

INTRO: Please turn with me in your Bibles if you will to Luke 13:10-21. It's important to read any paragraph of the Bible in the context of what's come before it, and our paragraph this morning is no exception (Bock 2:1,212). If we look back to Luke 12:54-56, we find Jesus talking about the weather. He says that the people of his day know how to predict the rain and the hot winds by looking at the clouds or paying attention to the winds; but when it comes to knowing the times, and especially the time of Jesus and what His earthly ministry meant for human history, people were totally clueless. In our passage this morning, Jesus works a miraculous healing. It's an example of showing them a cloud that would indicate to them that a great rain shower is coming. This is yet another sign of the times, a miracle of Jesus that attests to His divine nature as God, and to His mission to heal people of the disabling effects of their sin. And the question is, will people be able to pick up on it? Can they read the ministry of Jesus like they read the clouds of the sky? Can we?

If we look at the paragraph just before ours, Luke 13:6-9, we find Jesus telling the parable of the fruitless fig tree. The man who owned the vineyard had told the vinedresser to cut down the tree because it'd been fruitless for far too long, 3 years. The vinedresser asks for time to dig around it spread fertilizer, and apparently that time is granted. It's a warning to Israel that their temple religion had become fruitless and was in jeopardy of being taken away from them. Now in verses 10-21, Jesus works a miracle, and it's a test to see if the tree of second-temple Judaism would bear the good fruit of faith in Jesus and repentance from their sin. And it's a test of whether we ourselves will bear that same good fruit – faith in Jesus and repentance from our own sin. **Jesus frees us from the debilitating effects of sin so that we can walk uprightly before Him.** And the drama unfolds here in four scenes: The Restoration in vv.10-13, The Objection in v.14, The Correction in vv.15-17, and The Illustration in vv.19-21. Those four scenes will guide our time together this morning in God's word. And I hope that by the end of our time together you'll not only agree that Jesus is able to free us from the debilitating effects of sin. I also hope that your trust in His power would grow, that you would see yourself in this woman who has been healed of her disability, and that you'd go away praising God for His goodness to you in Jesus Christ. Let's stand now to honor the public reading of God's word as I read Luke 13:10-21.

1. THE RESTORATION (13:10-13)

Luke starts off by noting that the healing episode to follow happens in the context of Jesus' teaching in a certain synagogue on Sabbath Day. Teaching was the fabric of Jesus' ministry. His teaching was the background and context that made His miracles meaningful, and He offered that teaching, very often, on the Sabbath Day. And in this parable, the Sabbath Day context is especially important. On this particular Sabbath Day, there was a woman who had a disabling spirit. The text doesn't explain it, but this appears to be a personal spirit, a demon, who makes it impossible for the woman to stand up straight. That's confirmed by Jesus when he says later in v.16 that Satan had bound her. So she has had a serious physical disability for almost two decades.

What's amazing is that this woman is in the synagogue at all. She did not let even a demonic disability keep her home and away from God's people. That is a wonderful model of Christian devotion for us. Her love for God's word and God's people single-handedly trumped her pain, her fear, her embarrassment, and her self-pity. As weak as she was, she would not let the devil have the Lord's Day. Christian, how much does it take for you to skip a Sunday? It took a whole

lot for this woman. She came to church in spite of her physical suffering. J.C. Ryle said of her “The conduct of this suffering Jewess may well put to shame many a strong and healthy professing Christian. How many in the full enjoyment of bodily vigor, allow the most frivolous excuses to keep them away from the house of God! ...How many find religious services a weariness while they attend them, and feel relieved when they are over! ...Our feelings about Sundays are sure tests of the state of our souls. The man who can find no pleasure in giving God one day in the week, is manifestly unfit for heaven. Heaven itself is nothing but an eternal Sabbath.”¹ What do you think of Sundays, friend? Other concerns or hardships or events should not easily take priority over observing the Lord’s Day with the Lord’s people.

So here is this woman, bent over double for 18 long years. Her physical condition illustrates our natural human condition in sin. Our sin bends us down, away from God. It paralyzes us in all things spiritual. It hardens our spiritual joints and makes us crooked. The human soul is not supposed to be hunched over. It’s supposed to be upright. And God created it upright. But we sinned, we rebelled against the good God who made us and loved us. We wanted to be our own authority, to make our own choices about right and wrong out from under God’s good authority. And now that sin has curved and distorted and calcified the structure of our souls, so that now, in Augustine’s great phrase, our nature is *incurvata en se est*, curved in on itself; and apart from God’s good work in us in Christ, we are not the way we are supposed to be.

