

Gleaners Bible Studies B 3

A STUDY OF MIRACLES - PART 3

Study 1

The Man with the Withered Hand

Read

**Matthew 12: 9-14, Mark 3: 1-6,
Luke 6: 6-11**

This is not the first of our Lord's cures on the Sabbath day which stirs up the hostility of His enemies, or which is used by them as a pretext for accusing Him. (*Mark 3: 4-6*) There are seven such cures recorded in the Gospels and we have already studied one of them in series B 1 - the healing of the man in the synagogue who was demon-possessed.

In each of the three Gospels, notice how the account of the healing of the man with the withered hand directly follows that of the disciples plucking the ears of corn on the Sabbath day, and how the Master defends them for so doing. It would appear then that the account of this miracle is introduced in all three Gospels to illustrate the Saviour's teaching regarding the keeping of the Sabbath day. So we would do well to look at this first in order to see the setting or context of the miracle, for they obviously go together.

The Pharisees were offended with the disciples for plucking ears of corn and eating them on the Sabbath day. Notice that they did not accuse the disciples of theft - of stealing another man's property, for the law of Moses in *Deuteronomy 23: 25* actually permitted them to do so. It was NOT the act itself for which the disciples were condemned, but for the day on which they did it. What the Pharisees objected to was their plucking the ears and rubbing them with their hands which they regarded as a kind of reaping and threshing, and therefore forbidden on the Sabbath. This very narrow and legalistic view, the Lord met with a brilliant argument.

First He took a familiar incident from the life of David, recorded for us in *1 Samuel 21: 1-6*. David coming on a Sabbath day to the Tabernacle at Nob, begs for bread for himself and his weary men who were fainting from hunger. In his emergency, David was given the sacred shew-bread by the high priest who rightly judged that it was better to relieve the urgent needs of hungry men than to keep to the letter of the law and prolong their suffering. Our Lord's teaching here is that when two principles seem to conflict, the higher one must always be followed. So that man's obligation to rest on the Sabbath day can be laid aside if the higher law of love to God and to our fellow-men makes it absolutely necessary for us to labour. Do you follow this?

Our Lord's second argument is taken from the case of the Temple priests, whose duties in their priestly office had to be performed on the Sabbath, just as on other days. It would have been far worse for NO sacrifice to be offered, than that the priests should have to work in order to offer it. Do you see our Lord's skilful reasoning here? He argues that if the Temple priests were blameless in their work, then how much more blameless were His followers who were in the service of the One who is greater than any earthly temple. Because of their untiring work in His service, they had had no time to prepare or even eat the food necessary to stave off the pangs of hunger. Jesus reminds His hearers that in God's sight MERCY is more important than SACRIFICE. It is the SPIRIT of the law that is higher than the LETTER of the law. It is the Sabbath that is

made for men, not man for the Sabbath. (*Mark 2: 28*)

These principles so clearly laid down by the Lord are of lasting importance. They apply to the true Biblical Sabbath, which was beneficial to man, and Jesus was openly condemning the Jewish doctors of the law who had made their Sabbath so oppressive with all their legal restrictions.

The case of the man with the withered hand, coming, as it does, immediately after the pronouncement of these principles by the Lord, acts as an illustrative application. It brings to life these very principles that He has been teaching.

Jesus, on the Sabbath, had entered the synagogue as was His custom when He saw a man whose right hand was "withered". Now you may think that compared with the demon-possessed man, this case was not so urgent, or so important that it should need healing on the Sabbath. Yet Jesus had compassion for this man too, and could understand fully his deep need.

The man had a **WITHERED HAND**. In all probability this man was a craftsman of some kind, as most working men in our Lord's time followed a trade. His hand that at one time had possessed great skill was now quite useless. It was important for his own livelihood that he should be able to use it. If he could not ply his trade he would have to beg. Not only was begging a precarious existence, but it was also an indignity to his manhood. Sin had robbed him of his ability to work. So Jesus, with divine insight, yet total understanding, realised this man's great need.

There is a spiritual lesson which we, as Christians, can learn here. There are many ways in which we can work for God, but sometimes we are like this man with the withered hand - we are powerless to do what we want to do. Through the 'withering' action of unconfessed sin in our lives we are powerless to serve God, speak for God, or live for God. We need to be restored to full communion with Him, then we will experience His power for service.

