

A Woman with a Disabling Spirit

Introduction

Spiritual truths are not philosophy or only in the “realm of ideas.” These realities affect us every day. For example, God created mankind upright, for the purpose of reflecting his perfect design and infinite love. Yet, we live in a world that is certainly not perfect. It seems contorted, though we recognize what it could be if it were straightened out. More just. No pain. No strife. We know inherently that a world like that is the one we were made for.

When sin entered the picture, it bent and twisted the frame of the reality that God built for us out of shape. Now, the fractures from the fall are on display. Civilizations, governments, families and individual people are bent out of shape of the perfect, harmonious design imagined by God through the days of creation and from the formation of Adam and Eve. That’s why one word for sin is the Hebrew word *avon*, which translated, means “twisted or crooked.”

We have all felt the effects of the fall. Perhaps few have felt these effects in a more direct way than the woman with a disabling spirit in Luke 13.10-17. This woman ailing from a disabling spirit had literally twisted her out of shape for eighteen years as she encounters Jesus teaching in a synagogue on the day of rest.

A Disabling Spirit and Eighteen Years of Pain

And behold, there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself.

– Luke 13.11

Jesus had come into the synagogue as was typical for Him. One can imagine how the news would quickly spread that He had come into town to teach. A carpenter’s son teaching with greater authority than the Pharisees was sensational enough. Couple that with His amazing power of infirmity and demons. Imagine what it would be like to struggle for many years with a certain infirmity or pain, what would it be like to hear the news that the Healer and Teacher Jesus was going to be at your local synagogue? What would it mean?

For the woman in the account, we are studying from today, it meant that everything in her life had changed. It seems that she was plagued by an infirmity caused by an indwelling demonic spirit for eighteen years that caused her to suffer and live in a bent-over fashion. No matter how hard she tried, she could not stand upright on her own. One can imagine the physical aches and complications, the social difficulties and the spiritual effects of having an indwelling demon. Imagine the hopelessness of eighteen years of affliction.

Now, imagine the rush that must have went through her mind as she heard rumors of a rabbi who could cast out demons and heal infirmities. Imagine when she heard that rabbi may be the Messiah. Imagine

her reaction when Christ ceased to teach the crowd and focused His attention on her, to call her over. Her life was about to be changed forever.

And She Glorified God

When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, “Woman, you are freed from your disability.” And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God.

– Luke 13.12-13

Jesus calls the woman to himself, and it seems that she came to meet Him. There, He lays His hands on her and proves His redemptive power over our physical world as well as over the spiritual world in one moment. With no pause or recovery time, she is suddenly able to stand straight again.

Her response to this healing is to immediately glorify God. This woman identified the source of the healing and gave credit where credit is due. This is the desired effect of every miracle of Christ. In addition to serving this woman, Jesus simultaneously shows the power of God working through Him—further confirming His identity as the Christ.

Christ was not merely a healer of a physical and spiritual ailment that had forced this woman to remain bent. He is also the solution to a bent and twisted world that we live in, as well as our own bent and twisted souls. The “avon” or twisting effect that sin has on mankind is seen here as totally under the dominion of Christ. The woman with the disabling spirit recognized the moment.

Healing on the Sabbath?

But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people,

There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day.

— Luke 13.14

The ruler of the synagogue takes issue with Christ performing the healing for this woman on the Sabbath day, when working was prohibited by the Old Testament. Did Jesus sin by healing on the Sabbath? Not quite. The Jewish community at this time had become far more legalistic and restrictive than the actual laws according to the Sabbath were. Of course, the Pharisees had their own foregone conclusions, which were not logically consistent, nor were they consistent with God’s actual law.

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 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, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

—Exodus 20.8-11

The point of the Sabbath was to provide a day of rest from the typical rigorous work day for solemn meditation and reflection *for* God’s people. As Jesus, clearly points out in Mark 2.27, the Sabbath (and all God’s decrees) are given by God to bless and sanctify God’s people, not as another arbitrary rule “just because he can.” Jesus’ healings on the Sabbath aligned with the original purpose of the Sabbath... it

brought rest to a weary soul and brought glory to God. We know that Jesus always worked within the Old Testament, not rejecting it.

Yet the Pharisees had turned the Sabbath into a “heavy burden, too hard to bear,” such that they would cancel out the command of God to “love your neighbor as yourself” in order to establish their own extra-biblical rules about the Sabbath and what constituted work.

