

36. Jesus and the Crippled Woman

Luke 13:10-20

Luke: A Walk Through the Life of Jesus

Worldview and Evil Spirits

In the passage of Scripture that we are studying today, Jesus sets free a woman who was afflicted with a disability caused by an unseen demonic spirit. Our Western materialist mindset or worldview affects how we see and interpret things that are spiritual. Our worldview is like a lens that shuts out the fact that there might be more things to this world than what we see with our eyes. It never ceases to amaze me that one person can view something one way, and others can see it totally different. As an example of this, before going on to the words further down the page, scroll down to the picture below and decide for yourself what it is that you see.



The illustration is an example to us of how our eyes can be deceived. Do you see an old woman or a young woman? Sometimes, it's difficult to see something that others see. The old woman's mouth is the young woman's necklace. The old woman's nose is the young woman's chin. They share their hair, the scarf, the fur coat, and the feather in their hair. Don't be upset with yourself if you can't see the other woman. This is a classic eye trick that has appeared in psychology books for years as an example of an optical illusion! Our eyes can be so fixed on the things we view that it is difficult to see differently.

If you were to go to the Amazon Rain Forest and describe snow or ice, the natives who have lived there all their lives will think you are crazy to believe that water goes stiff and can be walked on, and that rain, sufficiently cold enough, can be white and become snow, and flutters down in northern regions of the Earth. Their experience is that water never behaves that way. It is hard to think differently concerning things that are spiritual when your knowledge is limited.

Our Western worldview is based upon reason and logic. Our culture has discarded the biblical worldview that Earth is a battlefield between two kingdoms: The kingdom of God vs. the kingdom of darkness (1 John 5:19). There is an enemy of God at work in our world who seeks to keep many in the dark as to the existence of evil spirits and their work of deception and evil. The passage we are studying today is about a woman whose disability is caused by a demon whose work lies mostly undetected by those around her.

Question 1) Why would the devil and his demons want to keep us oblivious not only to their presence but also to their schemes and strategies, too? Have you, or someone you know, ever had an experience that convinced you of the presence of spiritual beings sent from God or Satan?

C.S. Lewis, in his classic description of demonic strategy, *The Screwtape Letters*, writes a fictional account of a senior demon (Screwtape) educating a younger demon (Wormwood) in the art of deceiving the mass of humanity on the existence of supernatural evil forces. Lewis writes as if it is Uncle Screwtape writing:

Our policy, for the moment, is to conceal ourselves. Of course, this has not always been so; we are faced with a cruel dilemma. When the humans disbelieve in our existence we lose all the pleasing results of direct terrorism, and we make no magicians. On the other hand, when they believe in us, we cannot make them materialists and skeptics. At least, not yet. I have great hopes that we shall learn in due time how to emotionalize and mythologize their science to such an extent that what is, in effect, a belief in us (though not under that name) will creep in while the human mind remains closed to belief in the Enemy. The “Life Force,” the worship of sex, and some aspects of Psychoanalysis may here prove useful. If once we can produce our perfect work—the Materialistic Magician, the man, not using, but veritably worshipping, what he vaguely calls “Forces” while denying the existence of “spirits”—then the end of the war will be in sight. But in the meantime, we must obey our orders. I do not think you will have much difficulty in keeping the patient in the dark. The fact that “devils” are predominantly *comic* figures in the modern imagination will help you. If at any point suspicion of your existence begins to arise in his mind, suggest to him a picture of something in red tights, and persuade him that since he cannot believe in that (it is an old textbook method of confusing them) he therefore cannot believe in you. ¹

To the average Asian, African, or eastern person, the Western worldview is illogical in believing that there is nothing more than what we sense with our physical bodies. The biblical worldview of angels and demons, God and Satan, and the fact that these personalities can and do interact with us is God’s truth that we need to understand and not ignore. It seems that the demon was quite happy to keep the knowledge of its presence concealed to those around the bent-over woman. The enemy does his best work when we are unaware of his presence. Jesus, the Light of the World, brought the enemy’s presence out into the open.