The Lord Jesus was well aware of **WATCHING ENEMIES**, but He refused to compromise in any way, or to allow them to dictate the terms of His behaviour. He wanted everyone to know His intentions. He was not going to heal in secret. But first of all, the Lord again confronts these enemies with divine reasoning. In Matthew's account Jesus points out that if a sheep fell into a pit on a Sabbath day, they wouldn't leave it there, they would pull it out. Of how much more importance is a man than a sheep? If it is right to care for a sheep on the Sabbath, how much more should one minister to the needs of a man? Then, taking up more directly the question which they had asked, He answers it with a question of His own. **"Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill."** (*Mark 3:4*) He shows them that the crux of the question is not between working or not working on the Sabbath; but between doing good or doing evil. This principle is similarly employed by *James in 4: 17* of his epistle, **"Therefore, to him who knows to do good, and does not do it, to him it is sin."** Think carefully about this verse.

So the Lord was showing His enemies how THEIR principle when taken to its ultimate conclusion could actually lead to cruelty and the destroying of life. What was more, if in no possible case was it allowable to work on the Sabbath, and the refusal to work involved the loss of human life, then the keeping of the Sabbath would be a curse to man instead of a

blessing. What incredible wisdom our Lord had in His dealings with men!

HIS WRATH AT THEIR HARDNESS (Mark 3: 5)

Mark adds this graphic description of the inter-blending of the Saviour's emotions. His righteous anger was accompanied by grief, for He knew their sin and the awful consequences it would bring upon them. He was angry for the sin, but grieved for the sinner - a clear illustration of Paul's command. **"Be angry and do not sin" Ephesians 4: 26** - a lesson for us to note.

HIS WORK OF RESTORATION

The Lord said to the man, **"Stretch out your hand . . . and his hand was restored as whole as the other."** (Mark 3: 5) The man's hand was restored whole, and with it his ability to realise his full potential. He had possessed the skill but was unable to use it. Now he could work with skill once more. Let us remember that through the cleansing power of the Lord Jesus, that which is useless in our lives, because of sin, can be restored for His use and service. Let us be careful to allow nothing to enter our lives that will 'wither' our ability to work for the Lord Jesus.

Notice too that the man was in the right place at the right time to receive his restoration - the synagogue, on the Sabbath - the place where God's Word was read and God's power experienced. Had he not been there he would have missed the blessing.

A WICKED COUNSEL

The sight of this man restored, only made the enmity of the Pharisees more fierce, and though it was the Sabbath, they went out and took counsel with the Herodians to destroy Jesus. Their deeds were evil. Yes, these religious leaders who loved the restrictions and the ritual of the Sabbath were evil men who showed only hatred and condemnation for the compassionate Lord of the Sabbath. (Mark 2: 28) They hated Him so much that they desired His death. This desire to kill Him seemed to consume them right through the Gospel narratives, and we perhaps wonder why. Was it because of His unerring ability to touch them on the raw; to openly expose the hypocrisy of their nature? It certainly filled them with hatred towards Him and His teaching, and goaded them into turning the hearts of men away from Him - a process which ultimately led to the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus.

Study 2

A Sudden Storm

Read

Matthew 8: 23-27; Mark 4: 35-41; Luke 8: 22-25

All the miracles we have studied so far have been miracles of healing. They have shown to us, in a very definite way, the sympathy of the Lord Jesus with the sickness of men. The healings we read of in the four Gospels, record only a very small part of the number of people that were healed. Often at sunset the Lord could be found surrounded by all kinds of suffering people. If you look at **Mark 1: 32** you will see this. We can be sure that none of those who came to Him humbly seeking help were ever turned away. How wonderful the Lord Jesus is!

In this study we are faced with the power of the Lord Jesus in a different way altogether. We look now at a miracle which reveals His power as Creator over the elements. Notice that the story begins at evening. According to this chapter, the Lord Jesus had been teaching the people - talking about the Kingdom of God. I am sure that He was tired and was quite ready to move away from the crowds that surrounded Him. He therefore suggests that they board the boat and go to the other side. It is important to notice in the story that they took Him into the boat. (Mark 4: 36) I feel that we can learn from this that it is necessary to take the Lord Jesus into our lives. The disciples

could have questioned or asked Him to wait. They did neither of these things but allowed Him to enter their boat. It was a wise move because it was not long before they needed Him. So it is with us. We need Him - life and its emergencies are changed when He is on board.

So the voyage began - the Lord Jesus and His disciples in the dusk of evening, and soon darkness fell. Mark tells us that other boats were with Him. I often wonder how they fared in the storm. However the boat that had the Saviour on board safely reached the other side. The storm provided the opportunity for the Lord to demonstrate His ability and power, and He will also do this in the daily life of the Christian. Looking at people generally, one life looks much the same as another. The circumstances that make up everyday life are the common lot of mankind. So often people will say, 'What difference does being a Christian make?' There is a clear-cut answer to this as this story shows.

