

# Episodes in Life of T/lord 08 Healing on the Sabbath

by Robert Constable

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*The sermon explores Jesus' healing on the Sabbath as a profound lesson on faith, commitment, and the true purpose of the Sabbath.*

**Duration:** 35:25

**Scripture:** Isaiah 1:1, Isaiah 28:10, Isaiah 58:3-4, Mark 3:1-6

**Topics:** "Sabbath"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher uses an illustration involving a man with a withered hand to emphasize the importance of true commitment to Christ. He highlights the tendency of people to go through religious rituals without genuine heart change. The preacher references Isaiah's teaching of line upon line and precept upon precept to emphasize the need for repetition and reinforcement of spiritual truths. He also shares a story about a farmer and a salesman to illustrate how fear of recognized inability can hinder total commitment to Christ. The sermon ultimately encourages listeners to focus on serving others and breaking free from oppressive burdens as a true expression of their faith.

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## Transcript

This is rather a new approach this morning. Mr. Henderson said so that Mr. Constable can have more time. I don't quite know how to react to this.

Usually it's the other way around. One day in a conference, somebody said to me, looks like we're getting through with the preliminaries rather early. And I said to him, oh, give me more time.

And I told my wife about this later. And she said, I hope you know that's not funny. So I'll try not to take advantage of Mr. Anderson's kindness this morning.

I was around in the bookstore this morning, and naturally my eye fell on this book, The Way to God. And you say, why did it naturally fall on that book? Well, this book is one of the most remarkable books that ever was published for this reason, that it was one of the first books that D.L. Moody put together. And it has been published in over a million copies.

And there is no book that we know of that has been more effectual in leading men and women to Christ than this book, The Way to God. It has been distributed all over the world in many, many, many

languages. And it is just a tremendous book to put into the hands of the unsaved.

Simple couldn't be simpler. Clear, just the right kind of thing. And it answers the question people have, how do you get to God? This is one of Moody's great works.

When you talk about Moody's great works, you don't talk about something complicated. You talk about something simple, because he was a man of the people. And if you want a good book to give away, to leave wherever you go, this is it.

So I recommend it. When I was a young man and came to work at the Moody Bible Institute, one of the first privileges I had there was to meet Ruth Paxson, a missionary. And she has a very, very large book.

I forget the name of the big volume right now. But this is one-third of that large book. It's called Rivers of Living Water.

And this is real wonderful. I remember as a young man how I benefited from the reading of this book, The Ministry of the Holy Spirit to the People of God, Rivers of Living Water. If you want to read something that makes the ministry of the Holy Spirit simple and clear and makes you rejoice in it, this book will do that.

You know, these little books are great. They're easy to handle. They don't cost much.

You can leave them somewhere when you're finished with them without feeling that you're giving away your whole inheritance, you know. And they're very useful. Paperback books.

Aren't they popular today? My, you go to the stations, you go to the stores, you go to the supermarkets, you go anywhere and there's paperback books. You know who started paperback books? D.L. Moody. The Cole Portage Library, these little books that started out ten cents each, were his answer to getting the gospel out and the teaching of the word out to people inexpensively and for a generation.

The Cole Portage books, as they were called in those days, were just about the only paperbacks you could buy. And then other people caught on. And now, of course, you can find them everywhere.

But oh my, have you ever looked at these bookstands in the stations, in the airports, in these places? But you go in here and you see these shelves of paperback books and you can feed your soul. Do you know what Theodore F. says? He got his whole theological education out of Cole Portage books. And this is possible to do, to get a thoroughgoing theological education, to come to know the Lord out of these paperbacks.

So we recommend them. Turn to Mark 3 this morning for our episode in the life of the Lord Jesus. Mark chapter 3. Every miracle that the Lord Jesus performed was a lesson.

And every miracle that the Lord Jesus performed was a lesson because the life of the Lord Jesus was unified. Now what do I mean by that? I mean everything was tied together properly. There was nothing in his life that was secular.

He didn't divide his life into secular and sacred. We do this pretty largely. We think of the things that have to do with the Lord and the things that have to do with this life.

But he didn't live that way. Now remember, I'm not being critical of us, because we do, because we're not him. He was perfect.

