

Mark 3: 1-6; "A Bold and Courageous Ministry", Sermon # 13
in the series - "Astonished at His Teachings",
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on July 27th, 2008,
in the Morning Worship Service.

I do not know if you are aware of the fact that since Chapter 2, verse 7, that Jesus has been in conflict with the Pharisees. First, the Pharisees thought in their hearts that Jesus spoke blasphemies when he said to the paralytic man, "Your sins are forgiven." Then in verse 16 we find them asking this question of His disciples, "How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?" "And Jesus, you remember, when He heard of it said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick." "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." These things were offensive to the Pharisees because they thought that religion was for the religious; those who boasted in the law and in their own good works. He was actually speaking of the greatest need of mankind. He was speaking about people being healed of the worst of diseases, which is the sin which they have been born with; the sin which is in their very nature, which they have inherited from their parents. All people are sick with this disease, but not all people recognize it. The Pharisees thought that they were well. They thought that they were spiritually healthy because they kept the law of God outwardly. Let us understand this morning, that it was this group of religious men, the Pharisees, that had the most implacable hatred to Jesus and His ministry. And the reason that they hated Him so much was that He was showing everyone, that He had come to deal with the real needs of men. He had come into the world to show men the mercy which they needed to be healed and to be saved. But mercy was not important to the Pharisees. Their religion consisted of being right and winning the argument. Little did they know that they had already lost it. Jesus was showing all men the true way to worship God, but they thought that they already knew how to worship God. Jesus would have men to view God, by faith, in a much different way than the way that the Pharisees were looking at it. But they didn't care to see it.

What we want to see this morning is that the ministry of Jesus was the outworking of a bold and powerful righteousness, while the ministry of the Pharisees to men was cowardly and weak. We want to contrast the outworking of this bold ministry of our Lord Jesus with the cowardly and weak ministry of the Pharisees; and we want to learn from it. What was the difference between the ministry of Jesus and the ministry of the Pharisees as regards this man with the withered hand? And how can you and I be more like Jesus, in the ministry that He has given us here in this place? For whatever ministry we have in this place is an extension of the ministry of the Lord Jesus. We can say that the ministry of Jesus was different from that of the Pharisees in these 3 significant ways: 1st- Their watching of men was different. 2nd- Their speaking to issues of good and evil was

different. And 3rd- Their religious courage was different. I would like you to consider as we look into this, whether your ministry to people around you is like this, and how you might improve, having seen what the Lord Jesus did here.

1st of all - The ministry of Jesus was different from that of the Pharisees in that their watching of men was different. (Verses 1 and 2)

"And He entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a withered hand." "So they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him." Now you ought to be able to see immediately that there was a vast difference between the Lord Jesus and the Pharisees in the reasons that they went to synagogue that day. Both Jesus and these men went to the synagogue; both were watching men, as a part of their ministry, but only Jesus was watching righteously. Jesus went to church, and He was looking out for the needs of men, while the Pharisees went to see men bound by their Sabbath rules; to see men kept from doing and experiencing God's freeing and liberating power. We must ask ourselves, "What is the reason that I come to church on any given Sunday?" "How is it that I watch other people?" You and I, unless we are asleep, have come here for a most important reason. We have come here to worship God, and to worship Him by praising Him and by giving Him the glory due His name. But we are here for another reason also. And that is, that we would have other people around us to be saved and to have them benefit from the ministry that is taking place on this very day. Jesus, on this particular day, was on the look-out to see who had real and evident needs among the people. Probably the most obvious need that He could help with was this man with the withered hand. Now the wording of our text in verse two is very interesting indeed. In verse 1 it talks about Jesus entering the synagogue and mentions the man with the withered hand, which was what Jesus was thinking about. And then it says, "So they watched Him closely...." When you read the beginning of verse two, you might think that it means to imply that the Pharisees were watching the man with withered hand closely. But, no, it means that that they were watching the Lord Jesus closely. But the wording in verse 1 leads you naturally to believe that the Pharisees should have been watching to see how they might have helped and ministered to the man with the withered hand. Now, I am aware that they could not possibly have healed this man; that could only have been done by Jesus, or by someone to whom Jesus gave the power to heal to. But what I believe should have been taking place in the minds of these Pharisees was this. They should have been thinking to themselves, "Is it not wonderful that Jesus, this one who has healed so many, should be in our assembly this day?" "There is every reason to believe that He might graciously heal this man who has suffered the loss of his movement in his arm." "What a wonderful act of God it would be, if He should do this." They should have been thinking this way; because in doing it, they would be acknowledging God's work being done through Jesus. His power to do miracles was the plain evidence that He was the Son of God. But they were not thinking this way at all.

