

CHAPTER 3

In this chapter, we have,

- I.** Christ's healing a man that had a withered hand, on the sabbath day, and the combination of his enemies against him for it (v. 1-6).
- II.** The universal resort of people to him from all parts, to be healed, and the relief they all found with him (v. 7-12).
- III.** His ordaining his twelve apostles to be attendants on him, and the preachers of his gospel (v. 13-21).
- IV.** His answer to the blasphemous cavils of the scribes, who imputed his power to cast out devils to a confederacy with the prince of the devils (v. 22-30).
- V.** His owning his disciples for his nearest and dearest relations (v. 31-35).

◀☞ MARK 3:1-12

THE WITHERED HAND RESTORED

Here, as before, we have our Lord Jesus busy at work *in the synagogue* first, and then by *the sea side*; to teach us that his presence should not be confined either to the one or to the other, but, wherever any are gathered together in his name, whether *in the synagogue* or any where else, there is he in the midst of them. *In every place where he records his name*, he will meet his people, and *bless them*; it is his will that men *pray every where*. Now here we have some account of what he did.

I. When he *entered again into the synagogue*, he improved the opportunity he had there, of doing good, and having, no doubt, preached a sermon there, he wrought a miracle for the confirmation of it, or at least for the confirmation of this truth — that *it is lawful to do good on the sabbath day*. We had the narrative, ◀☞ Matthew 12:9.

1. The patient's case was piteous; he had a *withered hand*, by which he was disabled to work for his living; and those that are so, are the most proper objects of charity; let those be helped that cannot help themselves.

2. The spectators were very unkind, both to the patient and to the Physician; instead of interceding for a poor neighbour, they did what they could to hinder his cure: for they intimated that if Christ cured him now on the sabbath day, they would accuse him as a *Sabbath breaker*. It had been very unreasonable, if they should have opposed a physician or surgeon in helping any poor body in misery, by ordinary methods; but much more absurd was it to oppose him that cured without any labour, but by a word's speaking.

3. Christ dealt very fairly with the spectators, and dealt with them *first*, if possible to *prevent* the offence.

(1.) He laboured to convince their judgment. He bade the man *stand forth* (v. 3), that by the sight of him they might be moved with compassion toward him, and might not, for shame, account his cure a crime. And then he appeals to their own consciences; though the thing *speaks itself*, yet *he* is pleased to *speak* it; “*Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, as I design to do, or to do evil, as you design to do? Whether is better, to save life or to kill?*” What fairer question could be put? And yet, because they saw it would turn against them, *they held their peace*. Note, Those are obstinate indeed in their infidelity, who, when they can say nothing *against* a truth, will say nothing *to it*; and, when they cannot *resist*, yet will not *yield*.

(2.) When they rebelled against the light, he *lamented their stubbornness* (v. 5); *He looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts*. The *sin* he had an eye to, was, the *hardness of their hearts*, their insensibleness of the evidence of his miracles, and their inflexible resolution to persist in unbelief. We hear what is said amiss, and see what is done amiss; but Christ looks at the *root of bitterness* in the heart, the blindness and hardness of *that*. Observe,

[1.] How he was *provoked* by the sin; he looked *round upon them*; for they were so many, and had so placed themselves, that they surrounded him: and he looked *with anger*; his anger, it is probable, appeared in his countenance; his anger was, like God's, without the least *perturbation* to himself, but not without great *provocation* from us. Note, The sin of

sinner is very displeasing to Jesus Christ; and the way to be angry, and not to sin, is to be angry, as Christ was, at nothing but sin. Let hard-hearted sinners tremble to think of the anger with which he will *look round* upon them shortly, when the *great day of his wrath comes*.

[2.] How he *pitied* the sinners; he was *grieved for the hardness of their hearts*; as God was grieved forty years for the hardness of the hearts of their fathers in the wilderness. Note, It is a great grief to our Lord Jesus, to see sinners bent upon their own ruin, and obstinately set against the methods of their conviction and recovery, for he would not that any should perish. This is a good reason why the hardness of our own hearts and of the hearts of others, should be a grief to us.

