

JESUS: THE SERVANT AT WORK

VOLUME ONE

STUDY TEN

Mercy Under Suspicious Eyes

Mark 3:1–6

To the legalist, religion is keeping the rules, obeying the regulations, and following the rituals. To Jesus, the most important thing in the world is not correct performance of a ritual; it is the spontaneous response of mercy to the cry of human need. May God help us learn that.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WE all know the feeling of living under a cloud of suspicion when someone determines to find fault in us and inspects everything we do. This person never lets us out of his or her sight, putting every move we make under a microscope and dissecting every word we say. Our critic's cruel remarks pour down like hailstones as we endure thunderstorms of hostility that will not pass and we cannot escape.

In the 1500s, Martin Luther felt the heavy rain of criticism when he began to expose the wrongs in the established church. In a formal papal decree known as a *bull*, the pope ordered him to publicly burn his writing and recant his teachings or be excommunicated. During the official hearing in Worms, Germany, in 1521, Luther stood before the suspicious eyes of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and spoke these words:

I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against my conscience. May God help me. Amen.¹

Luther drew courage from his Savior, Jesus, who lived under His critics' relentless scrutiny. These clipboard-carrying nitpickers hounded Him wherever He went. Jealous of His popularity and afraid of losing their grip on people, they looked for any reason to destroy His ministry and shut Him up.



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

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In the passage for this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we'll witness Jesus' bold response when the Pharisees' suspicions gathered into a life-threatening storm. Against fierce headwinds, however, Jesus never ran for cover. Listen to His response as His enemies condemn Him once more. Let Him fill you with His courage to press on and, like Him, to "never get tired of doing good" (2 Thessalonians 3:13).



PREPARE YOUR HEART

First, *pray*. Acknowledge your dependence on God as you turn to His Word. Ask for His wisdom to find practical ways to live out the eternal truths that He will reveal to you. Thank Him for His ever-present help as you learn to live boldly for Him.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

We've been following Jesus as He ministered in Galilee. When Jesus forgave the sins of a paralytic man, His critics fumed: "This is blasphemy!" (Mark 2:7). Soon, they were hurling accusatory questions like darts:

- When Jesus dined with tax collectors and sinners: "Why does he eat with such scum?" (2:16).
- When Jesus enjoyed His meals: "Why don't your disciples fast?" (2:18).
- When Jesus' disciples ate grain on the Sabbath: "Look, why are they breaking the law?" (2:24).

In each situation, God's remarkable Servant stood firm and fought for freedom. In this next scene, we'll follow Jesus into a synagogue on the Sabbath as He meets a disabled man. What will He do this time under the Pharisees' scrutinizing, suspicious eyes?

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Observation: Jesus Heals on the Sabbath

Begin your Bible study with observation. Read [Mark 3:1–6](#) like a detective. Note the details such as the key words, cause and effect, commands, and flow of action. Go over the passage many times. Your eyes can easily miss some details on the first reading.²

A Serious Need in the Synagogue—Mark 3:1

What does Mark 3:1 say about Jesus and the man with a deformed hand? What do you notice that is not mentioned?

A Suspicious Attitude Among the Critics—Mark 3:2

In Mark 3:2, note the day of the week. Look at the line, “Jesus’ enemies watched him closely.” Why?

A Merciful Heart for the Disabled—Mark 3:3–5

Jesus could have delayed acting to avoid accusation. He could have helped the man later under cover of night to stay out of range of His enemies’ fire. Instead, what did He do to bring everything out in the open in Mark 3:3–5? What did He say first? Why was He angry and then grieved? What happened after He told the man to stretch out his hand? Imagine being there. What feelings would you have had?

Jesus said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And we read, “He stretched it out and his hand was restored.” Look, look! Can you imagine his heart at that moment? —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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A Murderous Conspiracy—Mark 3:6

In his parallel passage, Luke wrote that Jesus' enemies "were wild with rage" (Luke 6:11). According to Mark 3:6, what did these men-turned-raging-beasts do? What do you think inflamed them the most?