What the Pharisees were thinking was something like this. "This Jesus will not submit to our Pharisaic rules concerning the Sabbath Day, and He has come here to disrupt our meeting with His power to heal." "If He exercises this power to heal, we will have grounds to accuse Him of a crime against our religion." "We will be able to bring charges against Him." What you and I should be asking ourselves at this point is, "What would lead these very religious men to actually not be looking out for the needs of the man with withered hand to be met?" And even worse yet, "What would lead these very religious men to actually come to the place that they were looking to accuse the Son of God, their Messiah, and the only Savior of men; of breaking the law of God?" The answer is that they do not know God, and they do not have the love of God in themselves. They did not understand grace. The way that they watched other people is the evidence of this. They watched with a view to accuse. Very religious people, if they do not understand grace, can often become very judgmental people. To understand grace is to understand our own need and to also see the needs of others. We must ask ourselves this morning, what it is that we watch for, in relation to other men? Is our watching of people who come into our assembly, in order to accuse or to help? Our watching of people who are in need; is it to accuse or to help? And if we find ourselves often watching with suspicion in our hearts towards others; others who are only trying sincerely to help and to minister to the lost and needy; then we need to take a look at our own heart. It is not enough to think or even to say that we are true worshippers of God if we cannot long and yearn for God to do glorious things by His grace for people who have spiritual and physical needs. It is not enough if we simply attend the synagogue if we become judges with evil thoughts. These Pharisees were even worse than unbelievers. They were hypocrites. They not only did not believe that Jesus' works were God's works, but they would even keep people from being helped and healed and ultimately saved from their sins by Him.

Why did the Pharisees watch to accuse Jesus? They did it because they couldn't bring Him into line with the rules that they had made up which were an addition to the commandments of God. Is it wrong to be zealous and jealous of God's holy law? Never! But it is wrong to be zealous and jealous for your own additions to it. If you are going to be zealous for the commandments of God; make sure that you take notice of the fact that the greatest of His commandments is love, and then ask yourself if you are looking at other people with God's love; yearning for their healing, physically and spiritually, and willing to watch men for their good; both those who are in need and those who are attempting to minister to them. "But," you say to me, "I know some people who are trying to minister, and they do not follow after our church in its doctrines or practice." "They do not believe in our 1689 Confession of Faith." Yes, it may be true, but in your evaluation of them you must begin in the right place. You don't want to be a Pharisee. Are they sincerely desirous to help others? If they do not follow after us denominationally, do not disqualify the things that God may do through them,

because of it. Watch them with a mind open to believe that they may be doing their works so that they might be seen as being wrought in God. They may be trying to minister to God and they need the truths which you and I hold dear to complete their faith or their ministry. Instead of judging them and accusing them in your mind; try to minister to them where they are now; not where you think they should be, in accordance with the truth of God's word. Then they may actually want to know more about the truth of God's word from the Reformed Baptist perspective. You need not be pursuing a ministry of disqualifying other brethren from other religious denominations. Hold fast the truth of the word, but do not let go of your love for the lost and needy. Jesus never let go of either; the truth of God's Word or of his love for the lost and needy. The works of God in our ministry, or in the ministry of others, are based upon the love and mercy of God in Jesus Christ.

2ndly - The ministry of the Lord Jesus was different from that of the Pharisees in that their speaking of good and evil was different.

(Verses 3 and 4)

Jesus would deal with issues of good and evil plainly and openly, while the Pharisees were silent. The Lord Jesus was going to do a good work for this man upon his body. He didn't want His work, which was in perfect accordance with God's Word and God's compassion, to be done in secret, or in a corner. He wants it done in the synagogue on this Sabbath day. This is the way that Jesus deals with issues of truth and righteousness. He cuts through all the rules and traditions of men and establishes the true intent of the commandments of God. He puts His words and His works right out in the open. He is plain in His dealings with the man with the withered hand. He said to him, "Step forward." He wanted everyone in the synagogue to see that it was a good thing to heal this man on the Sabbath day. He says to the Pharisees, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" Issues of good and evil are meant, in the eyes of Jesus, and therefore in the eyes of God, to be plain and straightforward; not hard to discern. This is the way that God has made all of life. It is the sinfulness of men's hearts that makes the discernment of evil and good a hard thing, after men have read and known the Scriptures. Should it not have been obvious to every hearer there that day, that it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath? It is never lawful to do what is evil on any day including the Sabbath! Therefore, Jesus is reasoning out loud, before the whole assembly, that it is always not only lawful, but it is always good and right to do good on every day of the week. And it was particularly appropriate to do this deed of love and kindness on the Sabbath and heal this man. This is what Jesus wanted everyone to know. The Sabbath is not made and given by God so that men will not be helped by being healed, or saved from their sins, on that day of the week. It is just the opposite. Good works of ministering comfort, healing, and kindness, are appropriate to the Sabbath. Pursuing manual labor and our six-day weekly occupations is not appropriate to that day unless it is engaging in works of mercy or necessity. But this healing of

the man with the withered hand; this surely was a wonderful and an excellent thing to do on the Sabbath; a thing which would tend to the glory of God and show forth His mercy and kindness. Jesus would always speak plainly of the truth of what is good. And you and I should learn to plainly do the same thing.

