

Compassion and Conflict

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Luke 13:10-17

I want to read the whole passage of Luke 13:10-17. “Now He...” referring to Jesus “...was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath.” Whenever Jesus was teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath, you knew something explosive was going to happen. “And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up.” Doctor Luke uses medical terms to describe her infirmity and how long she had been afflicted. “But when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him and said to her, ‘Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity.’ And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.”

Verse 14, “But the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath; and he said to the crowd.” He didn’t speak to Jesus; he spoke to the people. “‘There are six days on which men ought to work; therefore come and be healed on them, and not on the Sabbath day.’ The Lord then answered him and said, ‘Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it? So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound—think of it—for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?’ And when He said these things, all His adversaries were put to shame; and all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him.”

We’ve finished the long discourse that Jesus just gave in Luke 12:1 to 13:9. It ended with a warning. Jesus said, “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3,5). And one of the reasons for this episode in the synagogue found here is that we see they did not repent. The so-called “spiritual” leaders were really carnal or legalistic. Jesus called them “hypocrites.” So we are given this record so we can see how they responded to Christ’s teaching: they would not repent.

We see Jesus being brought into conflict with the leaders of the nation of Israel. Why? Because very soon, within months, Jesus would arrive in Jerusalem and be rejected by the elders and the people and be crucified. We are heading toward Calvary. So we see the conflict once again as a result of Christ’s teaching in the synagogue. But we will see Jesus’ power over Satan and His compassion and mercy upon this poor woman. If I could have been a fly on the wall of that synagogue, I could have watched what took place between Jesus and this woman at this time.

There are basically four sections to our text. The first section is the woman’s liberation or freedom, verses 10-13. In this section, Jesus healed and liberated this woman, who was bound by the devil for 18 years. He straightened out her body, which was bent over from this infirmity.

The “He” here in verse 10 refers to Jesus, who was teaching in the synagogue. He had been teaching about the kingdom of God. In Luke 4:43, He said, “I must preach the kingdom of God

to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent.” So you have the kingdom of God being taught there on one hand and the kingdom of the devil, through the spiritual, apostate leaders of Israel, coming into conflict on the other hand.

Wherever the truth goes, it comes into conflict with the error. Jesus said, “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword” (Matthew 10:34). Man’s house shall be divided.

Jesus was in one of the synagogues. What is a synagogue? The word “synagogue” literally means “gathering place.” It wasn’t the Temple. It wasn’t a place of sacrifice of animals or a place of worship. It came into existence during the Babylonian captivity, when Israel was taken captive to Babylon. They were taken out of the Promised Land away from their Temple. But they wanted to gather together. So wherever there were at least 10 male Jews, they would build a synagogue.

The synagogue was primarily for teaching and instruction. It was led by laymen. It consisted of a group of leaders or elders of the Jews, and there was a ruler of the synagogue over them. He would commission someone to read the text and someone to expound from the text. And there would be a time of teaching and instruction. In Galilee at this time, there were probably 250 synagogues scattered around the area. And even today, there are synagogues all around the world. The Jews have maintained those places of teaching and instruction. So Jesus knew that He always had a place He could go to in order to teach and to reach out to His own nation.

At the end of Luke 13, verses 34-35, Jesus weeps over Jerusalem. He said, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house...” or “your nation” “...is left to you desolate; and assuredly, I say to you, you shall not see Me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’” So they will see Christ coming in the Second Coming and acknowledge that He is their Messiah.

The location of the synagogue in our text is not mentioned, nor is the time when Jesus was in this synagogue. Chronologically, it could be some other time, and Luke put it in here topically to be in the flow of what is going on.

At this time, there was a woman in the synagogue. Luke’s Gospel emphasizes the role of women in the Gospel story. Luke mentions women more than any other Gospel. So this Gospel should be loved by ladies. But we don’t know the woman’s name or where she was from.

This woman had “a spirit of infirmity.” Later on, we’re going to see that Satan “bound her” for 18 years, so it was a demonic infirmity brought onto her. We don’t know how or why that happened—either directly by the devil or by demonic influence on her body. And Luke, the doctor, mentions that she had it for “eighteen years.”

That’s a long time to be bent over. Her spine was probably bent forward. Verse 11 says that

she “was bent over and could in no way raise herself up.” Can you imagine being bent over like that for 18 years?! How difficult would that be?