What are they enraged over? He broke our rule. "Don't break our rule. You're going to pay for that, Buddy." —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Mercy Under Suspicious Eyes

According to [Mark 3:1–6](#), the Pharisees were watching Jesus as He approached the disabled man on the Sabbath. In the Greek dictionary at [billmounce.com](#), the Greek verb [paratereo](#) for "watched" means "watch insidiously" or "observe scrupulously."³ It's in the imperfect tense, suggesting past action that continued. What stands out regarding the meaning of this verb? How would you explain the attitude of the Pharisees?

The Pharisees couldn't care one whit about the withered hand of the man. He was simply a point of reference for them to use to see if Jesus would break their rules regarding the Sabbath. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Read [Mark 3:1–4](#) in The Message and J. B. Phillips translations. The Pharisees were hoping to catch Jesus violating the Sabbath. Did He? Review the article "[Did Jesus Break the Sabbath Law?](#)" at [gotquestions.org](#) and explain your conclusion.

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What point was Jesus making when He asked, “Does the law permit good deeds on the Sabbath, or is it a day for doing evil? Is this a day to save life or to destroy it?” (Mark 3:4)? Why didn’t the Pharisees answer?

To Jesus, human need poses a moral imperative, always. It trumps all things.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

We noted Jesus’ anger and grief over the Pharisees’ hard-heartedness. How are the emotions of anger and grief related? In what situations are these emotions appropriate?

As I grew up, I kind of learned the rules of religion that all anger is carnal, which is not true at all. There is a place for righteous indignation. I think many believers aren’t angry enough at the things they should be angry at, and they are too often angry at the things they ought to overlook. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Doing What Is Right Under Pressure

Let’s correlate our passage to see how doing what is right pleases the heart of God. Compare Micah’s response to the people about pleasing God and Jesus’ act of mercy in our passage (*Micah 6:6–8; Mark 3:1–6*). What similarities do you find? What lessons can we learn about doing what is right and the heart of God?

Jesus was saying, “There is everything right about this healing. I refuse to give in to those who are suspicious of me and my motives. I will do what is right.” Do you have any idea how rare are people with Jesus’ level of courage? We are trained from earliest years to be politically correct, to do what is acceptable. We learn to play it safe and not offend. We learn to be popular rather than right.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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What timeless principles do passages such as *Isaiah 1:10–17*; *Matthew 25:35–40*; *James 1:27* and our text accentuate about true religion? What do they teach about advocating for the defenseless?

Two timeless principles are at work here. The first is this: A litmus test of true versus false religion is its response to injustice. Here's the second: The primary test of all theology and morality is either passed or failed by one's response to the weakest and most defenseless member of society. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Do What Pleases God!

Three categories of applications emerge from Jesus healing the man on the Sabbath. First, we learn how to respond *to the disabled*. What Christlike attitudes can you display to those with disabilities, perhaps those who are wheelchair-bound or those with learning disabilities or special needs?

Pay attention to them, notice them. Never shun them. Show mercy to them. And may I say, stand in their defense if you need to. God honors that.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Second, we learn how to respond *to the mercy-givers*. Think about someone you know who has been caring for someone in need year after year. How can you express gratitude or provide him or her encouragement?

Find ways to encourage them, to stand alongside them. Help relieve their burden at times when you're able to do it. The burden is constant.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Third, we learn how to respond *to the hard-hearted*. What prayerful response to the hard-hearted might you give that reflects the heart of Jesus?

Pray that they'll change their hearts. God has a way of doing that. Pray that they will come to their senses and will realize how blind they have been. If necessary, be passionate about their hard-heartedness to the point of anger. It just isn't right. And then, don't forget to grieve over their hard-heartedness.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What have you learned from this passage that will help you do what is right instead of what is popular, show mercy under pressure, and live boldly for Christ?

As you conclude this study, let Christ's example ring as a bell of freedom inspiring you to always stand firm for what is right, regardless of what the critics say.



A FINAL PRAYER

Merciful Father, thank You for speaking to me in such tender tones. Use me as an instrument of Your peace and healing and hope. Help me do what is right instead of what is popular. Help me show mercy under pressure. Help me live boldly for You. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Martin Luther, as quoted in Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Mark*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 2 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 79.
2. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)" at [insight.org](#).
3. William D. Mounce, *Greek Dictionary*, [billmounce.com/greek-dictionary/paratero](#), see "paratero."

For the 2026 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Mirlenda Noëlliste in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2010, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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