

THE WITHERED HAND

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A SERMON
 DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, MAY 22, 1879,
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 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE NEWINGTON.

*“And behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. Then says He to the man, Stretch forth your hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other.”
 Matthew 12:10, 13.*

NOTE well the expression. Jesus “went into their synagogue and *behold*, there was a man which had his hand withered.” A mark is set, as it were, in the margin, as if it were a notable fact. That word, “*behold*” is a sort of note of exclamation to draw attention to it. “Behold, there was a man which had his hand withered.” In many congregations, if there should step in someone of the great and mighty of the land, people would say, “Behold, there was a duke, an earl, or a bishop there.” And although there were occasionally some great ones in our Savior’s congregation, I find no notes of admiration about their presence, no, “*beholds*,” inserted by the evangelists as if to call attention to their appearance. No doubt if there were in a congregation some person of known intelligence and great learning who had earned a high degree, there are persons who would say, “Did you know that Professor Science or Doctor Classic was present at the service?” There would be a “*behold*” put to that in the memories of many. There were persons well learned, according to the learning of the day, who came to listen to Christ, but there are no “*beholds*” about their having been present. Yet in the synagogue there was a poor man whose hand had been withered and we are called upon to note the fact.

It was his *right* hand which was withered, the worse of the two for him, for he could scarcely follow his handicraft or earn his bread. His best hand was useless. His breadwinner failed him. I have no doubt he was a very humble, obscure, insignificant individual, probably very badly off and in great poverty because he could not work as his fellow craftsmen could, but not a man of any rank or learning or special intelligence. His being in the assembly was in itself nothing very remarkable. I suppose he had been accustomed to go to the synagogue as others of his townsmen did. Yet the Holy Spirit takes care to mark that he was present and to have the word, “*behold*,” hung out like a signal that it might be regarded as a special subject for consideration that the crippled man was there.

And tonight, dear friends, it matters very little to the preacher or to the congregation that *you* are here, if you are some person of note or consequence, for we make no note of dignitaries here and attach no special consequence to anyone in this place where the rich and the poor meet together. But if you happen to be here as a needy soul wanting a Savior, if you happen to be here with a spiritually withered hand so that you cannot do the things that you would and you are wanting to have that hand restored to you, there shall be a “*behold*” put to that—and especially shall it be doubly emphatic if tonight the Master shall say to you, “Stretch out your withered hand”—and if divine power shall restore that hand and a deed of grace shall be accomplished. What our Lord needed on that particular Sabbath morning was somebody to work upon, somebody whom He might heal and so defy the traditional legality of the Pharisees who said that it was wrong to heal on the Sabbath day. Christ did not want their health that morning—He looked for their sickness that He might illustrate His healing power. He did not want any greatness in anybody there—but He did want some poor needy one in whom He could display His power to heal. And that is just the case tonight. If you are rich and increased in goods and have need of nothing, my Master does not want you. He is a physician and those who practice the healing art look out for sickness as their sphere of operation. If we were to tell a wise physician of a town where nobody was sick and everybody enjoyed perfect health, he would not settle there unless he wished to retire from practice. My Master does not come into the assemblies where all feel themselves quite content with themselves—where there are no blind eyes, no deaf ears, no broken hearts, no withered hands—for what do such folks need with a Savior? He looks around and His eye fixes itself upon pain, upon necessity, upon inca-

capacity, upon sinfulness, upon everything to which He can do good—for what He wants in us mortals is the opportunity to do us good—and not a pretense on our part that we can do Him good.

