



# Sermon Outline

A WITHERED HEART

MARK 3:1-6; MATTHEW 12:9-14; LUKE 6:6-11

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COME  
And SEE

The  
CHOSEN



# A Withered Heart

This resource helps you tell the story of the healing of the man with the withered hand and the Pharisees' ugly protest of the healing (see texts listed below). It includes a clip from Season Two, Episode 6 to show to the congregation, a suggested script for setting the scene before you show the clip, and a short sermon outline with main teaching points and pastoral prompts.

**Sermon Title:** A Withered Heart

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

**Dominant Thought:** A withered right view of God withers the heart—but both can be made well.

[Download the Episode Clip: Jesus Heals the Man with the Withered Hand](#)

## Setting the Scene (suggested script)

If you've read any of the four accounts of Jesus's life, you know it's not out of the ordinary for the extraordinary to get Jesus into trouble. While the miracles he performed brought good to the lives of those for whom they were performed, it tended to bring trouble to his own life. Take for example a particular moment recorded in three of the four gospel accounts. Jesus enters a local synagogue and encounters a man with a withered hand. There's a miraculous work to be done, and Jesus is the one to do it, but it just so happens to be the Sabbath—a day on which no work of *any kind* is to be done. Let's watch the moment unfold in this scene from Season Two of *The Chosen*...

**\*If you've never introduced your congregation to *The Chosen*, consider slightly tweaking the last line of the script above:** "Let's watch the moment unfold in this scene from Season Two of *The Chosen*, a television series that explores the life of Jesus..."

# Sermon Outline

## Introduction

\*Show the clip from *The Chosen*, using the suggested script above to set the scene.

\*After showing the clip, consider reading one of the Gospel accounts on which it's based—Mark 3:1-6, Matthew 12:9-14, or Luke 6:6-11. You could transition from the showing of the clip to the reading of the text by saying something like: "As I mentioned already, this miracle is recorded in three of the four gospel accounts we have in our New Testament. We've seen the moment unfold; let's *listen* to it unfold as well. I'm reading from the Gospel of \_\_\_\_\_ ..."

*Note: The word used to describe the man's hand is often translated one of two ways, and both are perfectly acceptable: "withered" or "shriveled." This resource opts for adjectival/verbal language of "withered/wither", but such adjectival/verbal language can easily be switched out for "shriveled/shrivel".*

\*After reading the passage, here is a suggested script to transition to the sermon proper in a way that introduces the imagery and wordplay used below in the suggested sermon body and subpoints: "Though we just heard the story from \_\_\_\_\_'s perspective, all three of the gospel accounts in which this story is told make it clear that the man's hand isn't the only thing that's withered. And it's worth noting it's not the worst and most harmful example of something in a withered state. Along with the poor man's hand, the hearts of the Pharisees are withered, too. They're shriveled up and lifeless. And you know the old adage: hurting people hurt people. To put it a bit differently in light of the story we're spending time in: a withered heart withers. But how does a heart even wither in the first place? What causes it to shrink and shrivel—to be reduced to near nothing?"

## Sermon Body

### I. Be wary of a withering right view of God.

**Main Teaching Point:** All of this talk of Sabbath sends us back to the start of things where Sabbath started in the first place—back to those first few chapters of the Bible. Because the Pharisees dedicated the entirety of their lives to poring over the Scriptures, they knew how the Story begins—with a breathtaking account of a son (Adam) and a daughter (Eve) deeply loved