There was a SUDDEN STORM.

Without warning it sprang up. Apparently this is a common occurrence on the Sea of Galilee and the storms could be violent and destructive. The disciples, as fishermen, would know all about this. Possibly this storm could have been more violent than many they had experienced. It certainly filled them with fear. They wondered if the boat would capsize and sink. This is a picture of life and its troubles. Maybe when we are young, trouble and sadness seem a long way off. Life is easy-going and we find it easy to be happy, but as life goes by, we prove that trouble can suddenly disturb the calm of our ways as we meet the storms of life. Just as the storm on the Sea of Galilee tested the reliability of the boat, so troubles and trials test the strength and quality of our lives. It is necessary for you to think seriously about this point.

Then there is the SLEEPING SAVIOUR.

As soon as the storm came the disciples looked around for Jesus. Where was He? Imagine their surprise when they found Him asleep. **"Do you not care that we are perishing?"** (Mark 4: 38) This was their cry. Did the Lord Jesus care? I think we can learn first of all that the storms did not disturb Him. He was quite calm in contrast to the disciples' panic. He just went on sleeping while the winds blew. But this certainly did not mean that He had forgotten His disciples. He soon showed how much He cared for them. We can apply this to our lives. Sometimes as Christians, it seems that God has forgotten us. We pray - no answer comes. The storms of life seem to shut Him out. But God does care. No storms in our lives will take Him by surprise. Although they may shatter our calm and upset our plans, they do not spoil God's plan for us. He will never let us down. This is a great comfort. David, the psalmist, knew a lot about this as he spoke of God as his keeper. **"He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep."** (Psalm 121: 4) How foolish the disciples were to panic. If the storm did not disturb Him, why should it worry them? Surely it was enough to have Jesus on board?

The STILLING OF THE STORM.

The Lord Jesus stood and rebuked the wind and waves. Just like a pack of wild animals, they were silenced, **"Peace, be still"**. He said. The Saviour showed that He was Master of Creation. He seemed surprised at their fear. He was absolutely in control. I am sure we can learn from this that Christ could deal with the storm without any difficulty, because He is the Maker of everything. In this miracle we can learn another important fact about the Lord Jesus. Jesus was so truly MAN that He could sleep because He was so tired. Yet He was so truly GOD that with majesty and power He could, by a simple command, still the violent storm and make winds and waves obey Him. This is tremendous. He, as God, made the winds and waves and all things. Surely then He had power to control them.

The miracle ends with a rebuke for the fearful disciples. **"Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?"** (Mark 4: 40) This tells us that Jesus expected them to trust Him. Was He disappointed? He knew them very well - well

enough to deal with them wisely. He knew that FEAR and FAITH could not exist together. He wanted them to have FAITH in Him. Let us take courage from the words of the Master. Satan could never sink the ship in which the Saviour was. Neither can he destroy those whose life is indwelt and controlled by the Lord.

Study 3 A Madman among the Tombs

Read

**Matthew 8: 28-34; Mark 5: 1-20;
Luke 8: 26-39**

The story of the Gadarene demoniac is one of the most vivid in the New Testament. See him rushing to meet the Lord Jesus. **(Mark 5: 2)** The verdict on the condition of this man, given by each of the first three Gospels, is pretty much the same in each case—he was fierce, uncontrolled and uncontrollable. Utterly repulsive and completely mad. Can you imagine how strange he would look – wandering in the caverns and tombs? Even chains and fetters could not bind him. The untameable madman! He was mad – but, as recorded by Mark, the cause of his condition was that unclean spirits possessed him.

We have already looked at the case of the man in the synagogue and we saw the power of the Lord Jesus over a demon. Here is a similar case in regard to need, but there are some significant points in it that are worth studying. Look carefully at the three accounts of the incident. You will especially notice that Matthew says there were two demon possessed men. Some feel that this could be a different incident, but the circumstances are too much alike to allow this. It has been said that if there were two, then there must have been one like the man whom Mark and Luke record. There we must leave it. I feel sure we are right in saying that it is the same incident recorded in each of the Gospels.

Look at **Mark 5: 6-7** carefully. There are three significant points about his contact with the Lord Jesus. He ran to Him and WORSHIPPED Him. Then he addressed Him as JESUS, SON OF THE MOST HIGH GOD. But then he pleaded that Jesus would not torment him. It seems that, although he was mad he discerned that Jesus was the Son of God, and this gave him a sense of awe. Can you imagine the impact that the Lord Jesus made upon the power of Satan? It is thrilling to feel that just His very presence brought those who were held captive by Satan to bow at His feet and worship Him. How wonderful is the all-superior power of Jesus!