And his life was unified. Everything was spiritual. Everything was secular.

It was tied together. When he said, I am the truth, it was an interesting statement. That wouldn't occur to any of us to make a statement like that.

I am the truth. He did not say, I teach the truth. I hold the truth.

I believe the truth. I declare the truth. Those are the kind of things we might say.

He didn't say that. He said, I am the truth. Because in his life he lived everything he said.

His life was the expression of every word he uttered. And that's why everything he does has a tremendous lesson for us in it. And that's why every miracle that he performs has a lesson for us.

Whether he was teaching, or thinking, or doing something, it was all one. It was tied together. Everything was sacred.

Everything was drawn together. And his dealings on the physical and spiritual level were all spiritual and secular too. That is to say, he dealt with men in the circumstances in which they lived.

But he got to the root of the matter with them. I would like to observe to you that we are often afraid of total committal to Christ because of some recognized inability that we have. We all know that we could do better.

I am reminded of the story of a farmer. And a salesman that had a set of books on farming came to see him. And he talked to him.

He went out to the field, and he talked to him about this set of books he had on farming. And after he'd given the sales talk, and the man had apparently agreed with everything he said, he got out his order book, and he said, Well, now will you sign the order? And the farmer said, No. So the young man gave the sales pitch again.

He got around to asking for the order, and the farmer said, No. But he had agreed with everything. And so this salesman, he was nonplussed with this.

He'd been told in being taught how to sell these books that if he could get people to agree with all the points when they got to signing the order, it would just be automatic. But it didn't seem to be with this man. He said, Why is this? You agree that this is a good set of books.

Oh, it's a fine set of books, yes. You agree that the men who have written in the book know what they're writing about. No question about it.

They're men of reputation. Yes, I certainly do agree with that. You agree that the price for this set of books is fair.

Oh, he said, I have no question. Sure. I'm sure it is fair.

Well, then he said, Why don't you buy the books? Well, he said, I'll tell you, young man, I already know more than I'm living up to as a farmer. I could be a much better farmer without the books than I am now. I don't need the books.

And that's the way it is with us, isn't it? We could be a lot better Christians than we are now, just from what we know already. That's part of our problem. So now let's read about this episode in chapter 3 in Mark, beginning at the first verse.

And Jesus entered again into the synagogue, and there was a man there which had a withered hand, and they watched him, whether he would heal him on the Sabbath day, that they might accuse him. And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth. And he said unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days, or to do evil, to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace.

When he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored whole as the other. And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him.

For Jesus withdrew himself with his disciples to the sea, and a great multitude from Galilee followed him, and from Judea, and from Jerusalem, and from Edomia, and from beyond Jordan. And they about Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, when they had heard what great things he did, came unto him. An interesting episode.

I want us to visit this place today and to get into this synagogue with these people. And remember, we're talking from the position that we could be better Christians if we would. We already know enough to be more like Christ than we are.

How many times we people have said, well, I'd like to be a Christian, but there's this but that comes in the way. Then there are Christians who say, well, I would like to let go. I'd like to be a hundred percent for the Lord, but what's the but? What is it in your life? Why aren't you a better Christian than you are? There's something, isn't there? Something gets in the way all the time of your being a better Christian than you are.

Let's get at that this morning, shall we? Now, notice the setting. What a compliment to the Lord Jesus this story starts out with. There was a man there which had a withered hand, and they watched Jesus, whether he would heal him on the Sabbath day.

This is quite a compliment to the Lord Jesus. You know, people just automatically brought together the idea of Jesus and need. And they knew there was a man in the company that needed special help.

And so they just figured, I'll bet he does something about it. Oh, yeah, but he can't do anything today. It's the Sabbath day.

You watch. That's the way the people talked as they came to the synagogue. And as they saw this man, whom they knew, who had often been there before, and they saw that he was in the company this morning, and they thought, well, this is going to be an interesting meeting this morning.

I wonder if he'll do anything. It was the Sabbath day. You know, they had some sort of weirdo ideas about the Sabbath day.