4. Christ dealt very kindly with the patient; he bade him *stretch forth his hand*, and it was immediately *restored*. Now,

(1.) Christ has hereby taught us to go on with resolution in the way of our duty, how violent soever the opposition is, that we meet with in it. We must deny ourselves sometimes in our ease, pleasure, and convenience, rather than give offence even to those who causelessly take it; but we must not deny ourselves the satisfaction of serving God, and doing good, though offence may unjustly be taken at it. None could be more tender of giving offence than Christ; yet, rather than send this poor man away uncured, he would venture offending all the scribes and Pharisees that compassed him about.

(2.) He hath hereby given us a *specimen* of the cures wrought by his grace upon *poor souls*; our hands are spiritually *withered*, the powers of our souls weakened by sin, and disabled for that which is good. The great healing day is the *sabbath*, and the healing place the *synagogue*; the healing power is that of Christ. The gospel command is like this recorded here; and the command is rational and just; though our hands are withered, and we cannot of ourselves *stretch them forth*, we must attempt it, must, as well as we can, *lift them up* to God in prayer, *lay hold* on Christ and eternal life, and employ them in good works; and if we do our endeavour, power goes along with the word of Christ, he effects the cure. Though our hands be *withered*, yet, if we will not offer to *stretch them out*, it is our own fault that we are not healed; but if we do, and are healed, Christ and his power and grace must have all the glory.

5. The enemies of Christ dealt very barbarously with him. Such a work of *mercy* should have engaged their love *to him*, and such a work of *wonder* their faith *in him*. But, instead of that, the Pharisees, who pretended to be oracles in the church, and the Herodians, who pretended to be the supporters of the state, though of opposite interests one to another, *took counsel together against him, how they might destroy him*. Note, They that suffer for doing good, do but suffer as their Master did.

II. When he withdrew *to the sea*, he did good there. While his enemies sought to *destroy him*, he quitted the place; to teach us in troublous times to shift for our own safety; but see here,

1. How he was followed into his retirement. When some had such an enmity to him, that they drove him out of their country, others had such a value for him, that they followed him wherever he went; and the enmity of their leaders to Christ did not cool their respect to him. *Great multitudes* followed him from all parts of the nation; as far north, as *from Galilee*; as far south, as from Judea and Jerusalem; nay, and from Idumea; as far east, as from beyond Jordan; and west, as from about Tyre and Sidon, v. 7, 8. Observe,

(1.) What induced them to follow him; it was the report they heard of the *great things he did* for all that applied themselves to him; some wished *to see* one that had done such *great things*, and others hoped he would do great things *for them*. Note, The consideration of the *great things* Christ has done, should engage us to *come to him*.

(2.) What they followed him for (v. 10); They *pressed upon him, to touch him, as many as had plagues*. Diseases are here called *plagues, mastigas* — *corrections, chastisements*; so they are designed to be, to make us *smart* for our sins, that thereby we may be made *sorry* for them, and may be warned not to return to them. Those that were under these *scourgings* came to Jesus; this is the errand on which sickness is sent, to quicken us to enquire after Christ, and apply ourselves to him as our Physician. They *pressed upon him*, each striving which should get *nearest to him*, and which should be *first served*. They *fell down before him* (so Dr. Hammond), as petitioners for his favour; they desired leave but to *touch him*, having faith to be healed, not only by *his touching them*, but by *their touching him*; which no doubt they had many instances of.

(3.) What provision he made to be ready to attend them (v. 9); He *spoke to his disciples*, who were fishermen, and had fisher-boats at command, that a *small ship should constantly wait on him*, to carry him from place to place on the same coast; that, when he had despatched the necessary business he had to do in one place, he might easily remove to another, where his presence was requisite, without pressing through the crowds of people that followed him for curiosity. Wise men, as much as they can, decline a crowd.

2. What abundance of good he did in his retirement. He did not withdraw to be idle, nor did he send back those who rudely crowded after him when he withdrew, but took it kindly, and gave them what they came for; for he never said to any that sought him diligently, *Seek ye me in vain*.

(1.) Diseases were effectually cured; He *healed many*; divers sorts of patients, ill of divers sorts of diseases; though numerous, though various, he *healed them*.