But after 18 years we get used to it, it seems natural; it seems like there’s no other way to be. And so we adapt, we expect nothing different. And if nothing changed, nothing would be different. But what makes all the difference comes in verse 12. “*When Jesus saw her.*” This is the first glimmer of hope for this woman. Jesus saw her. It reminds you of the beginning of the Exodus story in Exodus 2:25 “*God saw the people of Israel – and God knew.*” Oh sinner, Jesus sees what your sin has done to you. Jesus sees how bent over you are in your soul. He can see how crooked you are inside, and that you are totally unable to stand up straight in your heart. He sees how your sin has debilitated you. He knows. He knows the pain and frustration, and the helplessness of not being able to change yourself. And he has compassion for you.

Jesus calls this woman to Himself. Don’t pass over that too quickly. A Jewish man would never have called out to a woman in public. That breached the canons of etiquette. It was beneath a Jewish man to do that. But it was not beneath Jesus. And notice too that the woman does not ask for Jesus’ attention. Jesus initiates everything here. She didn’t see Him. She couldn’t see Him. She was bent over. He saw her. And look at what he does. Look at Jesus’ power and authority here. No showmanship. Just love acting in power by the word of God. Jesus simply, effortlessly, pronounces release from her weakness. “*He said to her, ‘You have been freed from your disability. And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight.’*” Who says that? And it’s a perfect passive verb, it indicates past completed action with ongoing effects. “*You have been freed.*” How can he say that, so confidently? She’s been hunched over, disabled, for 18 years? And here Jesus comes along and says “*you have been freed.*” Who does He think He is? Yes, that is the question, isn’t it friend? Who does Jesus think He is? Who is He? What kind of authority does He have? Where did he get that authority? Who gave it to Him? Eighteen years of disability, and on an unassuming Saturday, one touch, one word from Jesus, and immediately, immediately the text says in v.13, she was made straight.

¹ Ryle, *Luke* 2:119, 120.

The apostles knew how to interpret this miracle. **Acts 2:22** Peter calls Jesus of Nazareth “*a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst.*” This is one of those attesting mighty works. Jesus didn’t just do this for the woman, although he did have compassion on her. He did it to attest to His own divinity as the Son of God, sent from heaven to live the perfect life we should have lived and to die the substitute death we should have died as the penalty for our sins against a holy God.

There is a world of hope here for sinners, isn’t there? Jesus laid his healing hands on this woman. Jesus is not afraid to identify with our weakness. That’s the whole reason He became a man, was to identify with our temptations, to become poor, to experience our limitations and temptations, without sinning Himself, so that He might become for us a perfect High Priest to represent God to us and us to God. And the result is praise. She glorified God. To be known by Jesus and to obey Him is to be restored to full human dignity. It’s to walk upright again. Full human dignity is not found in full human autonomy. Autonomy leads people to slavery – slavery to our own appetites, to the spirit of the age, even to Satan Himself. The fallen human heart thinks that autonomy from God leads to ability for self. But autonomy from God never leads to ability. Autonomy from God leads to disability and deformity. Autonomy does not make us what we ought to be. Autonomy kills – that’s the lesson of Adam eating from the Tree of Knowledge. What restores my human dignity is not total freedom from God. It is total devotion to God, and wholehearted praise of God as we find Him in the powerful and gentle Jesus.

This healing illustrates what it looks like for a person to be converted to Christianity. We are crippled by our sin. Jesus sees us – before we see Him – He calls us to Himself, He pronounces us forgiven, lays His hand on us, and all of a sudden, we’re able to walk upright in obedience to God. Our slavery to sin is gone. Our disability becomes a distant memory. Sinner, Jesus can do this for you. Listen again to J.C. Ryle’s precious words on this passage. “With Christ nothing is impossible...He can bend stubborn wills which for ‘eighteen years’ have been set on self-pleasing, on sin, and the world. He can enable sinners who have been long poring over earthly things, to look upward to heaven, and see the kingdom of God...Let us never despair about our own salvation. Our sins may be countless. Our lives may have been long spent in worldliness and foolishness. Our youth may have been wasted in soul-defiling excesses, of which we are sorely ashamed. But are we willing to come to Christ, and commit our souls to Him? If so, there is hope. He can heal us thoroughly, and say ‘thou art loosed from thine infirmity.’ Let us never despair about the salvation of others so long as they are alive... We may perhaps have relatives whose case seems desperate because of their wickedness. But it is not really so. There are no incurable cases with Christ.”