I begin with this because my talk tonight will be very simple and it will only be meant for those of you who want my Lord and Master. Those of you who do not need Him can go, but you that want Him, it may be you shall find Him tonight and there shall be the record kept in heaven, not of those who were here, who said, “We see,” nor of those who said, “Our hand is strong and deft for labor,” but there shall be a register of blind ones who shall say, “You Son of David, open our eyes,” and of withered ones who shall tonight stretch out their withered hands in obedience to His divine command. I do not know that our crippled friend when he went to the synagogue that morning expected to get his withered hand healed. Being perhaps a devout man, he went there to worship, but he got more than he went for. And it may be that some of you whom God means to bless tonight do not know what you have come here for. You came because you somehow love the ordinances of God’s house and you feel happy in hearing the gospel preached. You have never yet laid hold of the gospel for yourselves, never enjoyed its privileges and blessings as your own, but still you have a hankering after the best things. What if tonight the hour has come—the hour which sovereign grace has marked in a red letter in the calendar of love—in which your withered hand shall be made strong and your sin shall be forgiven! What bliss if you shall go your way to glorify God because a notable miracle of grace has been worked in you! God grant it may be so done by the power of the Holy Spirit. I entreat those of you who love the Master to pray Him to work wonders at this time upon many—and His shall be the praise.

I. First, we will say a little about THE PERSON TO WHOM THE COMMAND IN OUR TEXT IS ADDRESSED. “Then said Jesus to the man, stretch forth your hand.”

This command was addressed, then, to *a man who was hopelessly incapable of obeying*. “Stretch forth your hand.” I do not know whether his arm was paralyzed or only his hand. As a general rule, when a thorough paralysis, not a partial one, takes place in the hand, it seizes the entire member and both hand and arm are paralyzed. We usually speak of this man as if the entire limb had been dried up and yet I do not see in Matthew, Mark, or Luke any express declaration that the whole arm was withered. It seems to me to have been a case in which the hand only was affected. We used to have not far from here, I remember at Kennington Gate, a lad who would frequently get on the step of the omnibus and exhibit his hands, which hung down as if his wrists were broken, and he would cry, “Poor boy! Poor boy!” and appeal to our compassion. I fancy that his case was a picture of the one before us in which, not the arm perhaps, but the hand had become dried up. We cannot positively decide that the arm was still unwithered, but we may notice that our Lord did not say, “Stretch out your arm,” but, “your hand,” so that He points to the hand as the place where the paralysis lay. If He had said, “Stretch out your arm,” as the text does not declare that the arm was dried up, we should have said that Christ bade him do exactly what he was capable of doing and there would have been no miracle in it. But inasmuch as Jesus says, “Stretch forth your hand,” it is clear that the mischief was in the hand, if not in the arm, and so it was putting him to do what he could not possibly do, for the man’s hand was assuredly withered. It was not a sham disease. He had not made a pretense of being paralyzed, but he was really incapable. The hand had lost the moisture of life. The spirits which gave it strength had been dried out of it and there it was a withered, wilted, useless thing with which he could do nothing. And yet it was to such a man that Jesus said, “Stretch forth your hand.”

This is very important for us to notice, because some of you under a burden of sin think that Christ does not save real sinners—that those people whom He saves are, in some respects, not quite so bad as you—that there is not such an intensity of sin about them as about your case, or if an intensity of sin, yet not such an utter hopelessness and helplessness as there is about you. You feel quite dried up and utterly without strength. Dear hearer, it is exactly to such as you that the Lord Jesus Christ directs the commands of the gospel. We are bidden to preach to you, saying, “Believe,” or at other times, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.” These commandments are not addressed, as some say they are, to sensible sinners, but to insensible sinners, to stupid sinners, to sinners who cannot, so far as moral ability is concerned, obey the command at all. Such are bidden so to do by Him, who in this case bade the man do what he naturally in and of himself was quite incapable of doing—because, you see, if he could stretch out his hand himself—there was no mir-

acle wanted, for the man's hand was not withered at all. But it is clear that he could not move his hand and yet the Savior addressed him as if he could do it—in which I see a symbol of the gospel way of speaking to the sinner—for the gospel cries to him in all his misery and incapacity, “To you, even to you, is the word of this salvation sent.” This very incapacity and inability of yours is but the space in which the divine power may be displayed and because you are thus incapable and because you are thus unable, therefore to you does the gospel come that the excellence of the power may be seen to dwell in the gospel and in the Savior Himself, and not at all in the person who is saved.

