

**12** Mark 3:1-6 Jesus Heals on the Sabbath

**Discussion:** Billy Graham once asked the question “if you were accused of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?” What are your thoughts?

Mark 3	Matthew 12	Luke 6
<b>1</b> Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shrivelled hand was there. <b>2</b> Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath.	<b>9</b> Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, <b>10</b> and a man with a shrivelled hand was there. Looking for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, they asked him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”	<b>6</b> On another Sabbath he went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shrivelled. <b>7</b> The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath.
<b>3</b> Jesus said to the man with the shrivelled hand, “Stand up in front of everyone.”		<b>8</b> But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to the man with the shrivelled hand, “Get up and stand in front of everyone.” So he got up and stood there.
<b>4</b> Then Jesus asked them, “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they remained silent.	<b>11</b> He said to them, “If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? <b>12</b> How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”	<b>9</b> Then Jesus said to them, “I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?”
<b>5</b> He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man,	<b>13</b> Then he said to the man,	<b>10</b> He looked around at them all, and then said to the man,
“Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.	“Stretch out your hand.” So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other.	“Stretch out your hand.” He did so, and his hand was completely restored.
<b>6</b> Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.	<b>14</b> But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.	<b>11</b> But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.

### Comparison

- Mark and Luke suggest this is another Sabbath occasion at a later date.
- All Synoptics have Jesus' detractors looking for a reason to accuse him, specifically whether he would perform a healing on a Sabbath. Mark and Luke focus on the *action* of healing while Matthew focusses on the *legality* of doing so.
- Mark and Luke have Jesus beckoning the man to stand up in front of the crowd.
- In Mark and Luke, Jesus now asks about the legality of doing good versus evil on the Sabbath, and of saving a life or killing, while Matthew presents those watching with a straightforward moral choice.
- Mark once again emphasizes the emotions felt by Jesus, this time of righteous anger. He is indignant at their stubborn hearts.
- All report that Jesus simply instructed the man to stand, and then stretch out his hand. There was no activity by Jesus, no touch, simply spoken words.
- In all accounts we see the Pharisees are against Jesus, but Mark adds the Herodians, while Luke adds the scribes, with Mark and Matthew stating that they wish to kill him.

### Context

- This is the fifth and final controversy in this section of Mark's Gospel, where an event has been followed by a pronouncement by Jesus.<sup>1</sup>
- The Greek term translated as *withered* is similar to a "plant desiccated by drought", and therefore probably paralysed.<sup>2</sup> The verb used also implies a prolonged problem, possibly since birth.<sup>3</sup>
- This is likely to be the same synagogue in Capernaum at a later date.<sup>4</sup>
- The word *Sabbath* is actually plural, suggesting that they have been watching Jesus for a while on a number of occasions.
- By turning up in person, the religious authorities are taking greater interest in potential violations of the Law by Jesus, especially following his previous pronouncement that he has authority over the Sabbath.<sup>5</sup> The atmosphere is already charged, and this is a hostile search for further evidence of Jesus' unorthodox stance on the Sabbath.<sup>6</sup> The Law demanded that Sabbath violators were to be killed (Ex. 31:14-17, Num. 15:32-36).

- The debate is whether *healing* can be considered as falling within the forbidden sabbath activity of *work*. The Law stated that the most a physician was permitted to do on the sabbath was to drop medicine into the mouth of a sick person, and only then if their life was in danger and they would not survive until the following day once Sabbath Laws no longer applied. Clearly, a withered hand was no threat to life.<sup>7</sup> In that case, the religious leaders considered that such activity must be delayed until the Sabbath had ended.<sup>8</sup>
- Jesus carries out no physical action, such as touch, but only speaks to ask the man to stand up, and then hold out his hand, yet they still deemed the healing to be *work*.<sup>9</sup>

### Key Points

- We don't know whether the man with the withered hand had arrived hoping to receive healing, or was instead horrified to find himself singled out, that his disability was being made so public, given the associated stigma.<sup>10</sup> However, Jesus intentionally places him at the centre of attention, to heighten the controversy and make his point.<sup>11</sup>
- In previous sessions, we noted how the Pharisees and scribes would frame their argument in the form of a legal *halakah*; now Jesus does the same back to them, and in Mark, we see that they had no answer (or perhaps simply refused to debate him).<sup>12</sup>
- "Which is lawful on the Sabbath," asks Jesus, "to do good, or to do evil?" To heal the man would permit him to go back into the Temple; it would be a restoration that enabled him to fully re-enter society. Indeed, whenever there is a need, doing *nothing* would be wrong, even unjust. Doing good cannot violate Sabbath Law.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps it is not technically "lawful" to heal on the Sabbath, but it is certainly right!<sup>14</sup>
- In Matthew 12:11, Jesus suggests that the religious leaders would themselves break Sabbath Law to assist one of their animals. So why not a human?
- Jesus is "very grieved" at their attitude.<sup>15</sup> Religion for the Pharisees is no longer about meeting needs, and of justice and mercy, but has become about fulfilling legal requirements and an excessive emphasis on matters of personal purity.<sup>16</sup> The word Jesus uses is similar to calcification when a bone sets after a break; it doesn't function as well anymore, but it has set even harder. We might use the term *boneheaded* today. Jesus is not rejecting Sabbath Law; he has simply brushed aside the whole complex issue of Sabbath prohibitions, making discussion unnecessary.<sup>17</sup>