by their Father God. The Father's love is seen in the robust ecosystem that's created to provide ongoing sustenance and pleasure; in the relational context he creates that allows for lasting friendships, fruitful co-laboring, and marital bonds; in the Father's ongoing counsel as to what ought to be done by his children (and what ought to be avoided). But putting the out-workings of the Father's love aside, the fundamental truth mustn't be lost: *the Father deeply loves his children*. But the Pharisees seem to have lost it just the same. Moving from the start of the Story back to our story at hand, it's clear from this interaction with Jesus in the synagogue, played out in the Scriptural account and in the scene from *The Chosen*, that the Pharisees have allowed the fundamental view of a loving Father to wither into a flawed view of an incessantly, insufferably angry and demanding one—a Father who will never care for his children much at all as long as there's even a hint of failure among them with regard to what's to be done, including observing the Sabbath. As noted once already, the Pharisees dedicated the entirety of their lives to poring over the Scriptures, so they should know better than anyone that *the love of the Father prompted the creation of the Sabbath*. The Father knew that working ceaselessly would quite literally kill his children, so he called for a day for all work to cease. But the Pharisees grew convinced over time that *honoring the Sabbath prompted the love of the Father*. They grew convinced the Father wasn't inherently loving, but rather he needed wooing by way of obedience. And this despite having pored over the Scriptures the entirety of their lives—this despite having read the opening pages of the Story in which even when the Father's children fail in their obedience in that dark plot twist of Genesis 3, he remains ever the loving Father in his promise to restore all things. What a long distance the Pharisees had traveled from those first few pages of the Story—from the first glimpses of God and his nature! What a withered view they'd embraced!

**Pastoral Prompt:** Here's an important question to ask, lest you become like the characters in our story that you least want to be like: does the start of the Story, with its picture painted of a Father who deeply loves his children, hold sway over the story of God you are sometimes tempted to write in your own anxious mind—a rival story of an incessantly, insufferably angry and demanding God? Has the right view of God, given to us as a gift in the earliest days of creation, begun to wither within you?

## II. Be wary of a withering right view of God, because a withered right view withers the heart.

**Main Teaching Point:** The calloused nature of the Pharisees, captured in the scene we watched from *The Chosen*, is rightly horrifying to us. *But it shouldn't surprise us.* Let's go outside of our story to consider a moment recorded in three of the four gospel accounts—the moment in which Jesus is asked to identify the greatest commandment. His response? Love the Lord your God and love your neighbor. He even goes a step further and says all other laws hang upon these two. And while Jesus lists and insists on both, it's no small thing for him to have listed one of them *first*. To love God is—among other things—to let God freely love *you* as his child. And to experience God's love is to have the foundational view of God as a loving Father affirmed for you—to know with certainty that what is said about God's nature at the very start of the Story is true. And—this is incredibly important—to know God's love personally, is to know his love communally. The love he has for you as his child, is the same love he has for your brothers and sisters. Until you go on this journey of loving a loving God and being loved by a loving God, you simply *will not* love others. You become so concerned with, and consumed by, cultivating a life that does exactly what is right in the eyes of God that before you know it, you have little concern with what “right” needs to be done for others. Consider the scene that unfolds in the synagogue. There sits a man with a withered hand, a life of fullness crippled by a crippled limb. In walks Jesus who can heal the withered hand. It just so happens to be the Sabbath, and there stands a circle of Pharisees who simply have not allowed themselves to be loved by the loving God presented to them in the first pages of the Story—and thus they are unable to love another in need. They are convinced that to heal on the Sabbath would stir the embers of God's latent anger. They are convinced it would all be a bridge too far, and one that would lead them away from the love of God. And so the man *must* go unhealed that the Sabbath might be honored. God has drawn a legal line that cannot be crossed even for the good of others. (And it matters not that the legal line was drawn in the first place for the good of others.) Beneath their protest, the Pharisees are offering a confession: we believe that none of us can be loved until we finally get around to getting things right. So, in their eyes even an act of love should be ignored if it threatens an opportunity to be accepted by and loved by God. A withered right view of God withers the heart.