The command, then, which brought healing with it, was addressed to one who was utterly incapable.

But, mark you, it came to one *who was perfectly willing*, for this man was quite prepared to do whatever Jesus bade him do. If you had questioned him, you would have found no desire to retain that withered hand and no wish that his fingers should remain lifeless and useless. If you had said to him, “Poor man, would you like to have your hand restored?” tears would have been in his eyes and he would have replied, “Ay, that I would, that I might earn bread for my dear children, that I might not have to go about begging and have to depend upon the help of others or only earn a hard crust with this left hand of mine. I wish above all things that I could have my hand restored!” But the worst of many unconverted people is that they do not want to be healed—do not want to be restored. As soon as a man truly longs for salvation, then salvation has already come to him. But the most of you do not wish to be saved. “Oh,” you say, “we truly wish to be saved.” I do not think so, for what do you mean by being saved? Do you mean being saved from going down to hell? Everybody, of course, wishes that. Did you ever meet a thief that would not like to be saved from going to prison or being locked up by the policeman? But when we talk about salvation, we mean being saved from the habit of wrong-doing—being saved from the power of evil, the love of sin, the practice of folly—and the power to find pleasure in transgression. Do you wish to be saved from pleasurable and gainful sins? Find me the drunkard who sincerely prays to be delivered from drunkenness. Bring me an unchaste man who pines to be pure. Find me one who is a habitual liar and yet longs to speak the truth. Bring me one who has been selfish and who in his very heart hates himself for it and longs to be full of love and to be made Christ-like. Why, half the battle is won in such cases. The initial step is taken. The parallel holds good in the spiritual world. The character I have in my mind's eye is the case of a soul desiring to be what it cannot be and to do what it cannot do—and yet desiring it. I mean the man who cries in agony, “To will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not.” “I would, but cannot, repent. My heart feels like a stone. I would love Christ, but alas, I feel that I am fettered to the world. I would be holy, but alas, sin comes violently upon me and carries me away.” It is to such people that Jesus Christ's gospel comes with the force of a command. Will you be made whole, my friend? Then you may be. Do you desire to be saved from sin? You may be. Do you wish to be emancipated from the bondage of corruption? You may be. And this is the only way in which you may be saved, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.” His name is called Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins. He has come on purpose to do this to real sinners, and not to mere pretenders, for it is clear that He cannot save men from sins if they have none. He cannot heal withered hands if there are no withered hands to be healed. He comes to you that want Him, to you that are guilty, to you whose hands are withered. Even to you is this glorious word of the good news proclaimed. God grant you grace to hear it believingly and to feel its power!

II. Secondly, I want to speak a little upon THE PERSON WHO GAVE THE COMMAND. It was *Jesus* who gave it. *He* said, “Stretch forth your hand.”

Did our Lord speak this in ignorance, supposing that the man could do so? By no means, for in Him is abundant knowledge. He had just read the hearts of the Pharisees and you may be sure that He who could read those subtle spirits could certainly see the outward condition of this patient. He knew that the man's hand was withered and yet He said, “Stretch forth your hand.” When I read in Scripture the command, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ,” I am sure that Jesus Christ knows what He is saying. “Go you,” He said, “into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” Yes, to every creature. Suppose that some of His disciples had been very orthodox and had come back and said, “Lord, was there not a mistake about the persons? Why preach to every creature? Are not some of them dead in sin? We would rather preach to character.” I have heard some of Christ's professed servants say that to bid dead sinners live is of no more use than to shake a handkerchief over the graves in which the dead are buried.

