

Luke 3:16

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Date: 14 July 1985

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[0 : 00] Let's turn to the passage we read, Luke chapter 13, and we may look especially at verse 16 of the chapter.

The words of Jesus, 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?

Last week we looked in the evening at the case of a woman whom Jesus healed.

The woman, you remember, who touched him as he was hurrying on his way to the house of Jairus, where Jairus' daughter was ill.

This evening we're going to look at another woman whom Jesus healed, but a different case, and we see how Jesus dealt with it in a different way.

[1 : 08] It's one of the most impressive, one of the most encouraging things in the Gospels, how Jesus deals with each case individually, how he knows the needs of each, and how his words and actions are appropriate to each particular case.

This healing, this miracle, was different in several ways from that we thought about last Sunday evening.

This one, it would seem at first sight, at any rate, that the initiative did not come from the woman herself, but rather from Jesus.

The other that we thought about last week was performed on a busy thoroughfare. This one performed in a synagogue, very similar to our church service here this evening.

Different environment, different circumstances, but most of all, different people. Two different women, two very different complaints.

[2 : 19] The first suffering from bleeding for 12 years. This woman suffering from being crippled, being bent double for an even longer period of 18 years.

And yet Jesus is able appropriately and lovingly to deal with each, and to do so in a very fitting and compassionate way.

There's also, of course, something that we can learn this evening about the dialogue that then takes place concerning this healing that Jesus has with the ruler of the synagogue.

So I'd like to think with you about some of the things we can learn from this for ourselves. Bearing in mind what we said last Sunday evening concerning the visual aid quality of the miracles that Jesus performed, the miracles of healing.

Bearing in mind that we are physical and spiritual unities. And what Jesus did in healing the body was a visual aid of the even greater and more important healing of the soul.

[3 : 35] And many of the people indeed whom he healed in body were also healed in soul. Not only did he say, take up your bed and walk, but he also said, your sins are forgiven you to the same person.

So first then I'd like to look with you at the woman's illness. Very different kind of illness from the woman we thought about last week. She was crippled.

Her body was distorted and twisted. Now it's quite possible that this was some kind of disease similar to what we might have today.

Something like arthritis or something like that. But we're told specifically that there was more to it than just a physical cause. We're told that she was crippled by a spirit for 18 years.

A reminder to us here that although quite clearly there are physical causes of all kinds of diseases and illnesses, yet there is also the fact of the great spiritual enemy of mankind.

[4 : 47] Remember that right at the beginning, after Adam and Eve sinned, when Satan thought that he had got mankind within his power as allies to himself, God sovereignly put enmity between Satan and the seed of the woman.

And from that time onwards, there has been this constant attempt by the devil to oppose everything that God is doing in this world amongst men, particularly for their good and for their salvation. We don't know exactly how these mechanisms and machinations of the evil one actually work. We don't know their relationship to the actual physical laws that we discover, whether in science or in medicine.

But yet we can be sure that every kind of evil, every kind of pain, every kind of misery is a delight to the enemy of God and to the enemy of our souls.

This woman was crippled. Crippled, her body twisted and distorted. And she remained in that condition for a long time.

[6 : 05] Just imagine yourself in her position. Someone who would have felt herself very useless.

Someone who perhaps couldn't be a wife or mother, or if she was, couldn't be a very good one, couldn't do the work that she might want to do, would feel frustrated, and would find great difficulty in doing the little that she could do.

Put yourself in her position as you think about that handicap that she suffered throughout these long years. And there, in that physical pain, discomfort and frustration, we have a very real and vivid picture of the effect of sin upon our lives.

The effect of sin upon human life is not one that is enlightening, not one that is life-giving, not one that is attractive, but exactly the opposite.

The link in Scripture and the Word of God is between sin and evil, between sin and pain, sorrow and misery. And as this woman's physical misery is a picture of the spiritual misery to which we all are in bondage, we learn that we ourselves and every sinner is not benefited, not enlarged, but rather distorted and twisted by sin, made so much less than what we ought to be as human beings made in the image of God.

[8 : 20] That's why we can see the effects of sin very much in terms of handicap and disability.

Now we know that the devil in all his propaganda, and he is a master of propaganda, would seek to get us into thinking and get the world into thinking that sin is attractive, that sin is life-giving, that there's a breadth about it.