2. THE OBJECTION (13:14)

Not everyone in the synagogue is equally impressed with Jesus’ healing of this woman. In v.14 the synagogue leader himself is indignant because he thinks Jesus is violating the Sabbath. Jesus is working a miracle on a day that’s supposed to be devoted to rest. This man even quotes Scripture to prove his point here in v.14. “*There are six days in which work ought to be done.*” That’s a reference to the Ten Commandments in **Deut 5:12-14** “*Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work....*” This man thinks he is being faithful to Scripture by rebuking the crowd for wanting Jesus to

perform a healing miracle on the Sabbath. But if you're reading carefully, there's a little wrinkle here. The leader is rebuking the crowd for coming to Jesus for healing. But wait a minute. Who made the first move? Jesus made the first move. It wasn't the woman who came to Jesus in v.12. It was Jesus who noticed the woman and called her over to Himself. It's not the woman's fault. It's Jesus' fault.

So why is the synagogue leader rebuking the crowd? Why isn't he rebuking Jesus? Well, this is actually his way of rebuking Jesus – indirectly. This guy isn't really rebuking the crowd so much as he is indirectly, but very publicly, rebuking Jesus Himself. He can't bring himself to rebuke Jesus directly, so out of cowardice and really hypocrisy, he rebukes the crowd. Now this could all come off as very spiritual, right? I mean, this guy is really taking the moral high road. "Don't come to be healed on the Sabbath, because that make someone else like Jesus work on the Sabbath, when the Sabbath is supposed to be a day of rest..." "Oh, wow, I never thought of it like that, but I guess he's right, maybe we shouldn't expect healings on the Sabbath. I sure wouldn't want to make someone else violate the Sabbath on account of me. Wow, I'm so selfish..." But what does Jesus think?

Now before we move on, we need to notice a word that this man uses. He says "There *are six days in which work ought to be done.*" Ought (dei, cf. e;dei in v.16)... Remember that. The synagogue leader thinks he knows what ought to be done and when it ought to be done. Jesus thinks he ought to know better.

3. THE CORRECTION (13:15-17)

"*The Lord answered him, 'You hypocrites.'* Notice, the word hypocrites is in the plural. Jesus is answering the man, but evidently he's got a posse there that agrees with him. They're convinced; but Jesus calls them hypocrites. Well, for starters, we can just keep reading in v.15. "*Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it?*" It's time to play "Know Your Old Testament." Jesus is not just pointing out a common practice, a work of necessity. He's actually referring to the practice of Old Testament Law. And He's referring to the passage immediately following the one that the synagogue leader quoted. The leader quoted Dt 5:13. Jesus is referring to Deut 5:14. "*On [the Sabbath] you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock....*" Every Jew knew that you weren't supposed to work your livestock on the Sabbath. But that didn't mean you couldn't untie them from the barn or walk them to the water trough. There were actually laws written down that told you how far you could walk your ox or your donkey on the Sabbath. But if the synagogue leader is right, and Jesus was wrong to heal the woman, then animals shouldn't be allowed to walk over to the trough for water. It's too much work on the Sabbath. So here's something - everyone in Israel knew that the Sabbath was no excuse for animal cruelty, yet when it comes to people, they get the letter of the law rather than the spirit. On the leaders' logic, animals get treated better than people. That's total hypocrisy.

But there's a deeper level of hypocrisy going on here. The irony is that the Sabbath principle itself pointed to the very kind of healing that Jesus performed. The Sabbath pointed back to God's rest after creation, and is pointed forward to a further rest that God would provide for His people when He set all things straight and made all things new (Heb 4:9). The whole idea of the

Sabbath was rest, release, which points back to the language of his pronouncement to the woman in v.12. He said in v.12 “woman, you are freed (avpole,lusai).” He says then in v.15 “Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie (lu,ei) his ox.” He says again in v.16 “Ought not this woman be loosed” (luqh/nai). The word for freed in v.12, untie in v.15, and loosed in v.16 are all forms of the same Greek word, lu,w, to loose, untie, free (cf. Isa 58:6).

The whole Sabbath principle, from Sabbath day, to the 7th year sabbatical to the year of Jubilee, is freedom, release from work, release from debt, release from obligation. **Dt 5:15** *You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.* This was also the stated reason for releasing slaves every 7th year in Dt 15:12-15 “If your brother, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you....You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the lord your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today.” And in Lev 25:10 God tells His people to “consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants.” The Year of Jubilee was about releasing property back to its original owners; it was about freedom, liberty, release from work, bondage, slavery, and oppression. Of all days for a woman to be released from a disability, the Sabbath was the day!