And my reply to them has been, “You are quite right. Do not do it, for it is evident you are not called to it. Go home and go to bed. The Lord never sent you to do anything of the kind, for you own you have no faith in it.” But if my Master sent *me* as the herald of resurrection and bade me shake a handkerchief over the graves of the dead, I would do it, and I should expect that this or that handkerchief, if *He* commanded it to be shaken, would raise the dead, for Jesus Christ knows what He is doing when He sends His servants. If He does not send us, it is a fool’s errand indeed to go and say, “You dead men, live.” but His commission makes all the difference. We are to say to the dead, “Awake, and Christ shall give you life.” What? Wake first and then get life afterwards? I shall not try to explain it, but that is the order of the Scripture, “Awake, you that sleep and arise from the dead and Christ shall give you life.” If my Master puts it so, I am quite satisfied to quote His words. I cannot explain it, but I delight to take Him in His own way and blindly follow His every step and believe His every word. If He bids me say, “Arise from the dead,” I will gladly do it now. In the name of Jesus, you dead ones, live; break, you hard hearts; dissolve, you hearts of steel; believe, you unbelievers; lay hold on Christ, you ungodly ones. If He speaks by His ministers, that word shall be with power—if He speak not by us, it is little matter how we speak. Well may the judicious brother say that there would be no use in *his* bidding the dead arise, for he confesses that his Master is not with him. Let him therefore, go home till his Master is with him. If his Master were with him, then would he speak his Master’s word and he would not be afraid of being called foolish. It is the Lord Jesus Christ who says to this man with the withered hand, “Stretch forth your hand.”

To me it is a sweet thought that He is able to give power to do what He gives the command to do. Dear soul, when you are bidden to believe and you stand with tears in your eyes and say, “Sir, I cannot understand and I cannot believe,” do you not know that He who bids you believe can give you power to believe? When He speaks through His servants or through His Word or directly by His Spirit upon your conscience, He who bids you do this is no mere man, but the Son of God. And you must say to Him, “Good Lord, I beseech You, give me now the faith which You ask of me. Give me the repentance You do command,” and He will hear your prayer and faith shall spring up within you.

Did you never notice, dear souls, Christ’s way of doing His work? His way is generally this—first, to give the command, then to help the heart to turn the command into a prayer, and then to answer that prayer by a promise. Take these specimens. The Lord says, “Make you a new heart.” That is clearly a command. But by-and-by you find the psalmist David, in the fifty-first psalm, saying, “Create in me a clean heart, O God.” And then, if you turn to Ezekiel, you get the promise, “A new heart also will I give you.” First, He commands you, next He sets you praying for the blessing, and then He gives it to you.

Take another. The command is, “Turn you, turn you, why will you die, O house of Israel?” Then comes the prayer, “Turn You me and I shall be turned, O Lord.” And then follows the blessed turning of which the apostle Paul speaks when he says that God has sent His Son to bless us by turning every one of us from his iniquity.

Take another case and let it refer to purging. We find the Lord commanding us to “Purge out the old leaven” and straightway there comes the prayer, “Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean.” And then on the heels of it comes the promise, “I will surely purge away your dross.” Or take another kind of precept, of a sweeter sort, belonging to the Christian. You are continually told to sing, “Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises.” In another place we meet with the prayer, “Open You my lips and my mouth shall show forth Your praise.” And in a third Scripture we have the divine promise, “This people have I formed for Myself; they shall show forth My praise.” See, then, the Master’s way of going to work—He commands you to believe or repent. He then sets you a-praying that you may be enabled to do it, and then He gives you grace to do it so that the blessing may really come to your soul, for everywhere gospel commands are uttered by Christ Himself to men’s hearts, they, receiving them, find the ability coming with the command.

“But He is not here,” says one, “He is not here.” Verily I say unto you in His name, He is here. His word is, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world”—till this dispensation shall be ended, Christ will be where the gospel is preached. Where His message is honestly and truthfully delivered with the Spirit of God, there Jesus Christ Himself is virtually present speaking through the lips of His servants. Therefore, dear soul with the withered hand, tonight Jesus Himself says to you, “Stretch forth your

hand.” He is present to heal and His method is to command. He now commands. O gracious Spirit, be present that men may obey.