They had added traditions to what had been given in the law about the Sabbath. You know, I suppose you don't know that people have to do this, the people that talk to you here in the conference. But this morning, I had to read the first 58 chapters of Isaiah to find the verse that I wanted to use at this point.

And so I want to be sure you turn to it this morning. After I looked it up, it took me nearly an hour to find it. Chapter 58 of Isaiah.

I knew that in Isaiah somewhere, it talked about this business of the Sabbath. And my concordance that's in my Bible here, I couldn't find it anywhere. So the only thing to do is start at chapter 1 and go on through the book.

And then I came to it. Verse 3 of chapter 58 in Isaiah says this. Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labors.

Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness. Ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. Now, you know what this means? This means your fast days, your Sabbath days, all you worry about the Sabbath is to start an argument about it.

That's all. And then he goes on in verse 5 to say, Is it such a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? And here he is saying, I think the Sabbath is for, just to go through a ritual, just to go through the motions. You call this a Sabbath? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, that ye may break every yoke.

Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house, when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily. See, what the Lord is saying through Isaiah in this place is, this business of a Sabbath day that is nothing but the performing of a ritual, is not for me. This isn't what I had in mind.

What I had in mind with the Sabbath was that it was going to be a day for the relieving of the oppressed, the breaking of burdens, the helping of one another. That's what the Sabbath is supposed to be. But these Jews had turned the Sabbath into a back-breaking burden for everybody.

It was all tied up with a lot of rules that didn't mean anything. It was ritualism. And the Lord Jesus didn't have any time for this.

He remembered Isaiah and what Isaiah had said, that the Sabbath day was a day for breaking the bands of oppression. So when they said, I wonder if he'll heal on the Sabbath day, they might have no need to heal on the Sabbath day. That's what the Sabbath day was for.

But at least they put together the need and the Lord Jesus, and they paid him a compliment when they did this, even though they were watching to entangle him with the law. Well, it was so then, and it is so now. As we come into the presence of the Lord on the Sabbath day or on any other day, there is a natural bringing together of need and the Savior.

We come into his presence with our need, and we count upon him to meet that need. And he does now as he did then. Because the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Now, this made the Lord Jesus angry. One of the few times we read about his being angry, sometimes I think we get the idea that he was a sort of a milky-toast person, that never got angry at anything, but the

Lord Jesus got very angry at some things. At the hardness of people's hearts, at their wickedness, at their oppressiveness.

He had no time for this kind of thing. And so he was very angry at the people in the synagogue this morning. He asked them a simple question.

Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath day or not? You'd have thought they might have responded, but they didn't say anything. And he got angry because of this. He looked upon them with anger, and then he said to this man, Stand forth.

Now, you are remembering, aren't you? Maybe I'd better remind you that it was just the opposite to what it is here this morning. There was a gathering of the people of God, but the speaker was sitting down, and this congregation was standing up. That's the way they did it in the synagogue in those days, and I don't know why they ever got away from this very good idea.

But anyway, the change came sometime, and I guess we're stuck with it. But in any case, here's a crowd filling the synagogue, and everybody sort of has this man on his mind, and Jesus knows he's there, and so Jesus says to this man, Stand forth. That meant separate yourself from the rest of the crowd.

Come on out here where we can see you. And so the man came out. Let's say that he stood there.

Everybody can see him now, and of course everybody is going like this to the fellow standing next to him and said, See, I told you. He's going to do something. Well, let's wait and see, the other one says.

So the man is standing there. Are you with me there in the synagogue? Now, this man had a withered hand. I don't know what that is exactly.

I know that it is a hand that is devoid of power. It was probably paralyzed. He had a hand he couldn't use.

Now, let's look at this man standing up here in front of the Lord Jesus and in front of the whole crowd. Now, let's listen to what the Lord Jesus says to him. Stretch forth thine hand.

And there's an immediate reaction. People are saying, Well, he can't stretch forth his hand. Why does he embarrass the poor fellow? And it isn't the best thing, you know, to bring somebody out front and center.

And if he's got an affliction like this and then point it out to him and then ask him to do something that obviously he can't do, just embarrass the poor man. What a way to do is this. You can just believe that everybody in that crowd was thinking his own thoughts about this and some were critical because of the way he was embarrassing this man.

