

## “His Name is Steve”

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Matthew 12:9-14

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### **\*Message begins with a video about a homeless beggar\***

As we watched this video, most of us made some sort of identification of these two men; the wealthy man in the car and the homeless beggar on the corner. We see these people and immediately lump them into some sort of category. I've often wondered what Jesus might say as He passed by someone like this. I believe there is a good chance He would ask them their name.

Shortly after the incident with the woman in Simon's house, Jesus begins to travel to the nearby cities and towns (Luke 8:1). On one such visit near Capernaum, Jesus enters a synagogue where several Pharisees worshiped. <sup>9</sup> “Departing from there, He went into their synagogue. <sup>10</sup> And a man *was there* whose hand was withered. And they questioned Jesus, asking, ‘Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?’ - so that they might accuse Him. <sup>11</sup> And He said to them, ‘What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out? <sup>12</sup> How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.’ <sup>13</sup> Then He said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand!’ He stretched it out, and it was restored to normal, like the other. <sup>14</sup> But the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, *as to how they might destroy Him.*” <sup>1</sup> (Matthew 12:9-14)

As the number of people following Jesus increased, especially after healing so many as John's two disciples looked on, it doesn't take too much imagination to see how His popularity would have swelled. Picture the crowd as Jesus would have moved from place to place. Some tagged along out of curiosity, but most of them followed because they had been touched by Jesus in some way. Jesus looked past what appeared on the outside and saw these people for who they really were. And He looked at them with love and tenderness in His heart.

Consider the man with the withered hand. As he stood there in the synagogue that day, what must he have felt being the brunt of pointing and talking? I am

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<sup>1</sup>New American Standard Bible : 1995 update. 1995 (Mt 12:9-14). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

continually shocked at the cold heartedness of these Pharisees as they point out people who are not healthy; as if these people are known by their disease and not by their name. Can you imagine the church service? “Welcome to all of you who have come out to worship today, especially those in our handicap section in the back corner”.

Jesus doesn't know them by their disease, He sees the person within. He doesn't look upon the way they dress but upon the person who lies hidden within. But what's even more interesting is that Jesus doesn't start qualifying a person's disease. There is no questioning; no probing, as if the answer is important to Him. This man with the withered hand, Jesus doesn't ask “So what foolish things did you do to make it this way”. In so many occasion of healing, Jesus never demands a cause from an individual as if to justify the healing; He simply heals.

There are so many churches that have sunk to the point that they pat themselves on the back for being such a wonderful church, set in their sanctuary singing “How Great Thou Art”, while right outside their doors the lost sheep are dying and going to hell. They all know of the wicked and sinful people in this world and can readily point them out in a crowd. But no one seems to take the time to find out their name; no one takes the time to rescue the lost sheep. These people take more pride in identifying the diseased and afflicted than in helping them find healing and wholeness in Christ.

This passage of scripture is important for me because I need to be reminded from time to time to look at the person and not the disease; their outward affliction. Even though I sometimes shine, there are times when I slip back into that pharisaical way of looking at others. One year, as I was returning home from the Moody Bible Institute, I sat in the train station in Chicago and began chatting with a man who had been sleeping on the floor. He looked homeless from all outward appearances. Steve obviously suffered from some disease similar to Cerebral Palsy. But rather than homeless, Steve was waiting for a train just like I was. We talked about our faith and our relationship with Jesus. Although Steve was difficult to understand, it was clear he was planning a visit with his sister in Saint Louis.

After a while, the Chicago police show up and tell Steve to move along; the train station wasn't a place to sleep. They accused him of disrupting the rest of us in the station. I informed them that his name was Steve, and that he was waiting for a train. And then Steve and I shared the little bit of food I had saved for the trip home.

Now, as much as I like to remember this event, to often I'm reminded that the problem within me still exists. Just last week I was watching a television commercial advertising a drug that helps people cope with sexually transmitted diseases. My first thought was not to the individual who may be battling this disease, but the fact that it was their sinful lifestyle that brought on this problem in the first place. And as quickly as my mind formed the thought, Jesus just as quickly reminded me **"How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep!"**

Why do I struggle with this? Why can't I learn to see what's important when dealing with people? Why do I have compassion only for those whom I have declared worthy of my compassion? Like the Pharisees, I stand and judge whether a person should be healed or not, while Christ simply tells them to stretch out their hand.

It is essential for all of us to be as Christ like as we possibly can when we are dealing with the lost and afflicted in this world. It is essential because Christ is not here to do it, He has ascended to heaven. The work of being Jesus to the people of this world rests in our hands. Jesus has entrusted His words, His compassion, and His love into His followers; people like you and me. If we don't learn the lesson **"how much more valuable then is a man than a sheep"** (or even a building), then we will continue to see the church dwindle in size and Christianity will become even more irrelevant to the lost and hurting people of this world.

By chance, do you spend more time qualifying whether or not a person deserves compassion than wrestling with the fact that a lost sheep is suffering and hurting? Like the Prophet Jonah, maybe there are certain people you feel do not deserve His healing, so you avoid them altogether. Do you limit the healing of our Savior, not just physical but emotional and mental as well, to those you deem worthy? The person living without Jesus, whatever their outward appearance, has a name and does not know the Savior. What will you do to solve this problem?