

‘AS IF...’

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INTRODUCTION

There was a man – a bit like many of us today - who went regularly to worship and teaching service. He was **always there** – you could be sure he would not miss a service. Everyone knew him – he was a likeable guy – **friendly, but a bit shy** – especially when you went to shake hands with him. He had a deformity of his right hand, and he couldn't shake hands properly – he would hesitate and offer his left hand a bit awkwardly. He would sort of hide his right hand – because it was twisted and didn't work properly and hadn't for years. But it was easy to see that it was sort of shrunken – like **the muscles had not worked for so long that they were wasted away**. But you would have liked him - he had a good heart, and he felt like there was a place for him at the services.

One particular day when everyone was in their normal place in the service, a **visiting traveling evangelist came** to the service unexpectedly. He was a bit controversial with his methods of healing and his lifestyle. But it was normal to open the meeting for people to share – so he was given the stage, and started to teach. Some of those **critical attitudes** were suddenly very attentive – because some of them had seen him doing really borderline things. His lifestyle, in their opinion, was a bit questionable. He really didn't **go by the rules**. They were catching each other's glances – and each knew what the other was thinking...when all of a sudden the traveling evangelist walked right up to the man who was trying to hide his hand...but everyone knew about it...looked him in the eye and said 'come and stand here in front of everyone'. The man was not sure what to do. He wished for a fleeting moment that the ground would open and swallow him up to avoid this awful embarrassment. Didn't the evangelist know how he felt? The evangelist looked around slowly at the people, eyeballing the ones who were his worst critics. This wasn't a healing meeting. Everyone knew that...what outrageous thing was this evangelist going to do....who did he think he was? The man was feeling very, very nervous....

***Luke 6:6-11** Now it happened on another Sabbath, also, that He entered the synagogue and taught. And a man was there whose right hand was withered. 7 So the scribes and Pharisees watched Him closely, whether He would heal on the Sabbath, that they might find an accusation against Him. 8 But He knew their thoughts, and said to the man who had the withered hand, "Arise and stand here." And he arose and stood. 9 Then Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one thing: Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy?" 10 And when He had looked around at them all, He said to the man, "**Stretch out your hand.**" And he did so, and his hand was restored as whole as the other. 11 But they were filled with rage, and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.*

People had gathered for teaching and worship on the holy day – more or less like us today.

Jesus was present – teaching. He was ready and planned to do a healing miracle. He is here today, and His word is being heard. He is the same yesterday, today and

forever. He evidences His presence and confirms His word by signs following. He wants to do something supernatural in our midst today.

Many of the **religious people were there** with **critical, religious attitudes**. Maybe some just weren't sure. Wow – would some of us be really uncomfortable if Jesus did a miracle here today? How would it happen?

There was **a man there with a withered hand**. Something had happened – it used to work properly. There had been either an injury, a disease, a problem with interrupted blood flow somewhere – and now a withered hand. His right hand – the one that should be the strong one.

Jesus knew what He was going to do - but **He needed the co-operation of the man**. Jesus said – 'stretch out your hand'.

WHEN THE LORD SAYS 'stretch out your hand'

There is **a principle** in the Word of God – **WHEN GOD SAYS STRETCH OUT YOUR HAND, HE SEES THAT IT IS HIM WHO IS STRETCHING OUT HIS HAND!** Let's look at some Bible examples....

GOD AND MOSES

The burning bush – **Ex.3:20** *"I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in its midst"*.

Ex.9:22 – *"the Lord said to Moses, stretch out your hand toward heaven that there may be hail in all the land of Egypt...and Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and..."*

Ex.14:16, 21, 26 (15:6) – *"Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord caused the sea to go back..."*

v.26,27 *"the Lord said...stretch out your hand over the sea that the waters may come back on the Egyptians..."* *"And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and when the morning appeared the sea returned to its full depth, while the Egyptians were fleeing into it. So **the Lord overthrew the Egyptians** in the midst of the sea"*.

Ex.15:6 *"Your right hand O Lord has become glorious in power, your right hand O Lord has dashed the enemy in pieces"*.

MOSES STRETCHED OUT HIS HAND WHEN GOD SAID TO, AND GOD SAW IT AS IF HE HAD DONE IT, AND DID MIRACLES.

Is. 63:12 *"led them by the right hand of Moses, with HIS glorious arm"* – the right hand of Moses was AS IF it is God's glorious arm!!

MOSES, AARON & HUR

Ex.17:9-15 – 'the rod of God' – Moses' rod is now called the rod of God. Moses and his helpers hold up the rod, and Joshua prevails against Amalek – when it gets heavy and sinks down – the enemy prevailed....all day, morning, until sunset – then victory! They named the place 'the Lord is my banner'. Moses' hand/rod was lifted up and God brought victory.

JOSHUA AND GOD

Joshua 8:18 – This was after the first defeat at Ai in the conquest of the Promised Land. God gave the right strategy after repentance and remorse, and after sin was dealt with. It was a surprise attack.