On the Sabbath, Jesus would go to the synagogue. And this woman, who was afflicted by the devil or by a demonic influence, still went to the synagogue. How much more should we go to church on Sunday? If Jesus gave us an example of being in a gathering place on Saturday, we should be committed to being in a gathering place of worship on Sunday.

Now, don't be legalistic about that. Some people ask me, “Do I have to go to church to be a Christian?” No, but you have to go to church to be a good Christian. How can you be all that God wants you to be if you're not part of a church family? How do you love one another? How do you forgive one another? How do you wash one another's feet? How do you get others to serve the Lord? How do you “consider one another in order to stir up love and good works?” (Hebrews 10:24). We just provoke each other.

You gather together. You need to be together with God's people on Sunday in the house of the Lord. Make that a priority. If you start to compromise or let other things get in the way, it will get harder and harder to get to church.

Satan doesn't want you to come to church. He doesn't want you to worship, to be around God's people, to hear the Word of the Lord. He doesn't want people to challenge you, to encourage you. He wants to isolate you, so he can attack you and destroy your faith. Hebrews 10:25 says that we should “not [be] forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some.” As we see the end of time and that the Lord is coming soon, we should gather together and fellowship as believers.

So they were gathering together with other believers in the synagogue, a place where they would congregate. And we, too, gather in a local church worshipping the Lord.

Verses 12-13 are two of the most beautiful verses in this text: He saw her, called to her, and said to her. “But when Jesus saw her, He called her to him and said to her, ‘Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity.’” The word “loosed” is used three times in this text: in verses 12, 15 and 16. It means to be “released, let go, free.” “And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.”

I like that it happened “immediately.” It wasn't progressive, it wasn't little-by-little, it wasn't maybe in a week or two—it was “immediately!” She didn't say, “I'm starting to feel a little better; I can stand up a little straighter. Maybe by next month, if I get some physical therapy, I can just get this figured out!”

When Jesus heals, He heals. He heals immediately, thoroughly, and completely. I like that. “She was made straight.” The crooked was made straight. Jesus still makes crooked people straight; people who are bound by sin, who are controlled by the devil.

Then everyone there began to glorify God—except the religious leaders. So here we see a

miracle.

I like the four points here. First, Jesus saw her. And He sees you too. That could be good or bad. The Bible says, “All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:13). You can’t think anything, say anything, or do anything that is hidden from Jesus. He knows and He sees.

For me, I’m glad. When I’m in need, when I’m hurting, when I have problems and I face difficulties, Jesus sees and Jesus knows. There are times when we think, Jesus! Do you see what’s going on down here?! Some of you are thinking, Jesus! Do you see what’s going on in my marriage?! Rebuke him, Lord! Lord! Do you see what’s going on in my body?! Heal me, Lord! Lord! Do you see what’s going on in my finances?! Provide for me, Lord! Jesus sees and Jesus knows.

We have a compound name for God in the Old Testament. It’s Jehovah Jireh. We have come to interpret that as “God will provide.” The etymology of the word “Jireh” literally means “God sees.” So what we’ve concluded from Scripture is what God sees, God provides. So what Jehovah Jireh means is when God sees a need, He provides.

Second, Jesus called to her. This is an actual story, but it’s also a picture of how Jesus saves sinners. He calls us by His grace. “He called her to Him.”

Third, He spoke His word to her. Then He “said to her, ‘Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity.’” We see the power of His Word.

And fourth, “He laid His hands on her.” Wow! The hands of Jesus! Jesus, the Son of God! He could lay His hands on a leper, and immediately the leper was cleansed. He could lay His hands on blind eyes, and immediately they could see. He could bless the bread and put His hands on five loaves and two fish and multiply them to feed over 5,000 men and women. The hands of Jesus that were spread out on the Cross and crucified reached out and touched this woman. What a blessed thing it is!

Have you had the hands of Jesus touch you? Has Jesus reached out and touched you with His mighty hands? He sees you, He calls you, He speaks His Word to you, and He touches you with His mighty hands.

Immediately, this woman was made straight and glorified God.” This is a picture of how God saves sinners. He sees us, calls us, speaks His Word to us—“Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17)—and then He lays His hands upon us. He regenerates us by His Holy Spirit, forgives all of our sins, and brings us into His forever family.