The idea that it is good for you to indulge every kind of desire irrespective of what God says and what he forbids. But how often, how tragically often, people discover even in this life that following their own whims, their own desires, deliberately disobeying what God commands brings not life and liberty, but brings bondage and decay and brings handicap and disability in the even more important realm than the physical and that is in the spiritual and in the psychological.

This woman then there, bound, as Jesus says, by her affliction for 18 long years, is a living visual aid to us of the effects of sin upon ourselves.

you perhaps might know something of what I'm talking about in your own experience. Perhaps you know something of the handicap that sin is to you.

Perhaps you know something of the longing of wanting to be done with sin and all its distorting of your personality and your relationship with others.

[10 : 14] Do you know something of that desire to be free of everything that handicaps you and holds you down and holds you back from being the man or woman that God wants you to be in his purposes?

If you know something of that feeling, then you know something of the experience of this woman, surely, that she had in the physical realm. The desire to be free, to be straight, to be liberated from that handicap from which she suffered.

And if you have that desire, then, this evening, you are in the right place in hearing the gospel to discover the liberating power that Jesus has to free us from such handicap.

Notice also that this woman was unable, of course, to right her own condition.

So often these conditions that are mentioned in the people whom Jesus helped, this is stressed, their helplessness, their inability. It says here in verse 11, she was bent over and could not straighten up at all.

[11 : 36] She had been suffering from this condition for so long that there was no way that she could straighten out her body. Whether it was through the extreme pain of even attempting to do so, or whether it was just the physical impossibility of doing so, we're not exactly told, but she couldn't do it.

She was helpless to even cause herself to stand in right. And again, a very fitting reminder to us that we ourselves are unable to deal with the handicap of sin.

We are unable to cure the disease of sin. And again, if you look into your own experience honestly tonight, you may be able to see, and I pray that you do, you may be able to see that every attempt of yours, merely your own human attempt to straighten yourself out, to turn over a new leaf, to change your own direction.

All these things have been futile and pointless. You've been unable to do it. I counsel you tonight to turn away from yourself and your own efforts and your own wisdom and all the wisdom of this world to turn to this one who here meets this woman and deals with her trying, and difficult condition. But notice that also this woman was in a particular place when Jesus met her. Now, the people Jesus healed were in all different kinds of places as we noticed already.

[13:19] But this woman was in a particular place she was in the synagogue. That tells us a tremendous amount about that woman. how many people like that woman today would be found in the house of God among his people?

How many of us, if we suffered from such a condition, would say, it's too difficult for me to get to church, too difficult for me to go out amongst people?

How easy it would be for us to say, just withdraw from other people and withdraw from going out to meet with Christians or attending church, even though we might know that it was a duty for us to do so.

Yet this woman did not do so. She did not yield to that kind of temptation. She had a desire to be amongst the people of God and to hear the word of God.

Bent double for she was, crippled, twisted, distorted, though she was. She was in the right place to receive the grace of God. Maybe that morning, that Sabbath day, she had no inkling, no anticipation of the marvelous thing that was going to happen.

[14:45] Maybe she had a hope that sometimes that something would happen to change her condition. Maybe she had prayed fervently concerning her. Maybe she continued to do so.

But at any rate, whatever happened, irrespective of whether she was helped or not, she was there amongst God's people to hear God's word and to be blessed and benefited, spiritually at least, if not physically.

Now that also is a great lesson to us, you are here tonight among the people of God and listening to the word of God.

And so you're in the right place to have your great handicap, your great disability of sin to be dealt with. Because you're in the place where Jesus has promised to be.

He has said, even if two or three are met together in His name, He's there with them. He said to His church, in the person of His apostles, He said to them, Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

[16:06] The Lord Jesus Christ has promised that He will be with His people, and where His word is proclaimed, where His name is honored. And so He's here tonight.

Whatever reason has brought you here this evening, you're in the right place to have your illness, your sickness, your disability, the disability of sin, cured, and straightened.

Then I want to look with you at Jesus healing. of this woman. How actually He went about it, how He dealt with it, and how she received this tremendous gift of cure, straightening, returning to normality.

Jesus. The first thing I would like to notice with you about it is that He noticed her. When Jesus saw her, He called her forward and said to her, Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.

Now this is one of these cases where the person does not make the first approach to Jesus. In many cases, that is how a miracle of healing took place.