III. It is time for a few words upon another point and that is upon THE COMMAND ITSELF. The command itself was, “Stretch forth your hand.” I notice about that command that it goes to the very essence of the matter. It is not, “Rub your right hand with your left.” It is not, “Show your hand to the priest and let him perform a ceremony upon it.” It is not, “Wash your hand,” but it is, “Stretch it forth.” That was the very thing he could not do and thus the command went to the very root of the mischief. As soon as the hand was stretched out it was healed and the command went directly to the desired mark.

Now, my Lord and Master does not say to any of you sinners tonight, “Go home and pray.” I hope you will pray, but that is not the great gospel command. The gospel is, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. Paul stood at the dead of night, with the trembling jailer who hardly understood his own question, when he cried, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” And Paul, according to the practice of some, should have said, “We must have a little prayer,” or, “You must go home and read the Bible and I must further instruct you until you are in a better state.” He did nothing of the sort, but there and then Paul said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.” There is no gospel preached unless you come to this, for salvation comes by faith and by nothing short of it. That is just the difficult point, you tell me. Yes, and at the difficult point this command strikes and says, “Stretch forth your hand.” Or in the case of the sinner, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ”; for remember, all that any of you ever do in the matter of eternal life, which has not faith in it, can be nothing after all but the effort of your carnal nature—and that is death. What can come of the movements of death but a still deeper death? Death can never produce life. Prayer without faith! What sort of prayer is it? It is the prayer of a man who does not believe God. Shall a man expect to receive anything of the Lord if he does not believe that God is and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him? “Oh, but I must repent before I believe,” says one. What kind of repentance is that which does not trust God—does not believe in God? An unbelieving repentance—is it not a selfish expression of regret because of punishment incurred? Faith must be mixed with every prayer and every act of repentance or they cannot be acceptable, and hence, we must go right straight to this point and demand faith, saying, “Believe and live.” “Stretch forth your hand.”

That stretching forth of the hand was entirely *an act of faith*. It was not an act of sense. As a matter of sense and nature, the man was, I say, weariless for it. He only did it because his faith brought the ability. It was a pure act of faith, that stretching out of the hand. “I still do not understand as yet,” says one, “how a man can do what he cannot do?” But you will understand a great many other wonderful things when the Lord teaches you, for the Christian life is a series of paradoxes, and for my own part, I doubt an experience unless there is something paradoxical about it. At any rate, I am sure that it is so that I, who can do nothing of myself, can do everything through Christ which strengthens me. The man who is seeking Christ can do nothing and if he believes on Christ, he can do everything and his withered hand is stretched out.

But in addition to its being an act of faith, it seems to me it was an *act of decision*. There sit the haughty, frowning Pharisees. Your imagination can easily picture those fine-looking gentlemen with fringes to their garments and phylacteries across their foreheads. There, too, are the scribes all wrapped up in their formal array—very grave and knowing men. Persons were almost afraid to look at them; they were so holy and so contemptuous. See, there they sit like judges at court to try the Savior. Now, Christ does, as it were, single out this poor man with a withered hand to be His witness and by His command He practically asks him which he will do—will he obey the Pharisees or Himself? It is wrong to heal on the Sabbath day, say the Pharisees. What do you say, you with the withered hand over yonder? If you agree with the Pharisees, of course you will decline to be healed on the Sabbath day and you won’t stretch out your hand. But if you agree with Jesus, you will be glad to be healed, Sabbath or no Sabbath. Ah, I see. You will stretch out your hand and break away from the tyrants who would keep you withered. The man did as good as vote for Christ when he stretched forth his hand. Many a soul has found peace when at last he has held up his hand and said, “Sink or swim, lost or saved. Christ for me. Christ for me. If I perish I will cling to His cross and to Him alone will I look, for I am on His side, whether He will have compassion upon me or not.” When that act of decision is performed, then comes the healing.