I wish I could have been there, hanging out in that synagogue, to see what took place; how she straightened up and glorified God. Now, this didn’t say that she glorified Jesus. But she gave God the glory, because she knew that this was a divine encounter, a work of God. Whether or not she knew Jesus was the Messiah, we don’t know. But she gave thanks and praise to God,

which we should do as well when we are touched and “straightened” by the power of God. So we see His compassion and His power.

The second section of the story is in verse 14. We see the indignation of the hypocrites. “But the ruler of the synagogue...” You would think he would say, “This is awesome! What a wonderful miracle!” No; rather he “...answered with indignation...” which is a strong word in the Greek; he was fuming with anger “...because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath; and he said to the crowd...” and not to Jesus “...‘There are six days on which men ought to work; therefore come and be healed on them, and not on the Sabbath day.’” Wow! This guy is a legalist; this guy is really bound by the Law.

This synagogue ruler is quoting from the Old Testament Decalogue, where it says that we have six days to work, but on the Sabbath day we should rest, Commandment number four (Exodus 20:8).

Of all the Ten Commandments, there is only one that is not repeated in the New Testament. That is the fourth Commandment about the Sabbath day. Of all the Ten Commandments, this is the only ceremonial Commandment and is not a moral Commandment.

When you put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, you have rest for your soul. He said, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Jesus is our Sabbath rest. Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday, and that’s why we worship on Sunday. Are we legalistic about it? No, we worship every day of the week. But we gather on Sunday because it’s the Lord’s day, the day Jesus rose from the dead. Yet we can gather on any day of the week.

So be careful not to become a legalist, lose love, and put more emphasis on the Law’s rites and rituals than on people. People are more important than your man-made traditions, than your petty rules and regulations, than your rites and rituals.

There are about three classic Sabbath clashes or controversies in the Gospels. In John 5, Jesus healed a lame man at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath. The waters had to be agitated by an angel, but the lame man had no one to help him into the pool. So Jesus came and healed the man. That brought Jesus into conflict with the religious community. They considered what Jesus had done to be work, so He had broken the Sabbath. Work?! By just healing by His word?! By just touching this woman in our text and healing her?! What hypocrisy!

And in Matthew 12, the disciples were walking through the wheat field, they plucked the head off the wheat, ground it in their hands, blew the chaff away, and popped the wheat into their mouths to eat. They were eating their Wheaties in the field. But the religious leaders were hiding in the wheat field and accused the disciples of doing what was not lawful to do on the Sabbath day. Then Jesus told them, “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry... how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat?”

Human need takes precedence over rites and rituals.

God wants us to have obedient hearts. He says to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31). And this leader of the synagogue was also disobeying the greatest commandment: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30). He never once, in this whole episode in our text, had any concern or care for this poor, sick woman. He didn’t praise God for her healing. He just said they needed to come on other days of the week for healing. So he was a legalist. But God wants mercy and not sacrifice (Matthew 9:13).

Now we go from the liberation of the woman in being healed and the hypocrites’ indignation to the third section, the Lord’s denunciation, verses 15-16. “The Lord then answered him and said, ‘Hypocrite!’” In Greek, it is “hypocrites,” referring to all who were upset about the healing on the Sabbath day. “Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it? So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham...” she was a Jewess and most likely a believer “...whom Satan has bound—think of it—for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?” This was Jesus’ denunciation and indignation of the religious leaders.

In the Mishnah, which is the commentary the Jews have on the Law, they were allowed on the Sabbath day to loose (same word) or untie their ox, donkey, or other animal and take them out of the stall and give them water and feed them.

Sometimes today, people care more about animals than they do about people. That’s where we’re headed in our nation today. I’m not saying we shouldn’t care about animals. But human beings are made in the image of God. If we’re going to take care of cats and dogs, don’t you think we should take care of human beings who are in the womb? It’s so tragic. If we’re going to save the whales, why don’t we save human beings? It’s unbelievable.

So Jesus calls them hypocrites. They were putting on a show, acting. And He rebukes them. Jesus said, “Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it? So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound—think of it—for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?” This is a lesson from the lesser to the greater. If you do what is less, you feed your animals on the Sabbath—why can’t this woman, made in the image of God, be healed on the Sabbath?

As far as the Sabbath goes, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). The Sabbath was intended to be a blessing, not a burden. And Jesus said that He was “Lord even of the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:8).

So beware of legalism. You’re worried about rites and rituals, but you don’t show the love of God. You are to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength....You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Yes, keep God’s laws and keep God’s Commandments, but we can’t merit or deserve favor with God by any

means. Trust Him and be careful of legalists, who are often loveless. They don't love God. They love themselves and don't love others. So Jesus is "Lord even of the Sabbath."