Elisha, the prophet, had a servant who was blind to the spiritual world. When the king of Aram wanted to capture Elisha, he sent his army to the city where Elisha and his servant were living;

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 32-33.

the servant was understandably full of fear when he saw the enemy encircling the city. Elisha knew that he was not alone:

¹⁵When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" the servant asked. ¹⁶"Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." ¹⁷And Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire [God's angelic forces] all around Elisha (2 Kings 6:15-17).

We also need to have our eyes opened to the spiritual realm around us. There are more forces on our side than appear to be against us. Luke continues his narrative now by going to another time, and another place, i.e. the last recorded visit to a synagogue by Jesus before His crucifixion. This occasion also happens to be on a Sabbath. We see here an example of Christ's care for those who have been broken by the enemy's work.

A Crippled Woman Healed on the Sabbath

¹⁰On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, ¹¹and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. ¹²When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." ¹³Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God. ¹⁴Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath." (Luke 13:10-14).

Luke brings to us a woman who today would probably be diagnosed by a doctor as having what physician's call Ankylosing Spondylitis, or Marie-Strümpell Disease, a fusion of the spinal bones. However, this time the disease has a spiritual cause rather than just an organic cause. There are no medicines that are known today that can cure this condition.

In the early stages of the disease, sufferers often find that the pain is relieved somewhat when they lean forward. So, they often go through the day leaning slightly forward, and gradually their spine begins to fuse. The more they lean to relieve the pain, the greater the angle, until a patient might be bent almost double, as is the woman referred to in our passage. The bones become calcified, and the person is not able to straighten herself. This woman has lived with this condition steadily getting worse for eighteen years.

We don't know if this was the first time the woman had come to this synagogue, but it seems that she sat down with the others. Although being bent over double, it is unlikely that she could see Christ. I think it is a beautiful thing that, even with her disability, she is still present to hear the Word of God being taught. One gets the feeling that, maybe, it was her only hope. Verse 10 indicates that the Word of God was taught first before Jesus called her out from the crowd. I wonder how many had noticed her that day or on previous Sabbaths. While she was sitting among them, was the congregation concerned for her condition? Were they aware that she was

influenced by demons? A person can be influenced by demons and have no outward manifestations of what is going on in their mind or bodies.

Question 2) Let's try to enter the crippled woman's world. What would it be like to live with your back bent for eighteen years? Why would Jesus be making the synagogue rulers angry by healing her as He did on the Sabbath before everyone?

She would have been continually ridiculed by children and teenagers. Dancing and praising God with the other Hebrew women at celebrations in the Temple courts would be an impossibility for her. There would be an inability to work in the same way as others, thus resulting in her living very meagerly. She would be unable to carry things and would have lost the respect of many, along with the hope of ever finding a husband. Her illness would possibly cause her to question God's love and sovereignty. It would be a natural tendency in this situation to be filled with bitterness, especially as we are told that the enemy had made inroads into her life and caused this affliction. There had to be a degree of trust in her heart to sit and wait and leave her condition solidly in God's hands. There are so many questions that we would like to ask her. Did she know what Jesus could do for her? Maybe, she was silently trusting and praying inside her heart, knowing that she could not ask for healing as it was a Sabbath day and that healing would be considered work. She could only listen and silently trust God.

Christ knew that there would be a storm of controversy by the religious people if He ministered to the woman, but He was never intimidated by those who were out for His blood. A greater man of courage I have never seen. Wouldn't it have been wonderful for her to be called out during a service, especially if she was between the seats and bowed down, possibly unseen due to others in front of her? Jesus saw her and called her out. It is a wonderful thought to know that the King sees all of us that belong to Him: **"The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and his ears are attentive to their cry"** (Psalm 34:15).

I wonder how many conditions today are treated with drugs when the cause is demonic in origin. We don't read of her experiencing demonic manifestations that we read of elsewhere in the Bible, namely frothing at the mouth, screaming in a loud voice, seizures, and self-destructive tendencies (Mark 5:1-10). I used to pastor in one of the most occult areas of England, and every now and then, I had to deal with people who were in bondage to the occult. On occasion, there has been much prayer that can take time to release a person from a demonic grip; whereas, at other times, people are released with a simple prayer. It depends on how deeply the person is entrenched in sin and in the enemy's kingdom, and to what degree the enemy has been allowed to affect the person's life.

