

Jesus Heals a Crippled Woman

In my youth I use to listen to and dance to a song by Dr. John. Some of the lyrics went:

I been in the right place
But it must have been the wrong time
I'd of said the right thing
But I must have used the wrong line
I been in the right trip
But I must have used the wrong car
my head was in a bad place
And I'm wondering what it's good for

In our scripture Jesus was accused of being in the right place, but at the wrong time. Jesus modeled a different way of living from the one taught by the religious leaders of his day. Jesus spent his time preaching, teaching, and explaining what the kingdom of God was like. He demonstrated this by healing the sick, giving comfort and hope, and modeling kingdom living. Luke described a woman as one who had been crippled by a spirit for 18 years and “bound” by “Satan.” If I had been crippled for eighteen years, I wonder if I would be faithful to worship God week after week in the synagogue. Surely this woman had prayed and asked God for help, and yet she was not delivered. God’s seeming unconcern did not cause her to become bitter or resentful. There she was in the synagogue.

Ever sensitive to the needs of others, Jesus saw the woman and called her to come forward. It may have seemed heartless to the congregation for Him to do this and expose her handicap publicly, but He knew what He was doing. For one thing, Satan was in the synagogue and He wanted to expose him and defeat him. But He also wanted the woman to help Him teach the people an important lesson about freedom. Jesus healed her by His words “Woman, you are set free from your

ailment,” and by touching her. Immediately she straightened up and praised God. This act of praising God was the proper response to the work of Jesus. It showed that people understood His mission.

In contrast to the proper response which the woman evidenced, the synagogue ruler was indignant because Jesus had not followed the Law as that ruler interpreted it. He addressed his protest to the waiting people, although it was meant for Jesus. He appealed to the crowd to reject Jesus’ miracle. Instead of rejoicing and giving God the glory, the ruler of the synagogue became angry. He did not have the courage to express his anger to Jesus, so he scolded the congregation! But the more we think about his tirade, the more laughable it becomes. Suppose they did bring their sick to be healed; who would heal them? Did he have that kind of power; and, if he did, why had he not used it to help people before? What a cowardly hypocrite!

The bondage of the ruler of the synagogue was worse than that of the woman. Her bondage affected only her body, but his bondage shackled his mind and heart. He was so bound and blinded by tradition that he ended up opposing the Son of God! Elbert Hubbard called tradition “a clock that tells us what time it was.” The ruler of the synagogue could not “discern this time” and he stood condemned.

It is true that Jesus could have healed this woman on any other day of the week. After all, she had been bound for eighteen painful years, and one more day would have made little difference. But He deliberately chose the Sabbath Day because He wanted to teach a lesson about freedom.

The attitude of the ruler of the synagogue supported what Jesus had already said about religious leaders keeping others from entering the kingdom.

Jesus pointed out that a person is much more important than an animal, and His enemies saw nothing wrong in helping their animals on the Sabbath. The total

hypocrisy and foolishness of the thinking of the religious leaders was obvious. As a result Jesus' opponents were humiliated but the crowds were delighted.

Without denying the historicity of the event, it must be pointed out that there is obvious symbolic value in Luke's placing this miracle at this point in the narrative. It was Jesus' mission among the people of the nation to loose them from crippling influences and bring them to uprightness. This was a graphic example of Jesus' touch, bringing the woman to a position of uprightness.¹

We also believe that not only does Satan bow people down, but so do sin, sorrow, and suffering. Jesus Christ is the only One who can set the prisoner free. He spoke the word, laid His hands on her, and she was healed and gave glory to God! That was a synagogue service the people never forgot.

But Jesus' indictment included the people in the congregation as well. If God permits people to help their thirsty animals on the Sabbath, doesn't He want us to care for needy people made in the image of God? Any tradition that keeps us from helping others is not from God. In fact, it is easy to use tradition as an excuse for not caring for others. "I would help people but I give to DMF. God wants both.

