

“YOU ARE SET FREE FROM YOUR INFIRMITY”

Luke 13:10-21

Key Verse: 13:12

“When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, ‘Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.’”

Living in America, we seem to be free. This is called “the land of the free.” But in reality, so many people are bound by things such as wounds, failures, bitterness, fatalistic worldviews, jealousy, lustful desires and greed. We can also be bound by legalism. Instead of enjoying our freedom, we suffer from frustration and condemnation, guilt and shame. Naturally we complain and despair. It is hard to have healthy relationships, because people complain past each other, without really listening or understanding. Our precious freedom, purchased by the blood of our ancestors, seems wasted on entitled self-indulgence. In order to have true freedom, we need Jesus. In today’s passage we learn how Jesus sets us free.

First, Jesus sets us free from our infirmities (10-13). As we know, Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem, where suffering and death awaited him. Anyone would naturally be overwhelmed by such awareness to the point that they could do nothing. What was Jesus doing? Verse 10 tells us that on a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues. Jesus knew that what people needed most is the word of God. Out of a great shepherd’s heart for them, he taught them. Among them, there was a woman who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. Nevertheless, she came to the synagogue to hear Jesus’ teaching because she believed that the word of God could give true rest to her soul. In verse 11, the original Greek begins with the word “behold.” In effect, Luke is telling each one of us, “Hey! Pay attention to this!” The woman was bent over and could not straighten up at all (11). As a woman, she was created to be beautiful and happy and loved, and to love others. To a woman, appearance is so important. Many are concerned about small pimples or wrinkles on their faces. How unbearable for this woman that she became ugly, miserable, useless and burdensome. It seems that the bones in her spine were rigidly fused together. I met a woman in a similar condition, who testified as follows: “From the pelvis through the neck, my spine is bent, crooked and twisted. Any moment I’m not struggling against it, I’m crippled. I wake up all night long, shifting positions because of discomfort. Each morning I’m bent over like an animal. To stand upright and attempt to maintain it, I need all my mental and physical faculties. Sitting exacerbates the problem, so resting is costly. Many movements are cumbersome. Every step I take is a new battle.” Such suffering is almost unbearable. Yet it was not only the woman’s body that was crippled, but her entire life. She could not have healthy self-esteem. To make

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matters worse for her, crippled people were prohibited from entering the temple (Lev 21:18). Not only was she marginalized by people, but it seemed that she was not acceptable to God. She was vulnerable to doubt God’s love and fall into deep sorrow and fatalism. What was worse, Satan worked through this to torment her soul with condemnation and to bind her as his slave. This had lasted not only days or weeks, but eighteen long years. She could not have true rest for a long time.

When Jesus saw her, he understood her suffering and had compassion for her. Healing her became the most important thing to him, and he stopped teaching. He called her forward. People must have been surprised. No one had paid attention to her. But to Jesus she seemed to be the most important person in the synagogue. It was not easy for her to go forward. She did so by faith, trusting Jesus. Then Jesus proclaimed, **“Woman, you are set free from your infirmity”** (12). To her, it was like the Emancipation Proclamation. Not only did Jesus proclaim freedom, but he also put his hands on her. These were the hands of mercy and love and the hands of life. Immediately she straightened up and praised God (13). Jesus completely healed her body and spirit. Jesus restored her dignity and honor as a woman, and enabled her to live a new life for the glory of God.

God created human beings in his own image to be stewards and rulers of his world. God made other animals crawl on the ground with four feet, looking down. But human beings can walk around on two feet and use two hands to do many things, and can look upward. We have tremendous capacity to move and work with freedom and confidence. We are fearfully and wonderfully made to live with dignity, crowned in glory and honor (Ps 8:5; 139:14). But since the fall of man, the power of sin has disfigured the image of God and corrupted and degraded people in many ways. St. Paul describes fallen man like this: **“[they] live...in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed”** (Eph 4:17-19). Though they look okay physically, their minds and spirits are bent or crooked. The Bible diagnoses generations as **“unbelieving and perverse... wicked... evil and adulterous... unfaithful... sinful... crooked and unjust... crooked and perverted”** (Lk 9:41; 11:29; Mt 12:39; 16:4; Mk 8:38; Ac 2:40; Php 2:15). These same diagnoses are true of recent generations, whether they be baby boomers or millennials. Due to sins, people’s minds and thoughts, hearts and emotions are damaged and distorted. Recently we heard about two teenage men who entered a church near Normandy, France and killed Father Jacques Hamel, age 86. How could this happen? It is the terrible

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effect of sin. Where there should be love and peace, there is anger, hatred and violence. Where there should be compassion and mercy, there is selfish indifference. Where there should be wisdom and understanding, there is ignorance and foolishness. Where there should be thankfulness and kindness, there is bitterness, complaints, and cruelty. Where there should be holy purity, there is corruption. This is why some people are smart yet fail to study, attractive yet fail to establish families, talented yet fail to get a good job. We all need healing and restoration from the power of sin.