[17:30] A person came to Jesus asking for help. Blind Bartimaeus cried out, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy upon me. This woman is one of those who was there in the synagogue, maybe there particularly because she maybe knew Jesus was going to be there.

We don't know. We're not told that. But she was just there. And Jesus noticed her. Now, there's no doubt that as in other cases where it says this specifically, it would be true that Jesus saw something about this woman and about her attitude that convinced him that she was one who was looking for the help of God.

And one who had that faith and commitment in what he would say to her so that she would be healed. Jesus knew, we're told, what was in a man or in a woman. He was not deceived by outward appearances. He could see behind the facades and the veneers that people put up. He could interpret every expression, every movement of the face, every movement of the hand and body, to understand what that person was feeling like and thinking like inside.

We're told that Jesus saw her. Now, tonight, perhaps, you may feel that you're able to conceal yourself.

[19 : 18] You may not feel very particularly exposed coming to church and sitting among the people of God. You may feel that you're well able to conceal what are your inmost thoughts and what kind of person you really are and what your troubles are, your problems.

You may be very well aware of some of the things I've been talking about here, about your own feeling of spiritual disability, handicap, of the twisting effect of sin upon your life.

But you may be well able to conceal these things from others. You may be able even to be a bit blasé about the whole idea of spiritual experience.

But Jesus knows exactly how you feel. Jesus knows your thoughts. There's no veneer, there's no facade that can protect you from the eyes of Jesus.

sin. But as well as that being perhaps a disturbing thought to some, it's a tremendous encouraging thought to others, a tremendous encouraging thing to this woman.

[20 : 35] Perhaps within her there were the beginnings of a desire, a longing to be freed from this infirmity, a belief that God was in some way or other able to do it.

But she would never have said any such thing to anybody. But Jesus knew it. Jesus was able to sense what kind of person she was.

And Jesus saw her in all her need, in all her disability. Tonight, Jesus sees us. Whatever our thinking is, whatever place we are in life, life's journey, he knows it.

And so, he notices us and takes notice of us and knows how best to help us. But then also we're told that he called her forward.

When he saw her, he took in all that was relevant about her condition, he called her forward. there was an invitation from Jesus.

[21 : 50] Now, that invitation of Jesus is still the same today. Jesus still calls us. Jesus has commanded his word to be preached in these kinds of terms, terms of invitation, in terms of calling.

He calls us to follow him. he invites us to believe in him. He stands at the door knocking, asking to come in to our lives.

Jesus still calls us today, calls us to come to him. him. And if before this, the woman had no inkling of what could happen, or even no hope or no belief that anything could happen, at this moment, when Jesus calls her out, she responds, she comes to him.

Here, she has heard a voice such as she has never heard before, something's happening to her that has never ever happened to her in a synagogue service before. Jesus calling her out to the front, in front of all these people.

And it's so obvious that there is a look on his face that shows that he understands what her trouble is. A look on his face that is compassion, love, and something about his whole bearing that shows that he has authority and power.

[23 : 28] And in her coming out to him, as she stumbles along, bent double, there is the beginnings of a response of faith in the command of Jesus to come to him.

Now, you may feel handicapped, you may feel totally inappropriate to come to Jesus, you may feel that you're just not the kind of person whom Jesus would want to have anything to do with, that perhaps there's nothing very much that you can offer to Jesus, yet Jesus calls you.

That woman, after all, was pretty useless. She couldn't do very much, it seemed, outwardly anyway, that Jesus called her, Jesus wanted her, Jesus wanted her to come to him, and he was going to do a great thing with her.

See, it's not what she was to begin with that was the great thing, it was what she was going to become that was the great thing. Now, you and I in ourselves, we're not much.

you and I in ourselves are even less than that because we are sinners and rebels against God. We have taken the very best things of God and we've twisted them and we've harmed them and we've spoiled them.

[25 : 01] Yet God in Jesus Christ says, come, come to me, come to me, you who are twisted and distorted, I will straighten you out.

I will make you stand tall. I will make you walk tall before people and before me. And Jesus then said to this woman, woman, you are set free from your infirmity.

And then he put his hands on her and immediately she straightened up and praised God. Now, there are some stages there that we need to notice. First of all, come the words.

He says to her, you are set free from your infirmity. It was really a description of fact, although it was a fact that had not yet come about, because he says you are set free from your infirmity, but it wasn't until he put his hands on her that she actually was.

