



Jesus entered the synagogue. There was a man there who had a withered hand. They watched him closely to see if he would cure him on the sabbath so that they might accuse him. He said to the man with the withered hand, "Come up here before us." Then he said to them, "Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath rather than to do evil, to save life rather than to destroy it?" But they remained silent. Looking around at them with anger and grieved at their hardness of heart, he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately took counsel with the Herodians against him to put him to death.

**Introductory Prayer:** Lord, I believe in you. Thank you for the gift of faith, more precious than life itself. I hope in you. May the dark waters of doubt never break through my dike of hope. I love you. I want to let you purify me, so that my love for you may be more ardent and more courageous.

**Petition:** Lord, help me to bear witness to you even in adverse circumstances.

**1. "They Watched Him Closely":** At the beginning of his public ministry, Christ already incurs the bitter opposition of the Pharisees. Having reduced them to silence in a wheat field, Christ bravely enters the synagogue to confront them once again. There the Pharisees are in the first places of honor, and they watch his every move, hoping he will cure against the laws of the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. The Pharisees were right about one thing. They did well to observe Christ closely. If only they had done so with the right spirit: to learn from him and to glorify God for the wonders he did through him. How closely do we watch Christ in our own lives? How readily do we perceive his actions through the circumstances of the day? How often do we glorify God for the great things Christ does and longs to do in us?

**2. To Do Good or Evil?** Christ obliges the Pharisees. With fearless courage he calls the man with the withered hand forward, so that no one can mistake what he is about to do. Then he puts his antagonists in a dilemma with two clear questions. First: “Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath rather than to do evil?” “They are bound to admit that it is lawful to do good; and it is a good thing he proposed to do. They are bound to deny that it is lawful to do evil; and, yet, surely it is an evil thing to leave a man in wretchedness when it is possible to help him.” (William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, pp. 68-69) Then Christ asks the second question: “Is it lawful to save life rather than to destroy it?” “Here he is driving the thing home. He is taking steps to save this wretched man’s life; they are thinking out methods of killing Christ. On any reckoning it is surely a better thing to be thinking about helping a man than it is to be thinking of killing a man. No wonder they had nothing to say!” (Ibid.)

**3. Angered by Their Hardness of Heart:** Seldom does the Gospel show Christ angry. Here his anger is provoked by the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and their hardness of heart. They close themselves off from his message of salvation. What happens when someone definitively closes his heart to Christ? The Pharisees, the defenders of the law and Jewish customs, were bitter enemies of the Herodians, who collaborated with King Herod and the Romans. Yet this Gospel relates the chilling fact that these two joined forces to plot to kill Jesus. They are united not by the intrinsic force of goodness, but by the malignant power of evil. Do I at times make small concessions to hypocrisy, envy or even hatred? These could slowly harden my heart toward Christ. Am I willing to be courageous like Christ and endure even bitter opposition for the sake of the Gospel?

**Conversation with Christ:** Thank you, Lord, for your goodness and courage. How small I feel when I compare myself with you in the Gospel. What an infinite distance separates us! Thank you for calling me — with all of my weakness, sins, and limitations — to be your apostle. Help me never to surrender to evil in my heart, but to grow in goodness of heart in order to be more like you.

**Resolution:** I will do a good deed for someone today, even if it is difficult, in order to bear witness to Christ.