This ruler of the synagogue also did not question that a miracle had happened. It was obvious that Jesus had healed this woman by the power of God. Then Jesus denounced Him.

The fact that Jesus denounced this hypocrite means to me that there is a time and place to rebuke those who are preaching or teaching things that are not Biblical. Many times, when a preacher mentions a false teacher, people freak out. "That's not loving and kind! You shouldn't condemn someone else!" I'm not condemning; I'm fruit inspecting.

When Jesus said, "Judge not, that you be not judged" (Matthew 7:1), the words "judge not" mean "Don't be critical or fault-finding." We're not to have a censorious spirit or attitude. But Jesus also said, "Nor cast your pearls before swine" (Matthew 7:6). That takes a judgment.

Like no other, Jesus rebuked the religious leaders. He called them "hypocrites" and "You are of your father the devil" (John 8:44). He rebuked them for their false teaching. So we see Him coming into conflict with them, even though He was a loving and gracious Savior.

What about Satan having bound her for 18 years, verse 16? It's a dangerous thing to make a direct correlation between anyone who is sick and believes they are demon-possessed. But it is true that demons can inflict bodily suffering and pain on a person.

Read about Job. God gave Satan permission to take all of Job's possessions and his family, except his loving, supportive wife! She told Job, "Curse God and die!" (Job 2:9). "Thank you, sweetheart. I needed that word of encouragement." Satan had said to God, "Stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!" God gave him permission: "He is in your hand, but spare his life" (Job 2:5-6). Satan cannot afflict us only what God permits him to do. God is in control; He sets the bounds.

God used Job to vindicate Himself. The message of the book of Job is that God is worthy to be worshipped, praised, and served apart from the gifts He gives. "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him" (Job 13:15). Job said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21).

We were not told how, when, or why Satan had bound this woman for 18 years. Originally, sin brought sickness, suffering, and death into the world, so you could attribute it back to Satan. There are also those times when people can be demonized and can be afflicted by Satan, but God is in control. If you are a Christian, God sets the limits and controls and uses it for our good and for His glory.

The fourth section of our text is in verse 17 and is the people's reaction. "And when He said these things, all His adversaries were put to shame; and all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him."

“Shame” is a very strong word in the Greek; they were totally humiliated and devastated. This wasn’t a kind of humbling thing, as in, “Oh, we’re sorry. Yes, we’re hypocrites! We shouldn’t have been so critical! We should have given glory to God. Oh, Jesus is the Messiah.” No, they were just indignant. They were angry and ashamed because of their hypocrisy. So the leaders of the Jews were ashamed.

But all the people “rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him.” That is the proper response to the power of God.

I want to remind you of the three main reasons for this text. Number one is to show us the conflict between Jesus’ truth, preaching the kingdom of heaven, and the lies of the religious Jews, because He was going to the Cross. Number two is that Jesus has power over Satan. “He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4). So Jesus has power over the devil. And number three, we see His compassion and His mercy.

In our text in verses 11-12, Jesus took the initiative in healing this woman. She didn’t say, “Thou Son of David, have mercy on me!” She didn’t pray here, she didn’t cry out, and she didn’t ask for a healing. I’m sure she had been praying during the 18 years of her affliction. And when she got up that day and got dressed, little did she know that she would meet Jesus—that He would see her and call her and speak to her and touch her with His hands. She didn’t say anything; He just saw her.

Whenever Jesus was in a crowd, He was always drawn to the person with the greatest need. “That’s me! Here I am, Jesus!” Whatever great need you have, Jesus is drawn to you. So I love the simple truth that Jesus lovingly and compassionately initiated this healing. This is one of the greatest displays of Jesus’ compassion and mercy.

Jesus still makes the crooked straight. Jesus still calls us by His Spirit. Jesus still lays His hands on poor, needy sinners and sets the captives free.

If you have heard His voice, if you have been touched by His hands, if you have been set free by His power, tell someone. Tell your husband. Tell your wife. Tell your kids. Tell your grandchildren. Give them your testimony. Tell your coworkers. Tell your family. Tell your friends—of what great things God has done for you.

When they glorified God “for all the glorious things that were done by Him,” that means the beautiful things, the lovely things that God had done that day in that synagogue. We should do the same.