(2.) *Devils* were effectually *conquered*; those whom unclean spirits had got possession of, *when they saw him*, trembled at his presence, and they also *fell down before him*, not to supplicate his favour, but to deprecate his wrath, and by their own terrors were compelled to own that *he was the Son of God*, v. 1. It is sad that this great truth should be denied by any of the children of men, who may have the benefit of it, when a confession of it has so often been extorted from devils, who are excluded from having benefit by it.

(3.) Christ sought not applause to himself in doing those great things, for *he strictly charged* those for whom he did them, *that they should not make him known* (v. 12); that they should not be *industrious* to spread the notice of his cures, as it were by advertisements in the newspapers, but let them leave *his own works to praise him*, and let the report of them *diffuse itself*, and make its own way. Let not those that are cured, be forward to divulge it, lest it should feed their pride who are so *highly favoured*; but let the *standers-by* carry away the intelligence of it. When we do that which is *praiseworthy*, and yet covet not to be *praised of men* for it, then *the same mind is in us*, which was *in Christ Jesus*.

MARK 3:13-21

THE CALLING OF THE APOSTLES

In these verses, we have,

I. The choice Christ made of the *twelve apostles* to be his constant followers and attendants, and to be sent abroad as there was occasion, to preach the gospel. Observe,

1. The introduction to this *call* or *promotion* of disciples; He *goes up into a mountain*, and his errand thither was *to pray*. Ministers must be set apart with solemn prayer for the pouring out of the Spirit upon them; though Christ had authority to confer the gifts of the Holy Ghost, yet, to set us an example, he prayed for them.

2. The rule he went by in his choice, and that was his own good pleasure; *He called unto him whom he would*. Not such as we should have thought *fittest to be called, looking upon the countenance, and the height of the stature*; but such as he *thought fit* to call, and determined to *make fit* for the service to which he called them: *even so, blessed Jesus, because it seemed good in thine eyes*. Christ calls *whom he will*; for he is a free Agent, and his grace is his own.

3. The efficacy of the call; He *called them* to separate themselves from the crowd, and stand by him, and they *came unto him*. Christ calls those who were *given him* (⁴¹⁶John 17:6); and *all that the Father gave him, shall come to him*, ⁴¹⁶John 6:37. Those whom it was his *will* to call, he made *willing to come*; *his people shall be willing in the day of his power*. Perhaps they came to him readily enough, because they were in expectation of *reigning with him* in temporal pomp and power; but when afterward they were *undeceived* in that matter, yet they had such a prospect given them of better things, that they would not say they were *deceived* in their Master, nor repented their leaving all to be with him.

4. The end and intention of this call; He *ordained them* (probably by the imposition of hands, which was a ceremony used among the Jews), *that they should be with him* constantly, to be witnesses of *his doctrine, manner of life, and patience*, that they might *fully know it*, and be able to give an account of it; and especially that they might attest the truth of his

miracles; they must be *with him* to receive instructions *from him*, that they might be qualified to give instructions *to others*. It would *require time* to fit them for that which he designed them for; for they must be *sent forth to preach*; not to preach till they were *sent*, and not to be *sent* till by a long and intimate acquaintance with Christ they were fitted. Note, Christ's ministers must be much *with him*.

5. The power he gave them to work miracles; and hereby he put a very great honour upon them, beyond that of the great men of the earth. He ordained them to *heal sicknesses and to cast out devils*. This showed that the power which Christ had to work these miracles was an *original* power; that he had it not *as a Servant*, but *as a Son in his own house*, in that he could confer it upon others, and invest them with it: they have a rule in the law, *Deputatus non potest deputare* — *He that is only deputed himself, cannot depute another*; but our Lord Jesus had *life in himself*, and the Spirit without measure; for he could give this power even to the *weak and foolish things* of the world.

6. Their number and names; He *ordained twelve*, according to the number of the twelve tribes of Israel. They are here named not just in the same order as they were in Matthew, nor by couples, as they were there; but as there, so here, Peter is put first and Judas last. Here Matthew is put before Thomas, probably being called in that order; but in that catalogue which Matthew himself drew up, he puts himself after Thomas; so far was he from insisting upon the precedency of his consecration. But that which Mark only takes notice of in this list of the apostles, is, that Christ called James and John *Boanerges*, which is, *The sons of thunder*; perhaps they were remarkable for a loud commanding voice, they were thundering preachers; or, rather, it denotes the zeal and fervency of their spirits, which would make them active for God above their brethren. These two (saith Dr. Hammond) were to be special eminent ministers of the gospel, which is called *a voice shaking the earth*, ⁸²⁶ Hebrews 12:26. Yet John, one of those *sons of thunder*, was full of love and tenderness, as appears by his epistles, and was the beloved disciple.