But even this isn't all. We have to remember that Luke sets up Jesus' whole public ministry in Luke 4:18 with Jesus in a different synagogue quoting the Sabbath principle from Isa 61:1 and applying it to Himself. “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*” And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Jesus describes his whole mission as the ultimate fulfillment of the Sabbatical principle. His ministry is the year of jubilee.

By healing this woman, specifically and intentionally on the Sabbath, Jesus was illustrating His commission to proclaim freedom to the captives from Isaiah 61:1. He is setting at liberty one who is oppressed. He was doing exactly the right thing on exactly the right day. He was releasing this woman on the most appropriate day possible, the day of release, the Sabbath day! That's why Jesus says in v.16 “ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond **ON THE SABBATH DAY?**” There's that word ought again, the one the synagogue leader used. The leader said this kind of work ought to be done on some other day. Jesus said he ought to know better, because the Sabbath is the Day of Release, precisely the day when SHE OUGHT to be released. How can you argue against that? Jesus' emphasis is on the Sabbath Day itself. Of all the days to be released from Satan's crippling grip, the Sabbath Day is the most appropriate. And the irony is that of all the people present, it's the leader of the synagogue who objects.

And there's a word missing from v.16 in the ESV that's in the Greek, a little word, but an important word. It's the word “behold” or look (ivdou.), and it's in an emphatic position, right before the number 18. “*And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound,*

behold, for 18 years, be loosed...?” It’s like he’s saying “look at her! Look at this woman. She had been like that for 18 years. Eighteen years she had been disabled like that, and you tell her to come back tomorrow? Did you have no compassion for her? How can you call yourself a child of God and yet have no compassion for such a godly woman who came to synagogue even though she had such a debilitating condition? Where is your mercy for this woman?” And he asks each of us today, where is your mercy, Christian? Where is your mercy, church? Where is your mercy for people like this, people with disabilities, people whom Satan has bound? Physical illness and deformity is a result of the Fall. Sin has crippling effects on the world and on us. Where is your mercy for crippled sinners?

Amazingly, the Reaction in v.17 is still division. Jesus still has adversaries. And they’re ashamed, but, they’re not rejoicing like the others are, and they’re certainly not believers. Jesus polarizes people. He’s still doing it today. And he doesn’t apologize for it. He makes us decide either for or against Him. There is no neutrality.

4. THE ILLUSTRATION (13:18-21)

“*Therefore he said...*” indicates an explanation of what’s gone before. The reason he gives the simile of the mustard seed and the leaven is that he healed a woman on the Sabbath to the synagogue leaders’ chagrin. So we have to understand the connection between these two parables on the one hand, and the healing of the hunchbacked woman on the other. Why does Luke put a “therefore” between verses 17 and 18? The connection is that the fulfillment of all the Sabbath laws in the OT – the inauguration of God’s kingdom – is beginning to happen in the healing of a seemingly insignificant woman. Jesus’ commission from Isaiah 61:1, which he quotes in Luke 4, “*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has...sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor*” – that commission is beginning to be realized in the healing of a woman who the Pharisees had ignored for 18 years. She is released from her bondage and oppression. That’s how the kingdom comes. It doesn’t come with a military coup, or pomp and circumstance; no immediate splendor, no political revolution, no revolt against the Roman occupation for the purpose of nationalized freedom, like all the Jews were expecting. It starts small. It starts in the broken body of a disabled woman. It starts over against the indignant objections of all the religious leaders. And what starts small grows big and has big effects.

The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed (vv.18-19). That’s the point of the parable of the mustard seed. It starts small, but grows and ends up as something different, something bigger, a tree. The birds might have eaten that seed if the gardener hadn’t planted it. But it grew into a tree, and now the birds nest in it. This is how the kingdom of God comes. It does not arrive in its first appearance as all that it will eventually be. It doesn’t keep a static shape; it’s organic. It begins as a seed; yet that seed contains all the elements necessary for it to become a tree. The kingdom of God begins as the healing of a hunch-backed woman in a no-name synagogue on an ordinary Sabbath day. And it’s unimpressive, at least in this world. Notice what kind of tree Jesus uses to portray the kingdom. The mustard tree did not grow to a very imposing height – it was normally between 6 and 12 feet, and sometimes as small as 4 feet. The kingdom of God in the world will be less like a towering cedar tree and more like a mundane mustard tree.²

² Ezek 17:22-23; cf. D. Pao and E. Schnabel, “Luke” in *CNTUOT*, p.334.