If you hold up your hand for Christ, He will make it a good hand, though now it is all paralyzed and drooping, like a dead thing. Unworthy as you are, He has the power, as you hold up your hand for Him, to put life into it and to give you the blessing your heart desires.

I think I hear somebody say, “Oh, sir, you would not be praising me too much if you were to say that I do wish to be saved and saved in Christ’s own way. I would give my very eyes to love Him.” Ah, you need not lose your eyes. Give Him your trust; give Him your soul’s eyes. Look to Him and live. “Oh, that I could be saved,” says one. “How I long for it.” May the Holy Spirit lead you to resolve in your own soul that you will not be saved by anybody but Christ. O that you would determine—

*“He that suffered in my stead,
Shall my Physician be.
I will not be comforted
Till Jesus comforts me.”*

When that is done, I do not doubt that through faith in the Physician you will be quickened by divine power and you will find healing at once.

IV. So I will just lead you on, in the fourth place, to notice THIS MAN’S OBEDIENCE. We are told that he stretched forth his hand. Christ said, “Stretch forth your hand.” Mark says, “And he did so.” That is to say, he stretched forth his hand. Now, observe that this man did not *do anything else in preference to what Jesus commanded*, though many awakened sinners are foolish enough to try experiments. Christ said, “Stretch forth your hand” and he did so. If, instead of that, the man had walked across the synagogue and brought himself up to Christ, the Master would have said, “I bade you do no such thing. I bade you stretch forth your hand.” Suppose he had then, with his left hand, begun to grasp the roll of the law as it stood in the synagogue and had kissed it out of reverence—would that have been of any use? The Master would only have said, “I bade you stretch forth your hand.” Alas, there are many, many souls that say, “We are bidden to trust in Jesus, but instead of that we will attend the means of grace regularly.” Do that, by all means, but not as a substitute for faith or it will become a vain confidence. The command is, “Believe and live.” Attend to that, whatever else you do. “Well, I shall take to reading good books, perhaps I shall get good that way.” By all means read good books, but that is not the gospel—the gospel is, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.” Suppose a physician has a patient under his care and he says to him, “You are to take a bath in the morning. It will be of very great service to your disease.” But the man takes a cup of tea in the morning instead of the bath and he says, “This will do as well, I have no doubt.” What does his physician say when he inquires, “Did you follow my instructions?” “No, I did not.” “Then you do not expect, of course, that there will be any good result, for you have disobeyed me.” So we, practically, say to Jesus Christ, when we are under searching of soul, “Lord, You bid me trust You, but I would rather do something else. Lord, I need to have horrible convictions. I want to be shaken over hell’s mouth. I want to be alarmed and distressed.” Yes, you want everything but what Christ prescribes for you, which is that you should simply trust Him. Whether you feel or do not feel, you should just come and cast yourself on Him, that *He* may save you and He alone. “But you do not mean to say that you speak against praying, and reading good books, and so on?” Not one single word do I speak against any of those things, any more than if I were the physician I quoted, I should speak against the man’s drinking a cup of tea. Let him drink his tea, but not if he drinks it instead of taking the bath which I prescribe for him. So let the man pray—the more the better. Let the man search the Scriptures, but remember, that if these things are put in the place of simple faith in Christ, the soul will be ruined. Let me give you a text—did you ever hear it quoted properly? “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; but you will not come unto Me that you might have life.” That is where the life is—in Christ—not even in searching Scripture, good as the searching of Scripture is. If we put even golden idols into the place of Christ, such idols are as much to be broken as if they were idols of mud or idols of dung. It matters not how good an action is—if it is not what Christ commands—you will not be saved by it. “Stretch forth your hand,” He says. That was the way by which the healing was to come—the man did nothing else and he received a gracious reward.