Why is it that so much evil goes on in the world unopposed? Why is it that a whole society morally goes down hill? Why has the Christian Sabbath largely been lost to this generation? It is because those whom God has given the discernment to see the difference between good and evil remain silent. I am not implying that it is always necessary for God's people to be writing into the newspaper or calling the local television station to be able to do what Jesus was doing. Not all of us are called to a public ministry. It is only necessary that you and I speak the truth in the station to which we are called, and that we do not remain silent. There is such a thing as a sinful silence. It happens when a righteous person hears someone say something that is positively wrong in relation to God's word; and they see that it might cost them the approval of that person, or of a whole group of people, to point out the error, and so they do nothing, and they say nothing. And then everyone around them thinks that the error might be right. It is not necessary, I am saying, for a righteous person to go on and on trying to convince people who hold erroneous moral and spiritual opinions, of the truth of the word. But it is necessary that they say a word in season. That is all that it will take. And God will convict the conscience of those who hold the sinful or wrong opinions.

The Pharisees knew the answer to Jesus' question. They simply did not want to follow his righteous logic. If they followed his logic, they would prove their own convictions wrong. So they were silent and they did not answer Him a word. They did not want the issues of good and evil to be plain and simple. This is why they added so many rules to God's holy Sabbath commandment. They would ruin the good and the right by their rules, and place great and unnecessary burdens upon all the converts to their legalistic religion. They would not let Jesus speak to them to change their legalistic ways. They would judge Him as a law-breaker, the very one who gave them the law in the first place. They think that they know better than God Himself what true religion is. I hope that this speaks to each of our consciences here this morning. We suppress the truth in unrighteousness if we will not follow and respond to the plain and simple and flawless logic of Jesus found in these verses. No, if we would be truly righteous, we must learn to answer the logic of Jesus with this answer; "Lord, you are right." "It is always lawful on the Sabbath to do what is right." "It is always lawful to do good and save life, and not kill it by standing by and doing nothing. If it is in your power to do right and you know that it would be right to do it, you are in sin if you do not do it. It says so in James 4: 17. "Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin." But it also says in Proverbs 15: 23, "A man has joy by the answer of his mouth, and a word spoken in due season, how good it is!" This is what I pray that you and I would be able to become; more like Jesus in giving to people around us a word in due season; a word at the proper time.

Then 3rdly - The ministry of the Lord Jesus was different from that of the Pharisees in that their courage was different. (Verses 5 and 6)

We see the courage of the Lord Jesus manifested in several ways here. When he asked them the question about doing good or evil on the Sabbath; the Pharisees kept silent it says in verse 4. But, as I have said, this was a sinful silence. Their silence showed Jesus their lack of real compassion and love. It showed what they really valued, or in this case what they did not value enough. They valued their religious rules more than compassion and love to people in need. And the Lord Jesus had the courage to confront it. It says in verse 5, "And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.'" Again, the Lord Jesus does not conceal His thoughts and feelings about these men's sinful hardness of heart. He was able to see it and know it like no other man, because He was the Son of God. But he was not polite to defer to it or in any way let them think that it was right. He looked around at all of them who would not say a word, and He was angry with them. He let them know His righteous anger by the way that He looked at them. He was indignant that they could be so lacking in compassion as to not publicly affirm the principle of truth that He had so plainly stated. He is saying to them in His looks, "You can sit there and not want this man to be helped, and not want me to heal him in this glorious way that would bring honor and glory to God?" "Are you so stubborn and set in your own ways that you will not acknowledge something plainly good when you see it?" "Would you rather that this man stay in this condition of having a withered hand?" "You say by your silence that it is so." In Matthew's gospel, Chapter 12, verses 11 and 12, Jesus adds something which is not recorded by Mark. He says, "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?" Jesus is saying, "You Pharisees are inconsistent." "You would value a sheep if it falls into a pit on Sabbath by lifting it out." "But you will not value this man's being able to move his hand normally enough to approve of his being healed on this Sabbath day." This is sheer hypocrisy. It is a misrepresentation of God's righteousness.