And they were saying, He could have done this. He'd have done it a long time ago. Now, that's impossible for him.

This man certainly gets unreasonable sometimes. All this kind of thoughts were going through the minds of the people that were there in the synagogue. Now, put yourself in the man's place.

Just think that you are in the synagogue this morning and you come up and you stand here. Everybody's looking at you and the speaker has made you the focus of the attention of everybody in the place. And you have this affliction, a withered hand.

You can't use it. You never have been able to. And then you hear the man say, Stretch forth thine hand.

How would you react? Well, of course, the first thing that would come flashing into your mind is, I can't stretch forth my hand. But he looked at Jesus and he didn't see any mockery there. He couldn't believe from what he saw of this man and the expression on his face that he was making fun of him.

And yet he said this strange thing. He told him to do something that he couldn't do. And so the man must have thought he must mean something I don't understand.

He said to stretch forth my hand. I can't stretch forth my hand, but I will. And he stretched it forth.

You know, it's very likely that he had lots of doubts in his mind when he stretched forth his hand. But the important thing is he stretched it forth. The moment he said, I will, to the command of the Lord Jesus, he began to find the forces he had lacked pulsating through the nerves that had made no response before.

And he had the strength. As soon as he said, I will, in his heart. That's what it took.

He stretched forth his hand. Now, we made this point before this week in connection with another one of the episodes in The Lord Jesus Life. And I am making it again, and I make no apology for making it again because the Lord Jesus seems to think we need to be told again and again and again and again.

And this is the way that Isaiah taught the people, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little, and then all over again. So I make no apology for making this same point. It may get through if we make it often enough this week.

And that is, that when Jesus begins to touch a man's disability, his method is bringing the man face to face with the one impossible thing in his life. The one impossible thing. This is what Jesus does.

He goes to the heart of the paralysis as it is manifest in the case of the person he's dealing with. And if it is you that he is dealing with, he's going to the heart of the paralysis. He's going to the root of the matter.

I don't know what he's saying to you particularly, but I know that if he's speaking to you this morning, he's bringing you face to face with the one thing that has kept you from being what you think you ought to be for the Lord Jesus. If he's saying anything to you this morning, he's talking to you about the one thing that keeps getting in the way all the time of your being all that you aspire to be. Do you aspire to be something more than you are? Why aren't you? Something keeps getting in the way.

Let's face it. Now, there are people who don't believe in the negative approach. This is the negative approach that the Lord Jesus used.

Now let's use the positive approach, the approach that some people would like to see used. So, the Lord Jesus knows there's a man in the crowd that has a withered hand, and he needs some help. But of course he doesn't want to embarrass the man or call anybody's attention to this, so he says, we have a friend among us here in the congregation that I would like to use for an illustration.

Friend, would you stand forth, please? And he indicates the man, not referring to his hand, of course. You over there, the third one from the end. Would you step out here, please, and come down here and stand here and help me with our little illustration this morning? And the man comes out and he stands down here, and then the man says, let's assume for the sake of the illustration that the withered hand is the man's right hand.

Shall we? And then he said, my dear friend, you have the nicest looking left hand. Now, would you hold your left hand up and let the congregation see your fine left hand. My, what a strong hand that is and how beautifully formed.

What can you do with that fine hand? Oh, he said, it's a pretty good hand. I can squeeze a tennis ball flat thirteen times in a row. Isn't that fine? Now, most of us couldn't squeeze a tennis ball flat more than six or seven times, I'm sure.

But your hand is a fine hand. My, that's a good strong hand. What have you used that hand for lately? And so the man tells himself, where are we getting with all of this? When he gets through all of this, he tells the man to go and take his place in the congregation again.

But what's been accomplished? Now, there's a lot of preaching like that. This is positive preaching. Put the emphasis on the positive.

Talk about the good hand. Well, it doesn't do anybody any good. Who in the congregation could care whether the man had a good left hand or not? They all had good left hands.

The important thing was he had a bad right hand. And Jesus' way of dealing with things is to get at the thing that needs getting at. Let's not be apologetic about this business when people sort of look down their noses at us and say, well, you've got to be positive.