Notice that *he did not raise any questions*. Now this man had a fair opportunity of raising questions. I think he might very fairly have stood up in his place and said, “This is inconsistent, good Master. You say to me, ‘Stretch forth your hand.’ Now, You know that if I can stretch forth my hand, there is nothing

wrong with me and therefore there is no room for Your miracle. And if I cannot stretch forth my hand, how can You tell me so to do?" Have you not heard some of our friends, who like to make jests of holy things and scoff at our doctrines of grace, declare that we teach, "You can and you can't; you shall and you shan't"? Their description is right enough, though meant to ridicule us. We do not object to their putting it thus if so it pleases them. We teach paradoxes and contradictions to the eye, if you only consider the letter—but if you get down into the innermost spirit, it is within these contradictions that the eternal truth is found. We know that the man is dead in trespasses and sins—steeped in a spiritual and moral torpor out of which he cannot raise himself—yet do we by the Master's own command say, "Awake, you that sleep and arise from the dead and Christ shall give you life." Or in other words, we say to the withered hand, "Be you stretched out," and it is done. The blessed result justifies that very teaching which in itself seems so worthy of sarcastic remark.

Notice further that what the man did was that *he was told to do—stretch out his hand* and he did stretch out his hand. If you had asked him, "Did you stretch out your hand?" perhaps he would have said, "Of course I did. Nobody else did." "Wait a minute, my good man. Did you *of yourself* stretch out your hand?" "Oh, no," he would say, "because I have tried many times before and I could not, but this time I did it." "Then how was it that you were able to do it?" "Jesus told me to do it and I was willing—and it was done." I do not expect that he could have explained the rationale of it and perhaps we cannot either. It must, indeed, have been a very beautiful sight to see that poor, withered, limp, wilted hand, first hanging down and then stretched out before all the people in the middle of the synagogue. Do you not see the blood begin to flow, the nerves gaining power, and the hand opening like a reviving flower? Oh, the delight of his sparkling eyes as at first he could only fix them upon the little finger and the thumb to see if they were really all alive! Then he turned, looked at that blessed One who had healed him and seemed anxious to fall down at His feet and give Him all the praise! Even so, we cannot explain conversion and regeneration and the new birth and all that—but we know this—that Jesus Christ says, "Believe," and we believe. By our own power? No. But as we will to believe (and He gives us that will) there comes a power to do according to His good pleasure.

I look around me, wondering where is the man with the withered hand tonight or where is the woman with the withered hand. To such I would say in my Master's name, "Stretch out that hand of yours." It is an auspicious moment. A great thing shall be done unto you. Believe now. You have said before, "I can never believe." Now trust Jesus. Sink or swim, trust Him.—

***"Venture on Him, venture wholly.
Let no other trust intrude,
None but Jesus
Can do helpless sinners good."***

Our Lord Jesus never casts away a sinner who trusts in Him. Oh, I would almost put it like this—If you do not feel that you can come, or ought to come to Christ being so unworthy, sneak in. Sneak into His house of mercy, just as you have known a hungry dog steal in where there has been something to eat. The butcher very likely would deal him a kick if he saw him after a bone, but if he once gets it, he may as well make off with it and keep it to himself. There is this blessed thing about my Master—if you can get a crumb from under His table, He will not take it away from you, for He never casts out those that come. However they come, He neither turns them away nor takes back the blessing. He never says, "Come here, sir, you have no right to hope in My grace." Remember the woman in the crowd that dared not come to Christ before His face, but who came behind Him and touched the hem of His garment? She stole the cure from Him, as it were, and what did He say? "Come here, My woman, come here. What have you done? O, what right had you to touch My garment and steal a cure? For this a curse shall come upon you"? Did He speak thus in indignation? Not at all! Not at all! He bade her come and she told Him the truth and He said, "Daughter, be of good cheer. Your faith has made you whole." Get at Him, soul! Behind or in front, push for a touch of Him! Make a dash at Him. If there is a crowd of devils between you and Christ, plow your way through them by resolute faith. Though you are the most unworthy wretch that ever trusted Him, trust Him now that it may be told in heaven that there is a bigger sinner saved today than ever was saved before. Such a salvation will make Christ more glorious than He ever was. And if yours is a worse case than He ever touched with His healing hand to this day, well then,