## Bible Study of Mark's Gospel

- The irony is that while the religious authorities would deny Jesus the right to do good on the Sabbath, they conspire to do evil.<sup>18</sup> The choice to “do good or do evil” is followed by the more extreme “to save life or kill”. The word translated as *kill* also means destroy.<sup>19</sup> The Pharisees (religious) and the Herodians (political) have set their minds to kill Jesus, joining together in a common cause to plot against him. He is to be opposed and, when the time is right, silenced. We recall the earlier words of Jesus predicting this violent “removal of the bridegroom” (Mark 2:20).<sup>20</sup>
- They have forgotten that God made the Sabbath for the benefit of mankind.<sup>21</sup>

### Summary of the Exousia and the Question it Raises

This first section of Mark has focused upon the Divine Authority given to Jesus. While Mark reveals to his readers the true identity of Jesus, those who encountered Jesus at the time, who heard him speak or were healed by him, were each left to ponder this for themselves. *Who is this man?* In silencing the demons, his identity would not be revealed to the people through that route. Jesus also condemns the religious leaders who, rather than leading the people towards God in grace and mercy, burden them with strict obedience to the Law.

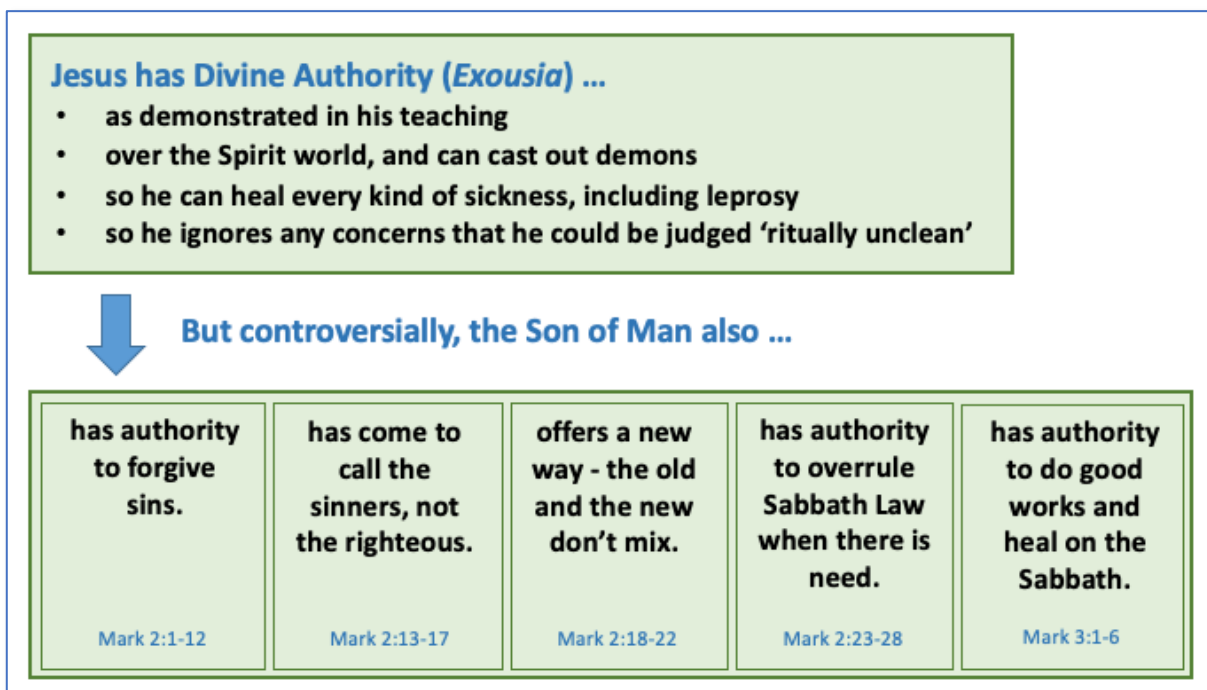


Figure 10: The Divine Authority (Exousia) of Jesus

**Discussion:** Can you think of any moral dilemmas where a difficult choice needs to be made? Do you have any examples related to your journey of faith?