You wonder why he did it that way. There's always a reason why Jesus did those things appropriate to the person. Was it because he was seeking to work within that woman the faith so necessary to coming to him and knowing him?

[26 : 31] He said, you are set free. And she believed it. She believed it. And immediately he set his hands on her. she straightened up and praised God.

Whatever the reason was for it, it was something appropriate to that woman's condition and that woman's thoughts. And so, when he touched her, there was this great demonstration of the power of Jesus Christ to straighten the twisted, to undo the effects of sin and evil in this world.

and in the most dramatic fashion, this woman, who had been bent double for 18 long years, stood straight and walked tall before the people that day.

Now, there again, we have the most marvelous visual aid of the gospel of Jesus Christ. God's We know, of course, that not all the problems of that woman were solved just by that one thing.

No doubt, there were still many problems in her life. Many problems that had been caused by her long years of disability. Many things that perhaps were past forever, things that she could never again enjoy in this life, opportunities missed, and so on.

[27 : 59] But yet, the greatest transformation of all had taken place in her life. Never again was she going to be bent double or crippled by this disease that affected her.

And that's a tremendous thing for us to know too. When we come to the Lord Jesus Christ, when we believe in him that he has the power to transform us and change us, we are never encouraged to think in the Bible that there and then, every problem evaporates and life becomes easy.

But what we are told is that by the power of God we are made new and we are given a new start, a new life, a new life that cannot be taken from us, a new life that will continue through all the ups and downs and difficulties and changes, a new life that begins from that point we trust in him and continues forever.

A new life that will not change things that have happened up until that time. Some things can never be undone, things that have happened in the past.

But a new life that is such a transformation that those old things are said to have passed away. All things have become new. Well, just finally, I would like to look with you at the blindness of this ruler, the synagogue ruler, who was there that day when Jesus healed the woman.

[29 : 39] We're told that he was indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath. And he said to the people, there are six days for work, so come and be healed on those days and not on the Sabbath.

It would seem that this man, like many other of the ruling and leading people of that day, had a one-track mind.

He had a mind that was dominated by the rules and regulations which had traditionally arisen among them, by which life was to be lived, by which God was to be worshipped.

And most of these rules and regulations were not found in the Old Testament at all. They were traditions or interpretations that had been passed on and had become established as the way by which people were to live and worship God.

Many of these rules and regulations were indeed to do with the practice of the Sabbath day. The commandment is that we are to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

[30 : 48] Yet they made it a day that was not a day of freedom, a day of free worship of God and enjoying this great liberty of having a day in the service of God and for the benefit of our fellow men.

But a day of bondage, a day of bondage to rules and regulations that they had invented. A day where it was almost impossible to do any good. So that Jesus had to say, what do you think?

Is it right to do good on the Sabbath day or to do evil? And Jesus again here has to demonstrate that utter inconsistency in the way in which they viewed things.

He says, doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall, lead it out, give it water? Jesus so often does in a very down-to-earth way.

Points out a very simple thing that they all did every day and never thought a thing about it.

Something that they accounted to be necessary. They let their ox or donkey out from the stall and gave it a drink of water.

[32 : 03] Didn't leave it tied up all day without any water because the animal would die. So they had a practical concern for the needs of their animals.

Mightn't have extended even to a love of the animals themselves for their own sakes. It might have been just a mercenary kind of interest that if their animal died, well it wouldn't be much use to them and it would be a financial loss.

But at least they showed some kind of concern for their animals. A concern that they were not prepared to show to this woman whom Jesus said had been bound by Satan for eighteen long years.

It's so easy for every one of us to be inconsistent but here surely is a glaring inconsistency that they were prepared to loose their animals every Sabbath day but not prepared that Jesus should loose this woman from her grinding affliction on the Sabbath day.

We've got to be extremely careful that our religion does not consist merely in things and in rules and regulation because the Lord Jesus put it most succinctly by saying the Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath.

[33 : 37] In other words he was saying the Sabbath was a day given by God for the benefit of man. And what Jesus did on the Sabbath day although it was a counted work by his opponents it was done for the benefit of man and for the glory of God.

The work that he did in healing people the work that he did in preaching and teaching all done for the glory of God and the benefit of his fellow men.

And every one of us has got to be very careful that our religion does not deteriorate into the kind of legalism that the Pharisees had.