Jesus said that the woman was a "daughter of Abraham," referring to her spiritual condition and not her physical birth. All the Jewish women present would have been "daughters of Abraham." Jesus' words implied that she was "demon oppression" rather than "demon possession." Certainly Satan can and does attack the bodies and minds of God's people. Some satanic oppression could last for many years until someone detects that Satan is at work. Buy not all sickness is caused by demons, so we must not blame everything on Satan.

There were people in the congregation who hoped to use this Sabbath violation to accuse Jesus, but He left them so ashamed that they said nothing. The lesson that

¹Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:240

He taught was clear: Satan puts people into bondage, but true freedom comes from trusting Christ. The Sabbath that God wants to give us is a “heart rest” that comes through His grace and not from obeying traditions.²

But let’s look briefly at the Sabbath and why Jesus was so often in conflict with the religious leaders of his day. The Hebrew Scriptures, which we call the Old Testament established the seventh day of the week as a day of rest. Over the years experts in Hebrew Law had debated the nature of “work” and had developed numerous rules that restricted Sabbath activity. For example, it was permitted to spit on a rock, but not on loose earth, because spitting on the ground could be considered plowing. A person could travel only a certain distance from home on the Sabbath—but if a person left a personal possession at the limit of a Sabbath day’s journey (2 to 4 miles), that place became “home” to him and he could travel an equal distance further. This multitude of rules governing Sabbath activity was held to be binding on good Jews.

Each of the Gospel writers wrote about the conflict between Pharisees and Jesus over the Sabbath. Our scripture is a typical case because Jesus healed on the Sabbath. Jesus understood the rules, but compassion was what he understood more about the Word of God. Apparently Jesus’ words and actions drove home the truth so sharply that even His opponents had to recognize He was right. But there is a vast difference between realizing one is wrong and repenting.³

This is also the last time we ever hear of Jesus being in a synagogue. It is clear that by this time the authorities were watching his every action and waiting to pounce upon him whenever they got the chance. Jesus healed a woman on the

²Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Lk 13:1

³Richards, Lawrence O.: *The Bible Readers Companion*. electronic ed. Wheaton : Victor Books, 1991; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996, S. 664

Sabbath; technically healing was work; and, therefore he had broken the Sabbath. But he answered his opponents out of their own law.

We can shake our heads and say “isn’t it a shame” but if we are not careful we can become like the ruler of the synagogue and be people who love systems more than people. We can be more concerned that our own petty little laws should be observed than that a woman should be helped.

One of the great problems of a developed civilization is the relationship of the individual to the system. In times of war the individual vanishes. A man ceases to be a person and becomes a member of such and such an age group or the like. A number of men are lumped together, not as individuals, but as living ammunition that is, in that terrible word, expendable. A man becomes no more than an item in a statistical list. Lady Beatrice Passfield was an economist and statistical expert; but H. G. Wells said of Lady Beatrice that her trouble was that “she saw men as specimens walking.”

In Christianity, Jesus’ mode of kingdom living, the individual comes before the system. Christianity guarantees and defends the value of the ordinary, individual person. But the worship of systems commonly invades the Church. There are many church people who are more concerned with the method of church government than they are with the worship of God and the service of others. It seems that more trouble and strife arise in Churches over legalistic details of procedure than over any other thing. In the world and in the church we are constantly in danger of loving systems more than we love God and more than we love others.

Jesus’ model and action in this matter makes it clear that it is not God’s will that any human being should suffer one moment longer than is absolutely necessary. The Jewish law was that it was perfectly legal to help someone on the Sabbath who was in actual danger of his life. If Jesus had postponed the healing of this woman until the morrow no one could have criticized him; but he insisted that

suffering must not be allowed to continue until tomorrow if it could be helped today. Over and over again in life some good and kindly plan is held up until this or that regulation is satisfied, or this or that technical detail worked out. A Latin proverb says, “he gives twice who gives quickly.” No helpful deed that we can do today should be postponed until tomorrow.⁴ This is the model that Jesus has given us...we must go and live it.

⁴ Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Gospel of Luke*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 176