when He has touched and healed you, as He will, there will be more praise to Him in heaven than He ever had before. O soul, I wish I could persuade you to draw near to Him, but only my Master can do it. May He draw you by His great grace!

V. The last thing to consider is THE RESULT OF THIS STRETCHING OUT OF THE MAN'S HAND IN OBEDIENCE TO THE COMMAND. He was healed.

I have already tried to set before you the fact that the healing was *manifest*. It was also immediate. The man had not to stand there a long time, but his hand was straightway healed—and yet the cure was *perfect*, for his hand was whole like unto the other, just as useful as his left hand had been, with all the extra dexterity which naturally belongs to the right. It was perfectly healed, though healed in a moment. You may depend upon it, that it was *permanently* healed for, though I have heard it said that saved souls fall from grace and perish, I never believed it, for I have never read of any of the cases which our Lord cured that they became bad again. I never heard of a withered hand that was healed and was paralyzed a second time. Nor will it ever be. My Master's cures last forever. I remember seeing in the shop windows some years ago that there was to be had within a "*momentary* cure" for the toothache. I noticed after a few months that the proprietor of that valuable medicine, whatever it was, had discovered that nobody wanted a momentary cure and so the word "*momentary*" was changed for the word, "*instantaneous*," which was a great improvement. I am afraid that some people's salvation is a momentary salvation. They get a sort of grace and then they lose it again. They get peace and by-and-by it is gone. What is needed is permanence and there is always permanence in the work of Christ. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance" and His healing is never revoked. O soul, do you see, then, what is to be had at this moment of Jesus? Healing for life; deliverance from the withering power of sin through life and through eternity! This is to be had by cheerful obedience to the matchless command, "Stretch forth your hand," or in other words, "Trust, trust, trust." Only this week I was talking with one who said he could not trust Christ and I said, "But, my dear friend, we cannot have that. Could you trust me?" Yes, he could trust me. "Why can you trust me and not trust the Lord Jesus? I will put it another way. If you said to me I cannot trust you, what would that imply?" "Why," he said, "it would mean, of course, that you were a very bad fellow, if I could not trust you." "Ah," I said, "that is exactly what you insinuate when you say you cannot trust Jesus, for he that believes not has made Him a liar. Do you mean to say that God is a liar?" The person to whom I spoke drew back with horror from that consequence and said "No, sir, I am sure that God is true." Very well, then, you can certainly trust one who is true. There can be no difficulty in that, to trust and rest upon one whom you cannot doubt must follow as a matter of course upon your good opinion of Him. Your belief that He is true is a sort of faith. Throw yourself upon Him now. Just as I lean upon this rail with all my weight, lean like that upon the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. That is faith. If God's mercy in Christ cannot save you, be lost. Make it your sole hope and confidence. Hang on your God in Christ Jesus as the vessel hangs upon the nail. As a man casts his whole weight upon his bed, so throw yourself unreservedly upon the divine love which was seen in Jesus and is seen there still. If you do this, you shall be saved. And I do not mean merely that you shall be saved from hell, for the power of faith, working in you by God, the Holy Spirit, shall save you from loving sin anymore. Being forgiven, you will henceforth love Him who forgives you and you will receive a new principle of action which shall be strong enough to break the bars of your old habits and you shall rise into a pure and holy life. If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed—and free you shall be at once if you now trust Him. The Lord grant His blessing, for Christ's sake. Amen.

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