The consequences are even more serious than we realize. It is because Satan is working behind the scenes. Satan binds us and makes us his slaves. That is why Jesus said, **“whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years”** (16b). The question is who can heal and restore us? Who can set us free from Satan’s bondage? Satan is very strong. According to Revelation, he has ten horns and seven heads (Rev 13:1). No human being can defeat him. No medical treatment or technology can work against him. Only someone stronger than he can set his prisoners free (11:22). Jesus is stronger than Satan. How did Jesus defeat Satan? Satan’s weapons are sin and death. In order to set us free from the power of sin and death, Jesus paid the price through his death on the cross. Peter said, **“He himself bore our sins’ in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; ‘by his wounds you have been healed’”** (1Pe 2:24). Peter also boldly declared, **“But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him”** (Ac 2:24). In this way Jesus defeated the power of death through his resurrection. So anyone who comes to Jesus can be healed from their wounds, restored in the image of God and set free from all the powers of sin and Satan. They can live a healthy, happy, meaningful and fruitful life.

I know of a young man who has experienced Jesus’ grace of being set free and restored. He grew up on the east coast in the 1980s and 90’s. His parents were devout believers, and he accepted Christ at a young age. He wanted to live a good life. He was home-schooled and studied well. But when he entered a public high school, he had trouble socially. He was ridiculed and bullied. He withdrew and lived in isolation. A desire for vengeance grew in his heart. He began to hate those who had hurt him and he condemned them in self-righteousness. As he grew older, he began to target his hatred toward Muslims and atheists. But one day, in his hatred, he had a violent argument and got into legal trouble. He began to realize that he had a problem and cried out to God for help. Then he met a Bible teacher who studied God’s word with him. He was a faithful Bible student. But he often ranted and vented during their Bible study for long periods of time. His Bible

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teacher patiently bore with him and prayed for him. During twelve years of Bible study, he gradually grew spiritually. He realized that he must die to his own self-righteousness and practice the forgiving love of Jesus. As he does so, he is experiencing the deep grace of Jesus’ healing and true freedom from the power of sin and Satan. He has learned to respect his Bible teacher and to humbly make relationships. Jesus sets us free from our infirmities, heals our wounds, and restores the image of God in us. Let’s come to Jesus as we are by faith.

Second, Jesus sets us free from legalism (14-17). When people saw the wonderful things Jesus had done for the woman, they should have praised God together with her and had a celebration. The synagogue leader should have been the first to celebrate this great work of God. But to our surprise, he was indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath (14a). He could not rebuke Jesus. So he rebuked the people, saying, **“There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath”** (14b). Why was he so indignant? In some sense, he was right. Sometimes, people need to be encouraged to have a right attitude toward the Sabbath as the expression of honoring God. But in fact, the people were all praising God. Still, the synagogue leader felt that something was wrong. To him, Jesus had broken the Sabbath rule by healing the woman. To him, the Sabbath rule was more important than healing the woman. Yet in fact, the Sabbath rule he was referring to was a man-made interpretation, not God’s word. The Jewish rabbis made many rules interpreting what it meant to work on the Sabbath. They developed 39 major categories of work and made over 600 specific rules that limited or prohibited activity. They considered healing a kind of work on the Sabbath. When they made these rules, their motive was to keep the Sabbath holy. But as time passed, they lost the original purpose of it and became bound by the rules themselves. This made them very legalistic and judgmental. This is why the synagogue ruler was indignant. He was not happy or free. He could not see the work of God, nor did he have compassion on a long-suffering woman. In a word he was a slave of legalism and led people astray. In the same way, it is easy for us to make our own standard, that seems to be based on the Bible, and to judge others. When we do so, without fully understanding their agony, we hurt them and it is sin against God. Whenever we serve others, it should be with a shepherd’s heart, not a legalistic mindset.

How did Jesus deal with the synagogue ruler? The Lord answered him, **“You hypocrites! Doesn’t each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water?”** (15) Why did Jesus call Jewish leaders hypocrites? It was a generally accepted practice that the Jews could break their Sabbath rules to care for animals. They should have been willing to do this

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for human beings, who are much more valuable than animals. Their value system was crooked. In fact, the synagogue ruler was a crippled person both mentally and spiritually. So Jesus corrected him out of love, **“Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?”** (16) Jesus’ point was that the woman was very precious, beyond compare to an animal. Jesus called the woman **“a daughter of Abraham.”** Jesus included her as one of God’s precious family members. When she heard the words, **“daughter of Abraham,”** her crushed and wounded soul was healed. She was free from Satan’s torment. Jesus restored her dignity as a woman. She found true rest, peace and joy. Jesus wants people to see his daughters with dignity and honor instead of being legalistic, oppressive and condescending. When my son-in-law Glenn first met my daughter Rebekah, he wanted to ask her on a date. But something stopped him. He began to be very troubled. So he went to his room, knelt down, and prayed to God. At that time, he was impressed by the idea that Rebekah was not just a woman, but a daughter of God. The fear of God came over him. He became more serious about attending Sunday worship service at Moody church. He faithfully studied the Bible and was baptized by Pastor Erwin Lutzer. He became a genuine, practicing Christian. He has always treated my daughter with dignity and honor. So I like him very much and always thank God for him. It is pleasing to Jesus when young men see his daughters with dignity and honor.

