way, how much more ought you to help that individual, when it is in your power to do so? Would you pity an animal more than your fellow man?” You see, the question is rhetorical, of course. It ought to be obvious to anyone with a soul, that helping others who are in need is a good thing to do on the Sabbath.

And so, this then leads to another overarching, Sabbath principle, which our Lord lays down in this text, which is in keeping with the heart of the Law, as that which undergirds the whole Second Table of the Moral Law. And that is this, “It is always lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” You see, yes, the Sabbath is a Day of rest. Yes, it is a Day to revel in, contemplate and worship the glory of our great God! And yes, it is a Day to lay aside our own interests and to lay aside our normal work. But, it is always a Day to pour out heartfelt love to God and others! And so, loving others, and doing good to others, may, at times, even require strenuous work. But such work as that; the work of exercising love to God and others, in very tangible ways, is always a lawful work to be done on the Sabbath. Now, we don’t sacrifice the worship of God in

the gathered assembly, to go and work in a soup kitchen. For, that would be a gross violation of the first Table of the Law. But, even among the gathered assembly, or before or after the gathered meetings, it is always lawful to do good to others. And in fact, when we lay aside our normal jobs; when we leave our normal work to the other six days, we will be better suited to serve others on the Sabbath. Now, does this mean that we cannot rest on the Sabbath? Of course not! It just means that we ought not to overlook the lawful opportunities of doing good to others on the Sabbath. To this end, the Lord never commanded us to take a break from serving others, and we ought to always look for opportunities to do so, as the Lord providentially permits. And so, along with “God desiring mercy and not sacrifice,” the second Sabbath principle which our Lord lays down here is that God delights in seeing His people lay down their own interests, so as to serve Him and others on the Sabbath. We cease from our regular, personal labors, but not our labors of love unto others.

III. The Affirmation of Our Lord’s Response (vs. 13-14)

After bringing forth His response, our Lord then provides that which ought to have affirmed all that He has said here. He heals the man. “Then He said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ And he stretched it out, and it was restored as whole as the other” (vs. 13).

And so, the Lord tells the man to do that which would normally be impossible for someone in his condition. He orders the man to stretch out his withered and paralyzed hand. And the man, believing that he would be able to do this, in accordance with the power and authority of Christ, indeed, stretches forth his hand. And we are told that it was made as whole and as good as his other hand. The Lord had restored the man, having delivered him out of his affliction.

Now, this in itself, ought to have compelled the Pharisees to repent of their foolishness, recognizing that the power of God was just exercised unto the miraculous healing of this man. But, they are so blinded by their sin and their pride and their stubborn commitment to the keeping of the letter of the Law; they are so hardened by their hatred of Christ, that they rather harden themselves further, and refuse to humble themselves before the evident testimony of the Holy Spirit, whom they have blasphemed. Indeed, it is right here, for the first time, that we are

told that they now had begun to discuss together, how they might kill the Lord! Notice, in verse 14, we are told, “Then the Pharisees went out and plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him.”

How hard is the human heart, brethren! That those who were the most religious even, among the people, could be so filled with hate and pride, that they could actually scheme together a plan to kill the very Son of God, who had just, by His words, healed a man whose arm was paralyzed! Can even witnessing a miracle change the corrupt and wicked heart of man? No! Indeed, “if they don’t believe Moses and the prophets, they will not believe even if one were raised from the dead.” And later on, following the resurrection of Christ, we see this to be true as well.

IV. Concluding Thoughts

1) Brethren, let us be ever conscious of the fact that we are prone toward devaluing the lives of our fellow man. Is it natural for us to place great value on those who are close to us; our families, friends, spouses, children...etc? Of course. But, by faith, we must remember that all of mankind are precious and of great value in the sight of God, because we bear His glorious image. The Pharisees, whose eyes were always fixed upon their own selfish-ambitions, had lost all means of recognizing the precious value of the lives of others.

But, as the people of God; as people now reflecting the heart of Christ, we must strive to contend with such evil, seeking, by the blood of Christ, to purge it from our naturally sinful hearts. We must see every human being as precious, and we must always seek the good of others, in so far, as it is in our power to do them good. We must put ourselves in the shoes of others, bearing their griefs, striving to comfort and help them, as we can. We must strive to do good to all, every day, and especially to the household of faith. And this is one of the greatest means of expressing our love to Christ, brethren! You say you love Christ? Show it, in very tangible ways, by loving others. You say you embrace the First Table of God’s Moral Law, show it, by striving to lovingly fulfill the Second Table!

And you might be tempted to say, “But could a Christian ever fall into such a pit of wickedness as the blind Pharisees had?” Have we not read the story of Jonah, who had more

compassion on a silly plant, than on an entire nation of men, women, children and animals? Oh brethren, if you and I don't see this degrading tendency of the Pharisees in us, then we are truly ignorant of the wicked ways of our flesh. But, if we are aware; if we are consciously aware of our own natural tendencies, we will be more alert, and ready to strangle the demon that is our flesh, whenever it rears its ugly head. We must strive to love! We must consciously strive to do good to others... or it will never happen.

[This is one of the reasons for why it is important for you to be here, in the flesh, among the people of God, as much as possible, brethren. Christianity is a personal touch, face to face religion. "Greet each other with a holy kiss!" It cannot remain on Zoom. Christianity was never meant to be lived out on Zoom, for the long run. For those of you who are at home, I would plead, come out... come and be among the brethren; take the Lord's Supper, be among the gathered body... as much as possible. Take that risk for the glory of God! It is right and good! And the God who doesn't allow a sparrow or a hair to fall to the ground apart from His will, will shield you, and He will only allow you to suffer in accordance with His good will (and unto your sanctification); and He will only take you home, when it is truly your time.]

Brethren, Jesus left His heavenly and eternal rest, to dwell among us, and to endure great suffering for us, bearing our sins in His own body on the tree! He left an eternal Sabbath to dwell in our unrest, and to bear our greatest burden! Can we hide ourselves away, or neglect to be among and to serve His people, when He has done so much for us?

2) Finally, friend, if you are not in Christ this morning, can I plead with you for a few moments? You might think that the Pharisees that I just spoke about, would have been out of their ever-living minds for rejecting Christ, after they had seen Him heal that man before their very eyes. But, you must realize that their rejection of Christ was not based on some illogical deficiency, or some form of unexcused ignorance. Their rejection was moral in nature, because of the hardness of their hearts. Now, why do I say this to you? Because, if you presently reject Christ, you likewise, do so, willfully and out of the same hardened heart. And for this reason, you are guilty of your rejection. In other words, you will never be able to stand before God, and to justify your rejection of His Son in this life. The evidence of God's existence is everywhere around you, and your own conscience bears witness against you, that you know that you are a

sinner worthy of God's judgment. You want your sin, and that is really what keeps you from embracing Christ and the Gospel. God has hard-wired these realities into your very soul. Remember, He made you. And so, please, don't be deceived into thinking that God will somehow excuse you, or allow you to pass through unscathed at the final judgment. Your sin will damn you to hell, and once you die, there will be no turning back.

And so, I plead with you, seek Christ now, before it is too late! [The Gospel!!!!]

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25