7. Their retirement with their Master, and close adherence to him; *They went into a house*. Now that this jury was impanelled, they *stood together, to hearken to their evidence*. They went together into the house, to settle the orders of their infant college; and now, it is likely, the bag was given to Judas, which pleased him, and made him easy.

II. The continual crowds that attended Christ's motions (v. 20); The *multitude cometh together again*, unsent for, and unseasonably pressing upon him, some with one errand and some with another; so that he and his disciples could not get time *so much as to eat bread*, much less for a set and full meal. Yet he did not shut his doors against the petitioners, but bade them welcome, and gave to each of them *an answer of peace*. Note, They whose hearts are enlarged in the work of God, can easily bear with great inconveniences to themselves, in the prosecution of it, and will rather lose a meal's meat at any time than slip an opportunity of doing good. It is happy when zealous *hearers* and zealous *preachers* thus *meet*, and encourage one another. Now the *kingdom of God was preached*, and men pressed into it, ^{<DIG>}Luke 16:16. This was a gale of opportunity worth improving; and the disciples might well afford to adjourn their meals, to lay hold on it. It is good striking while the iron is hot.

III. The care of his relations concerning him (v. 21); *When his friends* in Capernaum heard how he was followed, and what pains he took, they *went out, to lay hold on him*, and fetch him home, for they said, *He is beside himself*.

1. Some understand it of an absurd preposterous care, which had more in it of reproach to him than of respect; and so we must take it as we read it, *He is beside himself*; either they suspected it themselves, or it was suggested to them, and they gave credit to the suggestion, that he was *gone distracted*, and therefore his friends ought to bind him, and put him in a dark room, to bring him to his right mind again. His kindred, many of them, had mean thoughts of him (^{<DIG>}John 7:5), and were willing to hearken to this ill construction which some put upon his great zeal, and to conclude him crazed in his intellects, and under that pretence to take him off from his work. The prophets were called *mad fellows*, ^{<DIG>}2 Kings 9:11.

2. Others understand it of a *well-meaning* care; and then they read *exeste* — “*He fainteth*, he has no time to *eat bread*, and therefore his strength will fail him; he will be stifled with the crowd of people, and will have his spirits quite exhausted with constant speaking, and the virtue that *goes out of him* in his miracles; and therefore let us use a friendly violence with him, and get him a little *breathing-time*.” In his preaching-work, as well as his suffering-work, he was attacked with, *Master, spare thyself*. Note, They who go on with vigour and zeal in the work of God, must expect to meet with hindrances, both from the groundless disaffection of their

enemies, and the mistaken affections of their friends, and they have need to stand upon their guard against both.

MARK 3:22-30

THE BLASPHEMY OF THE SCRIBES

I. Here is, The impudent impious brand which the scribes fastened upon Christ's casting out devils, that they might evade and invalidate the conviction of it, and have a poor excuse for not yielding to it. These *scribes came down from Jerusalem*, v. 22. It should seem they came this long journey on purpose to hinder the progress of the doctrine of Christ; such pains did they take to do mischief; and, coming from Jerusalem, where were the most polite and learned scribes, and where they had opportunity of *consulting together against the Lord and his Anointed*, they were in the greater capacity to do mischief; the reputation of scribes from Jerusalem would have an influence not only upon the *country people*, but upon the *country scribes*; they had never thought of this base suggestion concerning Christ's miracles till the *scribes from Jerusalem* put it into their heads. They could not deny but that he cast out devils, which plainly bespoke him sent of God; but they insinuated that *he had Beelzebub* on his side, was in league with him, and by *the prince of the devils cast out devils*. There is a trick in the case; Satan is not *cast out*, he only *goes out* by consent. There was nothing in the manner of Christ's *casting out devils*, that gave any cause to suspect this; he did it *as one having authority*; but so they will have it, who resolve not to believe him.