Look, being positive is fine, but the way to be positive is to get at the root of the matter. How would you like to have a doctor come to take a look at you and you had something wrong with your head and so he looked at your knee? Now, this is the way people seem to think is the right way to do. Not Jesus.

He brings it right out into the open. Embarrass you or not. What did it matter whether the man was embarrassed or not just so he was healed? Wasn't that the important thing? Indeed, yes.

Jesus gets at the important things. He doesn't admire the good hand. Now, in salvation, of course, it's the whole man that's involved.

It isn't the hand or a foot or any part of the man. It's the whole man that's involved in salvation. But the thing we're talking about is the one thing in the whole man that keeps getting in the way.

As we said the other day, in the case of the young ruler, the one thing thou lackedst was that he was wrapped up in his possessions. His possessions possess him. Maybe there's one thing lacking in your life, one thing you cannot do.

Do you know what this story says to you? Do it. And you are saying back, but I can't do it. That's what the man said.

But the man carried it further than that. The man did it anyway. Maybe it's some habit, a long entrenched habit that gets in the way.

Maybe it's some notion you've got that needs to be abandoned. Maybe it's some power paralyzed. This story says, let's use it.

You say, well, I don't have that kind of willpower. If you don't have any willpower, exercise your will. The Lord Jesus says, abandon yourself to me by an act of your will.

If your hand is withered, stretch it out. Stretch it out. Now, let's look at the man.

What did he do? He obeyed. He obeyed. He stretched it forth.

Now, how did this happen? First, the man had a conviction that his hand was withered. No question about that. He knew his situation.

And this is the first thing we have to come to if we're going to be helped by the Lord Jesus, is to recognize we have a disability. We'll never be healed until we recognize we need it. He recognized that his hand was withered.

The second thing, the man had a conviction that the Lord Jesus was not there to make fun of him or to mock him. Now, what about you? You think he brought you here just to waste some time this morning, just to listen to his speech, just to spend an hour? Do you think he brought you here for a purpose, to do something for you? Now, the third thing, by his confession of faith, the man attempted the thing that was commanded in obedience to the one who was doing the commanding. And if the Lord is speaking to you this morning, it is the Lord that is speaking.

Don't forget that. It is not I. And in the moment that that man made the confession, by the act of his will, he made contact with all the infinite resources of Christ. These are available to you this morning.

All the infinite resources of the Lord Jesus are available. You should take hold of them. And they came into this man's arm, his hand, a new, dynamic, healing, helping life.

And he did the thing that he could not do. Now, some of us have had some experience in this. We have faced circumstances that we realized that we were not sufficient for.

And we have called upon the Lord for help and found out to our own amazement that we did something we thought we couldn't do. Now, let's not put this in the past tense. Let's put this in the present tense.

No man will stretch out his hand unless he's convinced of his need, unless he's confident of the power of the Lord to do something about it. But you know you can be convinced of your need and you can be absolutely convinced of the power of the Lord to take care of that need, and still nothing happens. The catalyst in all of this, the thing that makes it work, is obedience, is doing the thing the Lord commands us to do.

Then the hand was restored, whole as the other, it says, and the will of God in him was accomplished. Whenever there is obedience, spiritual disease is turned to health and spiritual disability to ability and uselessness. Ever feel useless? This uselessness is turned into usefulness.

The moment surrender is made, power is communicated. Not till then. So it's great.

It's great to know intellectually that we have a need and that we are not all we ought to be. It is a wonderful thing to realize that Christ we worship is the Christ of glory, the God of the universe, almighty. It's great to know that, but it doesn't do us any particular good to know that unless we respond to him, unless we obey what he says.

And when we obey what he says, power is communicated. All the resources of Christ become ours as we appropriate them. Our Heavenly Father, we are sure that the reason that thou dost say these things so frequently to us in thy word and give us demonstrations and illustrations and encouragements of one kind

and another is because thou dost know our frame and thou dost remember that we are dust.

We thank thee that thou art so patient with us and that again and again thou dost speak to us, teaching us line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little. Oh, we thank thee for thy patience. We thank thee for what we have learned of thee hitherto and we pray thee this morning that our hearts may be moved forward in our will to appropriate thy resources.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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