V.18 – *“Then the Lord said to Joshua, stretch out the spear that is in your hand toward Ai, for I will give it into your hand. And Joshua stretched out the spear that he had in his hand toward the city....and they entered the city and took it, and hastened to set the city on fire”.*

As Joshua stretched out his hand and spear towards the city, the Lord gave it ‘into his hand’.

PETER AND JOHN

This was the first great prayer meeting of the early church after Pentecost - precipitated by persecution. Peter and John had stretched out their hand to heal the man at the gate of the temple, in the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

Acts 4:27-30 *"For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. 29 Now, Lord, look on their threats, and **grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, 30 by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.**"*

They prayed that God would stretch out His hand to heal – but it was a result of THEM stretching out their hand to heal that they were in the trouble that had occasioned the prayer meeting. What were they thinking? They were **thinking that it was what Jesus had told them to do....and that His hand was stretched forth as they stretched their hand forth** and He was doing the work.

JESUS' COMMISSION TO US

Mark:16:15,16,18.

He who believes will be saved. Signs follow those who believe (saved ones) – lay hands on sick and they will recover. So they knew that as believers, saved by Jesus - as they stretched out their hand it was at His command, and He saw it as stretching out HIS HAND.

The early church understood this.

We need to understand this.

How many times do you pray for someone and ‘reverse faith’ sets in...*I hope something happens, probably nothing will, It's just me....*

We need to adjust our thinking in line with God's Word – Jesus has told us to stretch out our hands, and when we do it at His command – He sees it that He is stretching out His hand....

It is the same Jesus. We need to recognise that when we stretch out our hand in His name, and He has told us to do it – it is as if He is doing it. It is not that we have to have enough faith that we can heal people. The believing is believing in Jesus who saves. Let's do it.

WHAT IF MY HAND IS WITHERED?

The causes of (in the natural) a withered hand might be:

disease (sin sapping the life)

injury (a hurt, scarring that shrivels the hand, shrinks the ability to stretch it out and be Jesus' hand)

impaired blood flow (something has restricted the connective blood vessels, not properly connected)

Jesus says 'get up, stand here' – and stretch it out – He is present to heal. Yes, some might look and have other attitudes. But He wants you to be whole, be His hands stretched out to His world.

Example: Kum, a lecturer at ACTS college in Burma, who did lots of translating for us on our trip in January, was particularly touched and challenged after translating for a student session where I spoke on 'when God says stretch out your hand, and you do it, He sees it as if He is stretching out His hand'.

He told Gladwyn and me that when he was a child (he is in his 30s now) in his village near Chin state, perhaps about 4 years old, he had a healing gift, and anyone he laid hands on and prayed for was healed. This area had experienced real revival for many years, with amazing accounts of signs and wonders done by the Lord. In that area it was several days walk to get medical help, and so people would come and ask him (a little boy) to go to a badly sick person and lay hands on them. Sometimes at night, in the middle of the night, the church ladies would come and ask his mother if they could take him to lay hands on a very sick person. She did not want them to take him out in strange places in the jungle at night (there are tigers and elephants and all sorts of wild animals in the hilly jungle areas of Burma) - but they promised to carry him and would carry him on their back through the jungle to the sick person. As he grew, one time there was some special meetings, and for some reason they excluded the children, as if they did not matter – he felt the pain of that, as he had a real hunger for the Lord. He had stopped laying hands on people over the years. He thought that God had taken that away when he stopped using it. He knew the call of God, went to Bible college, and had become a college lecturer. He had stopped laying hands on people for healing long ago. We encouraged him that God's gifts are without repentance i.e. God does not take it away. But he needed to stir it up. Gladwyn asked him to lay hands on him for healing of his hips and knee – just to get him stirred up and started again. He prayed a simple prayer: 'Lord I used to lay my hands on people and they were healed – I can see now that when I did that, it was really You doing the healing'. Then he laid hands on Gladwyn and prayed for him. He said he would keep laying hands on and praying for people. Gladwyn noted that he did not wake up with hip pain from that night as he had been, praise God. On Monday morning he said: 'no pain in the night, no pain in the day, praise God – so far so good!' Kum needed to stretch out the 'withered hand' that had been damaged by something that had happened in church....and let God use him.

What is stopping us today from being Jesus' hands to the world? He wants us to **stretch out our hand and be restored**. He **wants to use our hands, stretched out, to His world**. When we realize this – our hand stretches out with His power to heal, with His encouragement to those who are down, with His compassion to give,

with His generosity to meet a need – that is what He is wanting. He plans to reach His world, using our hands.

Jesus demanded instant, practical response! ‘Get up and stand here’. ‘Stretch out your hand’. When He says stretch out your hand, and we do it, He does the work.

If today our hand is withered from disease, from lack of use, from fear, from hurt, damage, lack of blood flow – let’s not be people of God with withered hands. Today Jesus wants to restore the power, the strength, He wants us to stretch out our hand in so many ways. **Don’t say you can’t do it. It is His command. It is His power. He says when you do it at His command, He sees it as if He is doing it.** Remember Moses. Remember Joshua. Remember Peter and John. Remember the commission. Let’s stretch out our hand to the wounded, the hurting, the needs around us – and in the process we will find we are made whole.