Jesus said to her, **"Woman, you are set free from your infirmity"** (v. 12). The demon had not only caused this crippling disease eighteen years previously, but it was keeping her tied up in a spiritual way. Some would say that the demonic problem occurred eighteen years ago and that her problem was only physical now. The sentence, though, is in the present tense; she became free from the spirit at Christ's word. The result was that, when He put His hands on her, she immediately straightened up. Man is different from all animals in that he stands erect. It is evil spirits that would seek to make us bent down under the weight of sin. It is impossible for us to

realize how it must have restored her self-respect! Jesus can heal us to the point where we can look in the mirror again and be proud of the work of God! How wonderful He is!

We are told that her reaction to her deliverance and healing was that she *praised God*. The Greek word *Doxazo* is derived from *doxa*, the verb depicts action involving the recognition of the favor of God bestowed on her. The idea is to speak highly of the greatness and excellence of someone. Don't you think that she lavishly screamed her delight in audibly praising God? How could she not loudly lose herself when treated so graciously? The miracle was seen by a packed audience in church that day. What joy flooded her heart!

Cold Religion

What a difference we see between the religious ruler of the synagogue and the healed woman. What a cold stone of a man he was! It does not seem right that he is in charge over a congregation of God's people. Doesn't it make you wonder how a man with no heart and compassion can lead the flock of God? He is *indignant*. What a strong word that Scripture uses about him. Instead of joy at this woman's deliverance and healing, he is very angry and upset. ¹⁴Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath" (v. 14). Doesn't it make you wonder if the demon found another home right away? Isn't it amazing how religious people can pull a Scripture out of the context of the heart of God? The synagogue ruler quotes the Talmudic rule book interpretation that healing on a Sabbath day was work. The man does not rebuke the Lord; he speaks sharply to his congregation.

¹⁵The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? ¹⁶Then 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?" ¹⁷When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing (Luke 13:15-17).

Question 3) What do you see in the synagogue ruler's attitude that makes you want to be different than he is?

This woman had patiently sat in her seat; it was Jesus Who had called her forward. It is just like the enemy to get at the Lord by attacking his people, especially when the people of God begin to praise the Lord. What we see here is the enemy at work in the church. The enemy sometimes uses religious people to squash the praise of God. When Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, His people were ecstatic with joy, praising God in loud voices. The Pharisee's response was, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out" (Luke 19:39-40).

It strikes me how Jesus is so quick to defend the child of God from the attacks of the evil one. The Lord puts the religious man in his place. He spoke to all the religious people that were trying to quiet the congregation's praise, "You hypocrites!" (the word *hypocrites* is plural in the Greek language). He shames the religious for their lack of love for people and their worship of their

rules. He appealed to common sense, pointing out that each of them, upon waking on the Sabbath morning, unties his animals and leads them to water, and should not this woman of Abraham, a child of God, be set free from what tied her up spiritually on that same morning? How the common folk loved His response! There was much praise to God that morning.

He spoke words of love, affirmation, and respect into the heart of this woman that had lost all self-respect. He calls her a daughter of Abraham. How kind and reassuring that must have felt to her, a woman that, because of her physical condition, more than likely had been despised and accused of something sinful that had caused her condition. If you want to be a person that knows the power of God, then be set free in your praise to God. When all your natural instincts are to stand like stone as the rest of the congregation sings and worships, ask God to set you free. Raise your hands in submission to God. Picture God's sitting on His throne as you worship. Don't wait until heaven before you learn to worship in Spirit and Truth, for the Father is seeking for such people on earth (John 4:23-24). Learn to be a worshiper who will abandon self and give Him all your praise and adoration this side of heaven. The enemy hates it when the Lord's people move in an abandoned spirit of praise because the Lord is enthroned on the praises of His people (Psalm 22:3). A special sense of the presence of God comes as He is worshiped.

One would expect that a leader of God's people would be a lover of people, but this man showed no compassion whatsoever. One thing I have noticed about those who are in the grip of evil is that they cannot stand to be among a group of God's people praising God. This ruler of the synagogue cannot keep his words to himself. At an earlier time, Jesus had said, "A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For **the mouth speaks what the heart is full of**" (Luke 6:45 emphasis mine). This synagogue ruler's words betray where his heart was. Ask God to use your tongue for the edification (building up) of others and not to pull down the works of God. "The tongue is but three inches long, yet it can kill a man six feet high" (anon).

