

“Bent Out of Shape”

LUKE 13:10-17

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This morning I would invite you to turn with me to Luke 13, to one of the many miracles performed by Jesus (p. 1627). A miracle, Biblically speaking, is the setting aside of natural law in order to prove that the one performing the miracle is truly from God. Many times, people are confused about the meaning of the word “miracle.” Sometimes people today will refer to the “miracle of birth.” Well, not exactly – we know something about what it takes to have a baby! The process is not technically “miraculous.” Of course, we know what they mean by that – the process is amazing, and yet it is not miraculous in the Biblical sense of that word. The conception and birth of Jesus, on the other hand, is truly miraculous. So, a miracle, Biblically speaking, is the setting aside of natural law to prove that the one performing the miracle is truly from God. When we look at Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and when we put the four gospel accounts next to each other in parallel form, we find all in all that we have a record of only about 35 miracles performed by Jesus. Although the Bible tells us that the Lord performed “many” miracles, we only have an actual record of about 35, and a vast majority of those are miracles of healing. The woman in our text for this morning is described as being ***“bent double.”*** In fact, the text explains that she was not able to ***“straighten up at all.”*** And what I find interesting right here at the beginning is that this account is only found in the book of Luke and that Luke was a medical doctor. If you are familiar with the four gospel accounts, then you know that Luke seemed to take a special interest in some of the more unusual medical cases, and that is certainly true of our text for this morning.

One of the reasons why this account is so interesting is that the author, Luke, allows us to see this particular miracle from four different points of view, four different perspectives, and that is how I would like to structure our study this morning. Through it all, though, I want us to ask ourselves the “So what?” question – What does this particular healing really mean for us today? Why does this event really matter?

Let us begin, then, by looking together at what the physician Luke wants us to know – Luke 13:10-17,

And He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And there was a woman who for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was bent double, and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, He called her over and said to her, “Woman, you are freed from your sickness.” And He laid His hands on her; and immediately she was made erect again and began glorifying God. But the synagogue official, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, began saying to the crowd in response, “There are six days in

which work should be done; so come during them and get healed, and not on the Sabbath day.” But the Lord answered him and said, “You hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall and lead him away to water him? And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?” As He said this, all His opponents were being humiliated; and the entire crowd was rejoicing over all the glorious things being done by Him.

Again, as we look at this paragraph of Scripture, I want us to look at it (as Luke does) from four different points of view.

I. **And we begin, of course, by looking at it from the perspective of THE WOMAN WHO WAS HEALED.**

We find in verse 11 that this woman had had a sickness caused by a spirit. Just a note here: This sickness was not caused by God. Sometimes, when bad things happen, people are very quick to blame God. A baby dies, and someone says, “Well, God needed that child in heaven more than we needed him here.” No! That makes God responsible for killing the child! But note here: This sickness was not caused by God – it was caused by a spirit. She was bent double, she had been in that condition for eighteen years, and she could not straighten up at all. Imagine bending over to touch your toes, and then imagine getting stuck in that position! I don’t know whether most of us can even imagine being in that situation. I don’t know about you, but I enjoy being able to stand up straight! I enjoy being able to walk around the kitchen. I enjoy being able to see the top of the refrigerator. I know that not all of you are able to do that, but I enjoy my perspective on life right now. There are some serious advantages to being able to stand up. But we find in verse 11 that this woman was “**bent double,**” even to the point of not being able to straighten up at all – day after day, week after week, for eighteen years! Eighteen years is a long time. Think about what you were doing back in 1995. That was 18 years ago, the year this congregation was established. About 1/3 of you here this morning weren’t even born back in 1995. Eighteen years is a long time to suffer.

I don’t know whether we can really appreciate what this woman was going through. For eighteen years, unable to look up and see the sky. For eighteen years, looking down into the dirt. For eighteen years, looking at nothing but her own feet. For eighteen years, unable to see what was in front of her as she tried to walk. For eighteen years, having a hard time eating and drinking. For eighteen years, even sleeping would involve being curled up in a fetal position. For eighteen years, unable to reach for something above her, unable to lift a child, unable to do so many of the things that all of us do every day. For eighteen years, this woman had been stared at. For eighteen years, it must have been pretty awkward to even have a conversation with another person, unable to look anybody in the eye for eighteen years. I would imagine that that would wear on a person after a while! In fact, some might even give up on God after eighteen years like this.

However, please notice, though, that in spite of her horribly disfigured physical condition, this woman had made a commitment to assemble with God’s people on the Sabbath Day. In verse 16, the Lord describes her as a “**daughter of Abraham.**” She was Jewish, then, and she chose to study and worship with God’s people on the Sabbath. She did not use her condition as an excuse to forsake the assembly of God’s people.