The story now develops into a conflict between the power of the Lord Jesus and the power of the evil spirits. The man's name was Legion – many evil powers held him. Sadly, even today human lives can become demon-possessed. Spiritism and occult practices are on the increase continually. Many young people in our schools are playing with these kinds of evil things. Ouija boards are being used to seek messages from unseen powers – often just as a game or 'for fun'. The devil has many agents for destroying or captivating human lives and we must have nothing to do with any of these things. James says that we should resist the devil and he will flee from us. **(James 4: 7)** Think of how many powers held this man. A herd of swine was suddenly possessed by these spirits through the word of the Lord Jesus, and ran headlong into the sea to destruction. It is a strange story, but once again the majesty and power of the Lord Jesus are demonstrated. It is another proof of the purpose of the Lord Jesus in coming into the world. **1 John 3: 8** tells us, **"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil."** And without doubt He did this. One day Satan will be completely destroyed and cast into Hell forever.

Two significant conditions marked this man after the Lord Jesus had delivered him.

I. The complete CHANGE in the man.

The astonished people of the city went out to see what had happened. A herd of swine was not lost in the sea every day. As they came to the Lord Jesus they saw the delivered man changed completely, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, **"The one who had been demon possessed"**. **(Mark 5: 15)** No wonder they were afraid. The man whom no one could tame was controlled and calm through the mighty power of the Lord Jesus. We know that there is no one on earth who can change human lives like the Lord Jesus Christ. No matter how strong Satan's power is, HE is able to break it and bring calm and quiet where strife and disorder reigned. Let Christ take control and life will become ordered, peaceful and secure.

2. The COMMISSION given to him.

"Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you". **(Mark 5: 19)** This was a miracle designed to make an impact upon people who knew the man. It began at home - the most difficult place to witness, but the commission was given to tell others wherever he went. What a wonderful opportunity this man had. People had known him in his uncontrolled state. They could see, without doubt, the difference in him after he met with the Lord Jesus. It was fantastic. Likewise, every Christian, who has experienced the vital change in life that the power of the Lord Jesus brings, is commissioned to tell others of what He has done. Begin at home - this is where it matters most - and then tell others too. In Luke's record of this incident there is a wonderful sequel. **Luke 8: 40** tells us that when Jesus returned, the same people that had turned Him away were waiting for Him and received Him gladly. This really speaks volumes for the man's testimony to Christ. It shows that in sending him back to witness at home, the Lord Jesus knew what He was doing. He lived among his own people, and they saw the change. He told them of Jesus and they were attracted to Him. If you have found Christ as Saviour and He has changed your life, then the impact you can make upon your friends and family can be just as dramatic. Notice it was to Christ the people were attracted, NOT the man who was healed. He did not become a hero. Christ became the centre. That is the test of every true testimony - does it lead others to Christ?

Study 4

A Daughter who Died

Read

**Matthew 9: 18-26; Mark 5: 21-43;
Luke 8: 41-56**

If you were asked which miracles showed the greatest features of the power of the Lord Jesus, I am sure you would say the ones which involved raising people from the dead. You would be quite right. There were, no doubt, those who came to the Lord Jesus who were at death's door, and His healing would save them from death. This would have happened many times. However, there are three instances in the Gospels where the Lord Jesus actually raised people from the dead. They had passed beyond the reach of healing, and humanly speaking they were beyond hope.

In **Mark chapter 5** we read of a girl who was only twelve. In **Luke chapter 7** we read of a young man, a widow's son, being carried to his burial. In **John chapter 11** we read of Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary at Bethany - who, when the Lord Jesus reached him, had been in the grave four days.

In each case the result was the same - the power of the Lord was made evident in that they were each raised from the dead. This miraculous power of the Lord Jesus, even over death, proves beyond doubt that He is the Son of God. Remember, He destroyed death and the devil; although in doing so, He went through death Himself **(Hebrews 2: 14 - 15)** These verses indicate that it is the devil who has the power of death. This great fact makes us realise that between the Lord Jesus

and Satan there could be no truce. One or the other must be conqueror, and we can be thankful that the Lord Jesus was victorious and death was destroyed.

We can learn first of all from this study that death is no RESPECTER of persons. People might think that a twelve year old girl, full of joy and energy, had many years to live. We often associate death with old age and failing powers. Yet this young girl was taken ill and soon died. Of course when we stop to think about life today we realise that this does happen. People of all ages die. The Bible makes it very clear that DEATH is the result of SIN, not any particular sin or state of sinfulness, but sin is that which SEPARATES us from the life of God. Look at **Romans 5: 12-21**; **6: 23**, and **James 1: 15**. There is no doubt about the lessons we learn from these scriptures. The tragedy is that if no remedy is found, we shall die, and then beyond that, be lost forever. (**Hebrews 9: 27-28**) The importance of this study is to help us realise that there is a REMEDY for sin and death.