We should observe here that Jesus' anger is a righteous anger because he was grieved with their hardness of heart. It does not say that He was frustrated with their hardness of heart. It says that He was grieved by it. We, as people who are sinning, often exhibit this sinful anger toward people around us because we are frustrated with them. They will not do what we want them to do in relation to what is important to us and so because we cannot get them to change, we become angry with them. This is not what happened here with Jesus, and we need to learn from it. When someone is doing something wrong, when they are reacting wrongly, when they are deliberately unwilling to show love and compassion to someone in need; is it something that grieves us first, before we ever show them a righteous anger? A righteous anger feels first, grief that the appropriate and righteous response has been ignored or rejected. It thinks of what could have

been, and what should have been. It thinks about the rejection of God's way of love, and the dishonor to God and to the man himself that is the consequence of that rejection. There could have been and there should have been mercy and love that could have been shown and it was not. I like what Alexander Maclaren says on this. "And what was hardening their hearts?" "It was He." "Why were their hearts being hardened? Because they were looking at Him, His graciousness, His goodness, and His power, and were steeling themselves against Him, opposing to His grace and tenderness their own obstinate determination." "Some little gleams of light were coming in at their windows, and they clapped the shutters up." "Some tones of His voice were coming into their ears, and they stuffed their fingers into them." "They half felt that if they let themselves be influenced by Him it was all over, and so they set their teeth and steadied themselves in their antagonism to Him." "This brings grief to the heart of God and Christ." "It brings sadness that the heart of man is so hard, that it has willfully become that unfeeling." So says Maclaren and he has said it well.

But then this grief does lead to a righteous self-controlled anger which emanated from the brow and the eyes of our Blessed Lord. And we need to understand that the Lord will prevail in His anger here. He will prevail even as the Son of Man, who has taken His stand to suffer for it. He will do the right no matter what any man thinks! "Stretch out your hand!", He says to the man with the withered hand. What a courageous Lord we have. His is the courage of righteousness. What gave Him this courage? It was the power of these two things coupled together; His being grieved at the hardness of these men's hearts, and the great love and compassion that He had for this man. It was these two things that gave our Lord Jesus the courage to oppose all the Pharisees in that room that day. This is true moral courage. It takes its stand for the right, but it does it, not filled with malice toward the opposition, but with pity and grief. In His anger, the Lord Jesus confronted these Pharisees with what He saw in them, the hardening of their hearts, and He was grieved by it. But it did not stop Him from deliberately doing what He knew they thought was wrong. Someone was right here, and someone was wrong. There were consequences to Himself that Jesus knew would come because He deliberately took His stand against their lack of love and mercy. Verse 6 says that after He went ahead and healed the man, "Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him." Their courage was to be bold to plot secretly against Him to take His life. This is not true courage; it is cowardice. True courage will openly take its stand for good even when men will plot and scheme to take our lives.

It is this kind of courage we must pray for; it is this kind of courage that we must learn if we would have the ministry here in this church be more effective. We must learn that it is right to exhibit righteous indignation over the lack of compassion that we see in other men around us. It is a positive evil to be unfeeling and to lack compassion in regard to the helpless and the needy. It is a positive evil not to do good on the Sabbath day. But our response to that evil is very crucial to

the forward progress of the gospel. Our indignation is motivated by grief and our anger is the basis of our continuing to do good. It confronts the wrong by overcoming evil with good. Our response to religious formalists is not to spend our time arguing with them. It is to continue our ministry in spite of them. It is to continue to show love and mercy to those who are needy and who are looking to be helped both spiritually and physically by the grace of Christ. We show them that love and compassion right in the face of the silent disapproval of those who think that we are not doing right. We do this, not to be defiant to true authority, but rather to give to them and to all men the decided demonstration of the power of Christ to save and to heal. "Stretch out your hand." Command, with the command of love and compassion, that the person whose hand is withered, stretch out his hand; present the withered member to Jesus, and it shall be healed. A person cannot do many things without the full use of his hand. A person's life can be tragically impaired without the use of it. Jesus knew that He could heal the man. He went ahead and did it. Similarly, when you and I see people who need the gospel, whose souls need to be saved, people whose life and strength has withered for whatever reason, whether sinful or accidental, or because of age and use; it does not matter. Give them the gospel command. "Stretch out your hand". Tell them to receive what Jesus is willing to give to them, no matter what any man says to the contrary. Jesus is willing to give to them today, right now, on this Sabbath day, the ultimate healing; the healing of the soul's withered hand, so that it is able to serve God. Jesus not only healed this man's withered hand; but He freed him from Pharisaical bondage. He can do the same for anyone here this morning as well. Jesus can free you from the fear of the religious Pharisee's disapproval. Jesus can and does give the same moral courage, the righteous anger motivated by grief, the same love to see God honored by doing good to the souls and bodies of men. Let us each pray that we would become more like Jesus in the ministry that He has given us to do.