Jesus reminds the man that animals are treated better than His people under the rules of the Jewish leadership. Doesn't every man allow his animals to drink in the morning? One can hear the care in His voice for this poor woman who has been under the cruel bondage of Satan for eighteen years. "Not another day," he says. Notice again that, what we often see as a physical thing, Jesus said that the real condition was that Satan had kept her bound. I'm not saying that we should look for demonic problems in every person who is sick, but sometimes, the evidence stares us in the face, and it is our Western world view that blinds us from seeing spiritual things clearly (2 Corinthians 4:4).

In Luke's narrative, he then follows this context of this wonderful deliverance and the religious attack to tell us of two parables that Jesus spoke to illustrate the growth of the Kingdom of God.

The Parables of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast

¹⁸Then Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? ¹⁹It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches." ²⁰Again he asked, "What shall I

compare the kingdom of God to? ²¹It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough" (Luke 13:18-20).

Question 4) What is Jesus teaching by these two parables? Do they relate to this story of what happened in the synagogue? What stands out to you about them?

There are two ways that these parables can be interpreted:

1) In the first interpretation, both parables are about the growth of the Kingdom of God, a mustard seed is one of the smallest seeds, yet it has phenomenal growth to be a tree. Jesus represents the seed that falls into the ground and dies to produce many seeds. John the Apostle records Jesus as saying:

Unless a kernel of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds (John 12:24).

Over time, the beginning of the Kingdom of God becomes a tree much bigger than first believed possible. The same language is used in Daniel 4:4-12, where King Nebuchadnezzar is compared to a tree with birds and animals in and under the shade of his kingdom's tree. The Kingdom of God is likened to many people groups coming under the shade of the influence of the Gospel tree. We see that, wherever Christians have had their influence in countries of the world, education, work ethics, medical facilities, and many other things have taken root. It is possible that the parables represent how the Gospel message has and will influence the whole world, starting from such a small beginning with Jesus and the listeners present with him, *viz.* His disciples. Likewise, with the leaven or yeast that is added to flour, the yeast represents the influence of lives on the inside that are renewed. Changed lives cannot be seen just as the influence of the leaven cannot be seen, but changed lives and values will influence whole cultures.

In the early 1900s, the predominant belief of most Christians was that the Church would Christianize the world, and then Jesus would come back. The victorious Church would present the world to Jesus. Don't get me wrong. I do believe the Church will be victorious over Satan and the Mark of the Beast (Revelation 15:2). I just don't believe that the church is going to Christianize the world before Jesus comes. For the most part, that thinking has dissipated after the two world wars, and many others that have been fought. When I look through the book of Revelation, it does not indicate a world that is brought to Christ. My view is that, yes, Jesus is teaching in these two parables that there will be huge growth from the seed of Jesus' life.

2) The other possible way that it can be interpreted is to ask what Jesus meant by the phrase, "the birds of the air perched in its branches." Again, yeast was added to bread "until it worked all through the dough." In Mark 4, the Parable of the Sower, when the sower went forth and sowed the seed into the earth, the birds of the air were stealing the seed that was sown on the path. Jesus said that they represented satanic forces (Mark 4:15). Also, in Matthew 16:12, and several other Scriptures, we are told that yeast is symbolic of the presence of evil. When we think of the context in which these two parables were spoken, *i.e.* of the religious opposition that was in the synagogue seeking to hinder the work of Jesus in the congregation, the thought is that, as the

Gospel message grows, there will be the influence of people, such as the synagogue ruler, i.e. people who have positions of power and influence in churches, but who do not have the Spirit of Christ. The birds in the tree and the yeast represent those who would hinder the praise of God and compromise the pure message of the Gospel. The history of the Church records that such a thing has happened. It is possible that Jesus is warning His Church that, as the Church grows, we are to be people that are focused on Him and His Word and not to compromise with an ungodly world church that has at its core those who have a cold heart of stone.

Prayer. Father, we come to You in the name of Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Please transform us to be people that are continually filled with joy at Your works in this world. Let the attitude of the synagogue ruler be far from us. Amen.

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