Death brings with it RUIN and SADNESS. Just think of what it meant to this ruler of the synagogue, when, after asking Jesus to come and heal his daughter, who was ill, she died before He reached her. I am sure he believed that Jesus could heal the girl. But it seemed that the Lord just let her die, and death was a different matter altogether. We say often that while there is life there is hope. Beyond that, things are hopeless. We can pause here and think of all those things that are spoiled by death. Jairus' home could never be the same again. There was a blank that could never be replaced. All the love that had been given and enjoyed was over. Where once a voice was heard, there was a terrible silence. Death separates, silences, and brings sadness. It was into such conditions that the Lord Jesus eventually came. Do you think He felt the sadness when He came? Of course He did. Yet He just could not accept all the weeping and wailing of the Eastern home at times like these. **"Why make this commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping."** (**Mark 5: 39**) What a laugh! Yes, the people laughed Him to scorn. No wonder the Lord Jesus put them all out before He worked the wonderful miracle.

The Lord Jesus came to the home of Jairus as the only One who had the REMEDY for death. I do like the calm, quiet way in which the Lord came into the house. He did not want any noise, publicity or show. He just took the three chief disciples in with Him. He was in complete control of the situation. Notice how He just took the girl by the hand, **"Little girl, I say to you, arise"**. (**Mark 5: 41**) It seemed almost as if He was waking her from sleep. To everyone's amazement, she immediately arose and walked. She was back from the dead.

The lesson of the miracle is clear. The Lord Jesus was the answer to the tragedy of death. Sadly, as we reflect, the girl who was raised from the dead would die again. But there is a deeper significance in the power of the Lord Jesus. He was able to say, **"This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent"**. (**John 17: 3**) To know the Lord Jesus as a living Saviour means that death has no terrors for us. Because He is alive from the dead, all who put their trust in Him are assured of life beyond the grave - life for ever. One glorious day the Lord Jesus is coming. Then will begin events that will finally lead to the destruction of the LAST ENEMY - DEATH. See **1 Corinthians 15: 25, 26**. What a wonderful miracle we have studied. It introduces us to the Conqueror of sin and death.

Now you have studied four more miracle stories. Go back over them. Notice their special features. Especially notice HOW the Lord Jesus worked. To watch Him at work is like studying the work of a craftsman. Every move He made was perfect and each individual was healed according to their need. It tells us the wonderful fact that the Lord Jesus was concerned with the needs of men's bodies as well as with their souls.

It was through the means of meeting their physical needs in His compassion that He taught them the greater message of God's wonderful love. Let this lesson really come home in these studies.

Questions

Study 1

THE MAN WITH THE WITHERED HAND

1. What is significant about the way in which this miracle is introduced by three of the Gospel writers?
2. Our Lord defended His disciples' actions with a brilliant argument. Give an example from 21st century life that would illustrate our Lord's teaching on this occasion.
3. What spiritual lesson can we learn from the man with the withered hand?
4. a) What was the divine principle on keeping the Sabbath that Jesus showed by His skilful reasoning?
b) Where can we find its parallel in the Epistles?
5. What effect did our Lord's teaching have upon the Pharisees?

Study 2

A SUDDEN STORM

1. What is the main difference between this miracle and the others we have studied?
2. What difference does being a Christian make to the everyday circumstances of life?
3. What should the fact that Jesus was asleep during the storm teach us about the limits of Satan's power?
4. What does this miracle teach us about the nature or character of the Lord Jesus?
5. What practical lesson have you learnt from this study?

Study 3

A MADMAN AMONG THE TOMBS

1. Why is it dangerous to 'play around' with anything to do with spiritism or the occult?
2. What part of this story illustrates for us the all-superior power of the Lord Jesus?
3. One of the reasons why the Lord Jesus came into the world is clearly illustrated by this story. What is it?
4. What commission was given to this man by the Lord which has also been given to us?
5. What lesson can we learn from the sequel to this story recorded for us by Luke?

Study 4

A DAUGHTER WHO DIED

1. Give the references in the Gospels of the three incidents in which Jesus raised people from the dead.
2. What conclusions do you draw from these incidents about the Lord Jesus?
3. In your own words, from reading **Hebrews 9: 27 - 28**, what is the remedy for sin and death.
4. What does **1 Corinthians 15** teach us about death?
5. What is the most important lesson you have learned from your study of these four miracles?