Today, sometimes parents seem to be shocked and amazed that their children fall away and stop attending worship services altogether when they leave home for college. In reality, though, those young adults have been highly trained by their own parents that you only attend worship when there is really nothing better you

can do. In other words, from the time they were little children, if there was a school musical on a Wednesday evening or a middle school ski trip on a Sunday morning, you obviously cannot miss out on those things, so worship is pushed to the side. As the children move through high school, they are allowed (and many times even encouraged) to miss out on worship and Bible classes for work, or school projects, or any number of things. And then college comes around, as I said earlier, those young adults have been highly trained by their parents that you go to worship only when there is nothing better you can do. And then those parents are absolutely shocked that their angelic little babies have actually found “something better” to do.

But I want us to think about this woman who was *“bent double.”* In spite of her horrific physical condition, in spite of the fact that she most likely was in constant pain, this woman made worship a priority. In my own mind, I think of some of our seniors I have known through the years. I think of Ms. Katherine and some of the pain that she was going through near the end of her life. I think of one of the senior women down in Janesville, a woman from Eastern Europe who survived a concentration camp during WWII (she even had a number tattooed on her arm). One Wednesday we cancelled Bible classes because we had something like 9 inches of snow. When I called her, she said (with her heavy accent), “Don’t you ever cancel class again! If I need to, I will walk to get there.” She lived about four miles away (on the other side of the Rock River down in Janesville), and she was dead serious. I was scared of that woman! I don’t know if we ever canceled classes again after that! I think of some of our seniors who are here this morning who are dealing with excruciating pain. Like the woman in Luke 13, they also have made worship a priority. Even though she was suffering, she knew that she needed to be in the presence of God’s people. That is her perspective on this situation.

II. At this time, let us move on and think about this passage from THE LORD’S POINT OF VIEW.

In verse 12, we find that when the Lord saw this woman, he called her over and said to her, *“Woman, you are freed from your sickness.”* He then laid his hands on her, and immediately she stood up straight and started praising God. I would just point out here that the Lord saw this woman and did something about it, because the Lord had an eye for those who were hurting. Notice: The Lord doesn’t even ask her about her disease. The woman doesn’t even ask to be healed. But instead, the Lord sees what this woman is going through, and he makes it right. The Lord sees, and cares, and does something – a pattern for us today. As God’s people, we should also see, and care, and then do something.

With that in mind, it has been said that the church is not a showroom, it is a maintenance shop – and there is a difference, isn’t there? A showroom is where the dealers put all of the shiny new cars, a showroom is a place to show off, a showroom is a place to emphasize the positive and to try to hide or cover up the negative. The church, though, is not like that. The church is more like the garage. The church is more like the shop out behind the showroom. The church is the place where broken and hurting people go for support and encouragement. The church is a place where work is done, a place where people go for help. The church is not like the posh entryway to some exclusive hospital, but the church is more like the emergency room. The church is not the dining room, but the church is more like the kitchen, the place where the real work is done. The woman, then, even though she was suffering, she understood the importance of being with God’s people. And the Lord, when he saw what she was going through, he took steps to make it right.

Today, we live in a world full of hurting people. Just go to one of our local news websites. I checked in yesterday afternoon, and just on the main page there were stories about multiple shootings, and drownings, and child abuse, and house fires, and traffic accidents, and it just went on and on. We think about this congregation, and we are nearly overwhelmed with all of the personal hurt just among those who are gathered here this morning. We live in a world full of hurting people, but in the middle of it, the Lord God sees

it all. I have read that in any given year, Americans will purchase more than 3 billion does of Tylenol. But did you know that God is aware of every headache? Did you know that God is aware of what happens during every visit to the Emergency Room? When he was here on this earth, the Lord Jesus also saw people who were suffering, and whenever it was possible, the Lord Jesus paid attention and he did something about it. So as we look at this account from the Lord's point of view, we find that the Lord was moved with compassion and reached out to help the situation – like a doctor caring for a patient, like a parent caring for a child.

And that is what we learn here from the Lord's point of view – the Lord noticed those who were suffering, he cared deeply, and then he did something about it. As his followers, it seems, then, that we have a responsibility to do the same! Like Jesus, we are also to be aware of what others are going through, and if it is in our power to do so, we are to take steps to help in some practical way. We might not be able to reach out and cure somebody miraculously as the Lord was able to do, but maybe we can drop off a meal. Several days ago, I had the privilege of stopping by to visit one of our members who is recovering from surgery. He showed me a medical device crucial to his recovery that is being paid for by this congregation. He wanted me to pass along his thanks to the church for doing that. That right there is what the Lord was showing us by example – we are to keep our eyes open for ways to help. From the Lord's point of view, we learn that people who are hurting matter to God, and they should matter to us as well.

III. As we go back to our text for today's lesson, we notice a third point of view as we see this situation from the perspective of THE LOCAL SYNAGOGUE OFFICIAL.