**Pastoral Prompt:** Back to the question that was asked of you a moment ago: does the start of the Story, with its picture painted of a Father who deeply loves his children, hold sway over the story of God you are sometimes tempted to write in your own anxious mind—a rival story of an incessantly, insufferably angry and demanding God? Has the right view of God, given to us as a gift in the earliest days of creation, begun to wither within you? *And how have you seen this wither your heart toward others?* Whenever the Pharisees pop up in the Bible, we cherish an opportunity to contrast ourselves with “that awful crew.” But it’s an opportunity to compare ourselves to them, too. We all of us at times are so concerned with carefully cultivating a life of doing exactly what we are convinced is right in the eyes of God, that we miss the right that must be done for our neighbor. (Which, funny enough, *is exactly what God would have us be quite concerned with!*) What acts of compassion born out of a love of neighbor are you missing because you tremble over whether or not God has love for you?

### III. A withered right view of God withers the heart—but both can be made well

**Main Teaching Point:** The abhorrent worldview and ugly ways of the Pharisees make them easy to despise. But it’s worth noting that even in his exasperation—and at times *his righteous anger*—Jesus never embraced a loathing of the Pharisees; he sought always love to them. At just about every turn of any of the gospel accounts, we find the Pharisees lurking at the edges of the crowds that have gathered about Jesus to be taught or healed, and they’re never silent for long. The Pharisees are ever and always elbowing their way in to question, criticize, and even condemn. Frankly, *it’s annoying*. And so isn’t it something that Jesus allows them to be there at every turn? At any point Jesus could have made sure they were shooed away—either by a legion of angels or by way of a few hired heavies. But he lets them gather with everyone else. *Why?* Because he knows a right view of God has withered within them. He knows they are struggling to view God as loving Father. *And he knows what he’s said to them before:* “If you’ve seen me, you’ve seen the Father.” Any hint of loathing on his part as the Son wrecks any hope of their finally believing the inherently loving nature of the Father. Maybe, just maybe—because they are there with him—they will hear of the love of the Father in his teaching, and their withered right view of God will be made well. Maybe, just maybe—because they are there with him—they will see the love of the Father in the healing of a withered hand even on the Sabbath, of all days, and their withered right view of God will be made well. And with a withered right view of God made well, a withered heart will be made well with it. They will love the Lord their God—and be loved by him—and in it all, find themselves giddy to love the neighbor who is just as loved by God as they are.

**Pastoral Prompt:** We've had to admit this so far: (1) Despite the start of the Story telling us we have a Father who loves us, we all of us write a rival story of an incessantly, insufferably angry and demanding God. (2) In light of this rival story, we become concerned with, and consumed by, cultivating a life that does exactly what is right in the eyes of God. (3) This obsession leads to little concern with what "right" needs to be done for others. The only way to break the vicious cycle is to lay low the rival story by lifting high the one that is true. How do we do this? We have the story told to us again and again. Regardless of where we are in our Bible reading plans, we always need a time or two to turn all the way back to the first few pages of the Story. And more than that, regardless of where we are in our Bible reading plans, we always need ample time in the gospel accounts of Jesus's life. Because as he so emphatically says in all of those accounts, in his own way each time: "If you've seen me, you've seen the Father." And to see the Son so loving, is to see a loving Father.

## *Conclusion*

As with most all of the sermon outlines we provide, the conclusion of the sermon lends itself to the celebration of Communion, depending on your faith tradition with regard to practice and frequency. There are few acts in the life of the church that show the love of the Father in the love of the Son than the breaking of bread and drinking from the cup. However, the close of the sermon is an opportunity to (1) offer a pastoral prayer for the congregation's rival stories of God as incessantly, insufferably angry to be laid low by the truer story of God as loving Father, (2) read a selection of Scriptures over the congregation that tell the sweeping story of the love of the Father—starting in the first pages of the Story before inching into (and including) Gospel selections—to then read a selection of Scriptures that commission the congregation toward compassion and love of neighbor. Worshipful response through song could be woven throughout, or (3) more somberly enter into a time of confession over lack of compassion that's born out of rival stories of God's nature that we sometimes entertain even as believers.