II. The rational answer which Christ gave to this objection, demonstrating the absurdity of it.

1. Satan is so *subtle*, that he will never voluntarily quit his possession; *If Satan cast out Satan, his kingdom is divided against itself*, and it *cannot stand*, v. 23-26. He *called them to him*, as one desirous they should be convinced; he treated them with all the freedom, friendliness, and familiarity that could be; he vouchsafed to reason the case with them, *that every mouth may be stopped*. It was plain that the doctrine of Christ *made war* upon the devil's kingdom, and had a direct tendency to break his power, and crush his interest in the souls of men; and it was as plain that

the casting of him out of the bodies of people confirmed that doctrine, and gave it the setting on; and therefore it cannot be imagined that he should come into such a design; every one knows that Satan is no *fool*, nor will act so directly against his own interest.

2. Christ is so *wise*, that, being engaged in war with him, he will attack his forces wherever he meets them, whether in the bodies or souls of people, v. 27. It is plain, Christ's design is to *enter into the strong man's house*, to take possession of the interest he has in the world, and to *spoil his goods*, and convert them to his own service; and therefore it is natural to suppose that he will thus *bind the strong man*, will forbid him to *speak* when he would, and to *stay* where he would, and thus show that he has gained a victory over him.

III. The awful warning Christ gave them to take heed how they spoke such dangerous words as these; however they might make light of them, as only conjectures, and the language of *free-thinking*, if they persisted in it, it would be of fatal consequence to them; it would be found a sin against the last remedy, and consequently *unpardonable*; for what could be imagined possible to bring *them* to repentance for their sin in blaspheming Christ, who would set aside such a *strong* conviction with such a *weak* evasion? It is true, the gospel *promiseth*, because Christ hath *purchased*, forgiveness for the greatest sins and sinners, v. 28. Many of those who reviled Christ on the cross (which was a *blaspheming of the Son of man*, aggravated to the highest degree), found mercy, and Christ himself prayed, *Father, forgive them*; but this was *blaspheming the Holy Ghost*, for it was by the Holy Spirit that he *cast out* devils, and they said, It was *by the unclean spirit*, v. 30. By this method they would outface the conviction of all the gifts of the Holy Ghost after Christ's ascension, and defeat them all, after which there remained no more proof, and therefore they should *never have forgiveness*, but were *liable to eternal damnation*. They were in imminent danger of that everlasting punishment, from which there was *no redemption*, and in which there was *no intermission*, no *remission*.

◀ MARK 3:31-35

THE FAMILY OF CHRIST

Here is,

1. The *disrespect* which Christ's *kindred, according to the flesh*, showed to him, when he was preaching (and they knew very well that he was then in his element); they not only *stood without*, having no desire to come in, and hear him, but they sent in a message to *call him out to them* (v. 31. 32), as if he must leave his work, to hearken to their *impertinences*; it is probable that they had *no business with him*, only sent for him on purpose to oblige him to *break off*, lest he should *kill himself*. He knew how far his strength would go, and preferred the salvation of souls before his own life, and soon after made it to appear with a witness; it was therefore an *idle thing* for them, under pretence of his sparing himself, to interrupt him; and it was worse, if really they had business with him, when they knew he preferred his business, as a Saviour, so much before any other business.

2. The *respect* which Christ showed to his spiritual kindred upon this occasion. Now, as at other times, he put a *comparative neglect* upon his mother, which seemed purposely designed to obviate the prevent the extravagant respect which men in aftertimes would be apt to pay her. *Our* respect ought to be guided and governed by Christ's; now the virgin Mary, or Christ's mother, is not equalled with, but postponed to, ordinary believers, on whom Christ here puts a *superlative* honour. He looked upon those that *at about* him, and pronounced those of them that not only heard, but did, the will of God, to be to him as *his brother, and sister, and mother*; as much esteemed, loved, and cared for, as his nearest relations, v. 33-35. This is a good reason why we should *honour those that fear the Lord*, and choose them for our people; why we should be not hearers of the word only, but doers of the work, that we may share with the saints in this honour, Surely it is good to be akin to those who are thus nearly allied to Christ, and to have fellowship with those that have fellowship with Christ; and woe to those that hate and persecute Christ's kindred, that are *his bone and his flesh, every one resembling the children of a king* (see ~~1088~~ Judges 8:18, 19); for he will with jealousy plead their cause, and avenge their blood.