Notice in verse 14: This man was *"indignant."* In other words, instead of being happy that the woman was healed of this terrible condition, this man was incredibly upset, and he was upset because the Lord had dared to heal the woman on the Sabbath day. One thing I notice here is that the synagogue official does not address the Lord directly, but instead, he addresses the crowd. In my opinion, I think this man was too scared to deal with the Lord directly. So instead, he turns to the crowd – he turns to the people he has influence over. He knows he can't win an argument with the Lord, so he uses the power of his position over the people and he basically tells them to come back on some day other than the Sabbath. Somebody has observed that if this man had seen the man beaten up by the side of the road on the way to Jericho, unlike the Good Samaritan, this man would have appointed a committee, he would have had the committee delegate a representative, he would have had that representative get approval from the congregation, and after going through all of the proper channels, the poor guy on the side of the road would have been dead! But again, the synagogue official cannot argue with the Lord. He could not argue with the miracle. So, he gets on the people. As a critic, this man didn't have the guts to go to the Lord directly, so he goes to the crowd.

The Lord, though, steps right up to the fight and the Lord turns it right back on the man. As one paraphrase translation puts it here, the Lord says, ***"You frauds! Each Sabbath every one of you regularly unties your cow or donkey from its stall, leads it out for water, and thinks nothing of it. So why isn't it all right for me to untie this daughter of Abraham and lead her from the stall where Satan has had her tied these eighteen years?"*** And of course, there was no arguing with the Lord's argument here. By the way, I would ask: Did the Lord violate God's law by healing on the Sabbath? Absolutely not! The Law of Moses said that no work was to be done on the Sabbath. The Jewish people, out of an abundance of caution, had added a bunch of hedges around the actual law to avoid violating the law by accident, and apparently, in one of their outer fences around the actual Sabbath law, their tradition said that it was against the Law to *"heal."* The Lord, then, violated their tradition, but he certainly did not violate the Law as it was originally given, and he makes the point in such a powerful way – it cannot be refuted. The leaders, in fact, are *"humiliated"* (verse 17).

As we look at this from the synagogue official's point of view, then, I believe we learn something about the danger of religious tradition and the fact that tradition has a way of distracting people from the main point – which, in this case, was showing compassion on a woman in a great deal of pain. And I would point out here: This is not a case of God's Law vs. God's Love, but this is a matter of God's loving Law vs. Manmade Religious Tradition. As we learned in our class on Hosea this past week, there will never be a time when we need to choose between God's love and God's law. If we ever think we need to make a choice between those two, then we have misunderstood one or the other or maybe even both. The conflict here, then, is between the Lord and the synagogue official's manmade religious traditions.

There is a lesson for us today, then, from the perspective of the synagogue official: There is a danger to being burdened down by the hypocrisy of manmade religious traditions. Here at this congregation, we are doing everything possible to set aside manmade religious traditions and to simply be Christians, basing everything we teach and everything we do on nothing but God's word.

So, we have learned something from the woman who made it a priority to be with God's people on the Sabbath, we have learned something from Jesus who actually did something to help someone in a terrible situation, and we have also learned something from the synagogue official who was burdened down with manmade religious tradition.

IV. **Before we close, I want us to think about this scene from the point of view of THOSE IN THE CROWD THAT DAY.**

In verse 17, with reference to the Lord, we find that ***“the entire crowd was rejoicing over all the glorious things being done by Him.”*** So, instead of finding fault as the official did, those in the crowd were actually happy about what had happened. To them, this woman was one of their own. And so we find here that the people in the crowd were happy. To them, one of their own had been freed from her slavery. She had been freed from this horrible condition.

Today, we think about someone we know who has obeyed the gospel. We are happy when that happens. There is a sense of joy. There is a sense of relief. We remember how Paul described becoming a Christian as being ***“rescued from the domain of darkness and being transferred into the kingdom of God's beloved Son”*** [paraphrased] (Colossians 1:13). And so, as we assemble together this morning, we learn a lesson from those in the crowd. Instead of being critics, instead of opposing the Lord, those in the crowd were happy for this woman. And there is a lesson here for us. It is good to be happy as we worship! It is okay to be happy about the amazing things that God has done.

Conclusion:

As we close our thoughts on this passage, I would like for us to think about the good news, the gospel. The good news is that God cares for us. If we have ever broken any of God's laws, that is, if we have ever sinned, the Bible explains that we have earned death, ***“For the wages of sin is death,”*** Paul says (in Romans 6:23). But thankfully, as Paul goes on to say in the rest of that verse, ***“...the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*** The Lord God saw our situation and sent Jesus to die in our place. He died, he was buried, and he was raised up from the dead on the third day. In response to that sacrifice, we are called upon to reenact the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus in our own lives. We are told that we are to die to sin (we are to repent), we are to allow ourselves to be buried with Christ in baptism for the forgiveness of sins, and then we are raised up out of the water as the Christian life begins. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, that is the good

news – the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We obey the good news by doing this in our own lives. God loved us so much that he became one of us, and now that we are healed, we turn around and we care for others just as he cared for us. Just as he loved us, we love others. If you have any questions, we hope you will let us know. Our goal will be to go to the scriptures to find the answers. If we need to pray about some situation in your life right now, let us know. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right away, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com