Even when it's full grown in this world, God's kingdom will not look impressive by world's the standards, at least not until it's consummated in the world to come. Nor will it look like the impressive OT expectations of the kingdom. It's not going to be a politicized, militarized state, with an impressive royal family and an intimidating cache of military weapons and financial reserves. In this world, it will be a humble kingdom, a lowly kingdom, a mustard tree kingdom. It has already started, but it starts with the healing of one, insignificant, hunch-backed woman, and it grows from there, slowly, sometimes even imperceptibly. But don't be fooled. It is big enough for the birds of the air to nest in it.

The image of the birds making a nest in a tree was an OT image of Gentiles becoming members of God's kingdom. It's not so clear from the context here in Luke that Jesus intends us to understand the birds as Gentiles. But it is certainly true that the kingdom becomes like a tree that's big enough for all sorts of birds to find rest and shelter there. The kingdom becomes a **home** for many. It's not just there for its own sake, but for the sake of the birds who come and nest in the tree. This is the kind of church we want to be. We want to be a church that exists for others, so that others can come and enjoy the shade. We're not here just to plant a church for ourselves, wherever we end up finding a permanent location. We're here not simply as consumers, but as providers, just like the mustard tree.... And isn't it encouraging for us in particular that the kingdom of God works this way? It starts as a seed, and grows into a tree that others can nest in. Never despise the day of small beginnings (Zech 4:10). This is always how kingdom work starts. It starts small, like a seed, but grows into a tree. The kingdom dynamic is organic.

The Kingdom of God is like leaven (vv.20-21). Jesus makes the same point from a different angle with the parable of the leaven. The point of the mustard seed was the surprising **size** of the tree as a home for the birds when it only began as a seed. The point here is the surprising **effect** of a small amount of hidden yeast on a big batch of dough. The tiny amount of yeast makes a really big lump of dough rise when it's baked. But it works invisibly, internally. The effect is visible, but the agent is hidden. The reign of God, which is beginning in Jesus' ministry, has a powerful, leavening effect. That transforming power was just illustrated in the healing of the hunch-backed woman. Jesus didn't look like much. All many people could see in Him was a carpenter from Nazareth. But the power of God is in Him, because He Himself is divine, and He is the king of God's kingdom. And the power that Jesus exercised in the body of the disabled woman is the same power that's working today all over the world to convict people of their sin, to convince them of righteousness and judgment to come, creating God's people and converting them into loyal subjects of His kingdom, and conforming them to the image of Jesus. Christian, it's the same power that's working in your heart and mind to transform us from loving sin to loving righteousness and being eager for good works to the image of Jesus.

But again, it's a hidden power. It's invisible, imperceptible, internal. It's not political or militarized, like in the Old Testament. It doesn't come with crushing force, or social revolution, or public prestige, like most first-century Jews were hoping. It's not outwardly impressive; but there's no mistaking that it's transformational. It changes us from the inside out. This is one of the reasons we shouldn't try to politicize Christianity. Yes, Christianity does have implications for how we think about issues of the state and social morality. But the kingdom of God is not about exercising outward political influence, and we American evangelicals, both on the right

and on the left, should reconsider whether the leavening effect of the kingdom is really intended to reveal itself in a righteous empire or a Christian nation. Leaven always has its effect without being seen, without attracting attention to itself.

The kingdom of God here is God's royal authority, His authority to rule and give life. And in the parable of the leaven, the leaven is like the kingdom, the ruling authority of God. But the leaven is a good thing. It transforms flat dough into edible bread. God's authority, His rule over us, is good. It's good for us. It produces good things. The human heart naturally thinks that rebelling against God's authority is what's best for us. But that's not true. To rebel against God's kingship over our hearts is to be content with eating unleavened bread all the time. No one wants to do that. Bread is best when it's leavened. And life is best when it is leavened with the authority of God, ruling over us, teaching us, protecting us, and providing for us.

CONCLUSION

Jesus frees us from the debilitating effects of sin so that we can walk uprightly before Him. Oh friend, do you believe that? Have you experienced that? Has Jesus done this for you? If He has not, remember J.C. Ryle's words. There are no incurable cases with Jesus. Pray to the Lord Jesus that He would do this for you, or for those you know. Do not lose hope, either over your own salvation or the salvation of others. There are no incurable cases with Jesus. One word from Him, and you are free. Is that not worth praying for?