Notice Jesus’ response and his treatment of this woman and how it exposes the hypocrisy of the ruler of the synagogue and speaks to the woman’s identity, and worth:

- ***Is she not worth more than an animal?*** (v.15) The Pharisees taught that it was acceptable to take a working animal out for the purpose of feeding and watering on the Sabbath. This did not constitute work in their estimation, since the animals would needlessly suffer and potentially die. Yet, they did not understand that Jesus was leading with mercy and acting within the Sabbath restriction on labor in this moment—even though, He was showing the same level of basic concern for her that the Pharisees showed their livestock.
- ***Is she not a daughter of Abraham?*** (v.16a) Further, Jesus refers to the woman with the disabling spirit as a “daughter of Abraham.” In this statement, Jesus appeals to her status as a member of the covenant people of God. He recognizes her identity and ties her lineage back to the patriarch whom the Jewish leaders of the day exalted. In this statement, He also acknowledges her as part of the family of God. One can scarcely imagine a faithful father and follower of Jehovah God refusing to help or rescue his daughter from extreme pain and duress because it may constitute as “work,” on the Sabbath.
- ***Is she not under bondage from Satan?*** (v.16b) Finally, Jesus calls to attention the spiritual reality of this woman’s situation. She had been tormented by a demon and broken almost in half by it. The level of legalism that it would take not to rejoice at the healing of the woman and rather to focus on an (incorrectly perceived) breaking of Sabbath-day prohibition is egregious and Christ makes this clear with his rhetorical question in verse 16. Christ’s ultimate goal and highest virtue of purpose is to remove the bondage of Satan and make everything that was bent out of shape straight again.

In Christ’s typical fashion, it seems clear that the defense of His Sabbath-day healing of this woman utterly shut down the attempted criticism from His accusers and simultaneously glorified God.

As he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame, and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him.

– Luke 13.17

We Can Be Made Upright Again

Each person is not much different from this woman with the disabling spirit. We have been bent and twisted out of shape by our own sin, the sins of others and the effects of living in a fallen and broken creation. We may not physically be bent, sometimes even the bending and twisting may not be obvious at all. Yet, we all experience it. How then do we become upright?

1. ***Go to God in your heart.*** “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you,” James 4.8a. The woman in the story encountered Christ in the synagogue. What was she doing there? It was likely she had heard that Christ would be teaching there. If not, still she was seeking the God of Israel by attending the synagogue. This woman may not have been the poster child or have the appearance of an “elite religious person” and yet here she is having her life changed by God. Step one for those of us who feel that we are bent is to open up our heart to God and start moving toward Him. This looks like going to church and being present in body and in mind. This looks like moving toward God in a more dedicated prayer life. This looks like getting in the scriptures. This looks like clearing out our excuses not to do these things.
2. ***Listen when He calls and respond.*** Christ is calling out to all of us. The church that Christ died for is composed of all those who have heard His call and responded. If we listen, at the right moment, He will call us out of the crowd and invite us to a new or deeper relationship with him. New layers of personal revival come to those who are actively looking for God’s movement, listening to his voice in the Word and trusting that he can and will come through for us. If we truly believe he can do far more than we think or ask, then we will listen carefully and pay attention to what God is doing in our lives. This means keeping a biblical worldview, trusting, and expecting God is working all things for your good in Christ and regular meditation on what he wants to do in your life.

We know that Christ is ready and willing to make a defense for us exactly like He did for this woman. What He said of her is true for us, too.

- ***We are God’s prized creation, above all other created things on Earth.*** “Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” (Matthew 6.25-34)
- ***We are welcomed into God’s covenant family.*** “For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.” (Matthew 12.50)
- ***We are sought and saved by Jesus, as is His ongoing mission in all of creation.*** “To seek and save the lost.” (Luke 19.10)

For Thought and Reflection

1. What stands out to you about Luke 13.10-17?
2. How does sin bend our wills in the wrong direction?
3. How does sin bend our cultures and societies in the wrong direction?

4. What would it have been like to live for eighteen years with a malicious disabling spirit?

5. What are the emotions that this woman must have experienced before and after her healing?

6. How did Jesus make the case that healing this woman was acceptable on the Sabbath?

7. What do you think Jesus saw when He looked at the woman with the disabling spirit?

8. How are the Pharisees a good example of how NOT to think of others?

9. What are Christ's teachings regarding the value of each person?

10. What does Christ promise to do with our bent and twisted selves? How do we know we can trust Him?