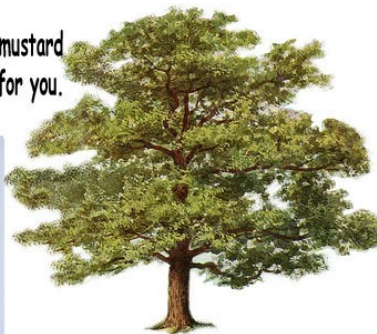
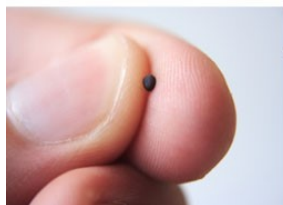
At Jesus’ words, all of his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing (17). People felt a tremendous sense of liberation from the heavy burden of keeping all the Sabbath rules. Here we learn that Jesus’ words set us free from legalism. Legalism always leads to a bad outcome. If we keep the rules, we become proud and self-righteous and condemn others based on our own standard. If we fail to keep the rules, we fall into self-condemnation and despair. When we live with a legalistic mindset, our souls never experience true rest, peace and joy. But when we live by grace alone through faith in Jesus we are free from legalism and can experience true rest, peace and joy. Thank you, Jesus!

Third, the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed and yeast (18-21). When Jesus demonstrated his compassion, love, wisdom and power, one person was restored and the kingdom of God was revealed. The whole atmosphere was changed from fatalistic, burdensome, legalistic and oppressive to joyful, free, happy and hopeful. Satan’s power was driven out and Jesus was reigning in the woman’s heart as Savior King. The kingdom of God had come through Jesus. This blessedness was not just for one woman, but is for everyone who believes in Jesus.

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Jesus wanted to help people open their eyes and see the kingdom of God by telling two parables.

If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, nothing will be impossible for you.



First is the parable of the mustard seed. Jesus asked, **“What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches”** (18-19). The mustard seed is the smallest of all garden seeds. It is like one sesame seed on a hamburger bun. It is easy to ignore or dismiss it. But this one seed has life in it. It has the potential to grow into a giant garden tree twelve feet tall and provide perches for many weary birds. In the same way the kingdom of God grows. It may begin with what seems to be a small act of teaching the Bible to one person until they are restored in the image of God. It may seem insignificant, but in God’s eyes it is the beginning of new life which will grow endlessly. Why did Jesus tell this parable at this moment, and how is it related to the previous event? At that time the Jews expected the Messiah to bring kingdom of God with apocalyptic power and glory, judging all evil and establishing the visible kingdom. To their eyes, Jesus’ teaching and healing one crippled woman seemed insignificant. But the kingdom of God started when one person received Jesus’ words and was restored in God’s image. The work of God in one person is more important than all the speeches of politicians. God’s life-giving work goes on in this way. So we should not overlook or ignore, but appreciate and value highly the work of God in one person through his word.



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Next, Jesus explained that the kingdom of God is like yeast. **“Again he asked, ‘What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough’”** (20-21). Sixty pounds of flour can produce enough bread to feed 100 people. A minute quantity of yeast can permeate such a large amount of dough and have a profound effect on it. This illustrates the power of influence. One person who is legalistic and indignant, like the synagogue leader, can influence a whole community. Their words can spread like poison causing others to be depressed, angry, or bitter. On the other hand, one person who believes in Jesus, teaches his word, and loves others with a compassionate heart can influence a whole community with joy and peace. However, many people ignore the seriousness of influence. Influence is invisible; we cannot see or touch it. But it permeates all our relationships. Everyone gives influence, be it good or bad. So we should examine ourselves. What kind of influence do I give to my family members and others? If we are legalistic, self-righteous and judgmental like the synagogue ruler, we can oppress and wound others badly. But when we have faith in Jesus and help even one needy person with the word of God until they are restored, we can be a good influence. Then the kingdom of God permeates our families, our workplace, and our community. A couple weeks ago, Darren Gruett suddenly lost his job due to downsizing. As news of this spread, a former coworker heard about it, called him immediately, and offered him a new job. Darren asked him, “Why did you offer me this job?” He was told, “When I worked with you, I watched you closely, knowing that you are a Christian. Even though your supervisor was a domineering and harsh person, you always did your best to work things out with patience, kindness and respect. Then I said to myself, ‘That is the kind of person I want to work with.’ So I called you.” Actually, everyone wants to be surrounded by people of good influence.

Jesus sets us free from our infirmities. Jesus sets us free from legalism. As Jesus dwells in us, he makes us a good influence through whom God’s kingdom spreads. Through seeing Jesus’ compassionate care for one suffering woman, I have been convicted of my lack of understanding and compassion, especially toward my wife. I acknowledge this before you, O Lord, and pray that you may create in me a new heart that is like yours. I pray to be useful to you as a shepherd for suffering people. Let’s all live by faith in Jesus and serve him in the freedom and peace he gives. Surely the kingdom of God will spread.