We've got to be extremely careful that our estimations are the same as the estimations of the Lord Jesus who said that this woman and her need were far more important than the traditions that these people had worked out for themselves.

In other words Jesus said putting it more simply that people matter more than things. People matter more than things.

[34 : 56] These people may have been very concerned in their own kind of way for what they thought was the law of God but in fact it was their own traditions and their own self-interest. But Jesus is saying we must be concerned for people and for their dire needs.

Therefore it's right to do good on the Sabbath day. Similarly we must apply the same kind of thinking to the whole of our religion, the whole of our Christianity. It's so easy for us to get tied up in minor details of practice or of doctrine, of church government or in forms of worship.

I'm not saying that any of these things are unimportant but it's so easy for us to get tied up in those things. All around us there are people who are crippled and distorted and handicapped by sin.

People that need to be free. freed by the power of God through Jesus Christ. When Jesus said this we're told in verse 17 all his opponents were humiliated but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.

You see there is a tremendous impact of the work and words of the Lord Jesus Christ. Tremendous impact that we have to admit there's so much missing in the day in which we live.

[36 : 31] A reflection upon ourselves and upon all our churches. Wherever Jesus went and wherever he spoke and wherever he worked there was an impact there was a reaction. There were those who were humiliated by his words and angry against him and there were those who were delighted with the wonderful things that he was doing.

Jesus' words here hit home yet again. Should not this woman and daughter of Abraham whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her? These words penetrating right to the heart of the matter cause a reaction. What kind of reaction do these words cause in your mind tonight? What kind of reaction does this emphasis that Jesus makes here, the emphasis of liberation from bondage and from being crippled, what impact does

that have upon you tonight?

Do these things sound very remote, very unreal to you? Or do they tonight touch something in your soul and touch something at your point of need?

Do you see that yes, indeed, you do feel handicapped and crippled and distorted and twisted by sin? And you want above all to have that rectified, to have that cure?

[38 : 02] Well, you come to the only one to whom you can come, the eternal son of God who alone has power to alter what seems to be the unalterable, to cure what seems to be the incurable, and to straighten out what seems to be the most twisted and convoluted.

The Lord Jesus Christ tonight is as able to help you with your psychological problem or your problem of temptation or your problem of sin, as he was to help that woman with her physical problem.

I'm not saying that every problem will be ironed out in this life. The Bible does not promise it so. God does not promise it so. He said to the Apostle Paul that he was to continue to have his weakness, whatever it was, his thorn in the flesh.

Although Paul pleaded that it would be taken away, he continued to have it in this life as a reminder to him that he was indeed but a weak man who needed the grace of God and that God's grace was made perfect, God's strength was made perfect in his weakness.

But there's something here that goes beyond even that. Because this healing of the woman and indeed all these other healings that we read of in the gospel are a reminder to us that ultimately it is not God's will that there should be handicapped, or disability in this world.

[39 : 42] God allows it in this life for many reasons, many reasons that are perhaps inscrutable to us, that we cannot fully understand. Perhaps we can sometimes understand part of it like Paul obviously came to understand something of it in his own life, whatever his disability was.

He saw that it was for his own good. Perhaps sometimes we cannot understand, but yet we know that the time comes when all these things, these temporary arrangements of God pass away, and the age is ushered in when there will be no handicaps.

The age is ushered in when every effect of sin in this life, whether physical or spiritual, will be reversed. And not only this woman, but every other child of God who has suffered a disability, every child of God who has been twisted or in some way perverted or made less than they ought to be in the service of God, they are restored to complete manhood, to complete humanity.

When their bodies are raised up, new bodies, new whole human beings, fitted for the complete service of God, throughout all eternity in a new universe, a new heavens and new earth.

What a tremendous hope before every person who believes in Jesus Christ. You remember, I'm sure I've mentioned it before, but it's perhaps the most fitting way in which this can be expressed.

[41 : 30] You remember the girl, Joni Erickson, who was so tragically handicapped by a diving accident, paralyzed from the neck down. She went through tremendous torment, not just physical, but spiritual, in her great struggle to come to terms with how God could allow such a thing.

Yet she has come to see how God has purposes, good purposes in it, in this life, but she has never lost the belief, the right and the good, biblical belief, that one day all these things shall have passed away.

And she puts it like this, one day, the resurrection day, she will be on her feet dancing. May that be the experience of everyone here tonight, through Jesus Christ.

Let us pray.