

Title: Let's try this again
Text: Luke 13.10-17
Theme: another chance for humble faith
Series: Luke
Prop Stmt: Humility leads to life; humiliation to an angry death.

On Wednesday's there is a newsy church-wide email that is sent out. It usually contains a note (devotional thought) from me (sometimes others), a list of updates, links for more information, a list of members to pray for and the text for the upcoming Sunday's sermon. If you read the sermon text this week, you may have thought that this sounds a little familiar because it is familiar. Here is another healing by Jesus in another Synagogue on another Sabbath. The last time Luke recorded this type of event was toward the beginning of chapter 6 and the result was a man with a withered hand was made whole, but the Scribes and Pharisees were incensed that Jesus dared to heal a man on the Sabbath. In a moment, I am going to read our text for this morning. As I do, ask the question that you should always ask when reading the Bible. "Why is this here?" To help you answer that question you have to see the relationship of this text to what comes before and after. In other words, what does this text have to do with the text we studied last week?

Read Text:

Jesus just finished telling a parable about a fig tree that did not produce figs. The owner was ready to cut it down, but decided to give it one more chance. What happens next? Jesus goes into another synagogue on another Sabbath and here is another person who is in a pitiful condition and once again, Jesus heals this person and once again, the leaders are incensed. Same song, second verse, a little bit louder and little bit worse. Jesus is giving them another chance to get it right, but the mercy of God seen in the gracious power of God is the occasion for the synagogue ruler and others to hate Jesus even more. Did Jesus know that this would light them up? Sure. Obviously, Jesus did this on purpose. He did not have to heal this woman then and there, so why did he do it that way? A little background may be helpful.

There is nothing in the OT about synagogues. However, synagogues are all over the place in the gospels and are the places where significant events take place in the life of Christ. He teaches in them and at times he heals people in them. But what are they and where did they come?

1. **Synagogue Life** – (10)

Solomon's Temple and Moses' Tabernacle before that, was the center of and focal point of Israel and then Judah's religious and ceremonial life. For several hundred years the Jews would travel to Jerusalem 3x per year for the holy-days (festivals). But life in the OT was intended by God to be more than ceremony and ritual. God's law was to be internalized. God's people were supposed to love God, love neighbor and obey God. OT life had a strong ethical and moral element that properly understood and applied structured the day-to-day life of a Jew. OT life was designed to be like 2 lanes on the same road: ceremonial and ethical. One of the major

themes of the OT prophets is how the Jews ignored the ethical but liked to retain to some degree the ceremonial. Ceremony without heart is worthless.

In 586 B.C., the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple and took thousands of Jews into exile. If you study the history of religions, you will note that in most cases, when you destroy the place dedicated to the god, you destroy the religion. Dagon, Baal, Asherah, Molech, (etc.) are gone because their temples were destroyed. But the worship of Yahweh did not die with the destruction of Solomon's temple. Instead of being assimilated into Babylonian life and fading out, the Jews were able to retain their ethnic and, in many cases, religious distinctiveness even in a foreign country. Even in another country, the Jews would gather together on a regular basis to listen to the law, to worship in some fashion and to be a community of Jews. They were in exile. Babylon was now their home, but it was not really their home. These gatherings that eventually became synagogues were formally organized when they met certain criteria. Each synagogue had a ruler and a council of elders and they constructed a place to meet. In order to be a member of the local synagogue you had to meet certain criteria. If you were a Gentile and you wanted to become a member of a synagogue there was a formal conversion process that took place including baptism by immersion (mikveh). That is why baths for immersion were built as part of the local synagogues. The focal point of their religious life was no longer Jerusalem and the Temple, but the synagogue. Therefore, the high priest was no longer the authority as much as the local rabbi/teacher. New traditions and practices emerged as the Jews had to pivot to their situation.

When the Jews returned to the land, they rebuilt the Temple (on a much smaller scale) and they brought the synagogue life back with them to Israel. Synagogues were also spreading throughout the Roman Empire wherever a decent number of Jews lived. The faithful would gather on the Sabbath day in the local Synagogue to hear the law read, discussed, taught and where prayers and songs were done. The local community of the faithful was identified and held together by the synagogue life. The Temple was still important and the festivals like Passover were still major events, but personal accountability and identity was found in the synagogue.

There was a decentralization of the Jewish religious life to some degree. There was no longer one ring that ruled them all. So, by the time Jesus came along, there were different groups (think denominations) that had authority: Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots and Essenes. The majority of the Jews did not belong to any of these groups though the Pharisees were the most influential among the common person. The Sadducees related more with the wealthy and elite while the Pharisees were more of the common man's group. The Pharisees did more teaching of the law with the people so they had more influence in the synagogues than other groups. If the ruler of a synagogue was a Pharisee or in agreement with the Pharisees, then that synagogue would be a means through which the Pharisees' interpretations and emphasis would be spread. With that came an emphasis upon certain rituals and strict adherence to the Pharisees' additional laws. Those onerous rules were their attempts at applying the law. However, their attempts at applying the law and making that the new law resulted in the very purpose of the OT being lost.

So, why did Jesus keep going into the synagogues to teach (v.10) and on occasion to heal? First of all, to correctly interpret God's law for the people. The Jews had the Words of God that were now fulfilled in the Word of God in the flesh. Having God's Word is of no benefit if you don't understand it correctly and apply it properly. Synagogue life was in a sense driving the people farther away from God than to him. Secondly, synagogue life was a preview of local church life.

The synagogue came into existence because the people of God lost the land and the Temple. Now, several related things were about to happen. God's plan to have a people from every tribe, language and nation was about to go public. This was the next big phase. The New Covenant people of God (think church) was about to be launched. The church would not be tied to a land, nor to a Temple. The church does not have a headquarters in Jerusalem, or Constantinople, Rome, Ann Arbor or Columbus. The New Covenant people of God would be all over the world and would be exiles. They would be in homes which were not their real homes. Our real home is with God and our forever family. Jesus was going to use much of the patterns of synagogue life for life in local churches. Local churches would be the assembly of the faithful followers of God who belonged to one another, who met for worship, instruction, fellowship and would scatter throughout the week to be witnesses of Christ. Jesus was not only seeking to provide a correct interpretation of the law by teaching in the synagogues, he was endorsing a system that he would use as a pattern for his next phase. The Church. Knowing that healing on a sabbath would cause these guys to get their knickers in a knot, why did Jesus keep doing it?

2. Sabbath Life (10b)

When God gave the law to Israel, he ordered them to rest on the 7th day of every week so they would enjoy him and one another by enjoying the gifts of God from the fruit of their labor. The Sabbath rest was designed so that the people of God would not be workaholics and enjoy the fruit of their work. By the way, God also ordered a sabbath rest for the land every 7 years which forced the farmers (most of them) to take it easy every 7 years. It gave needed rest to the land and it gave needed rest to people and gave them opportunities to travel, to play and to enjoy their work. The Sabbath day and the Sabbath principle was rest in order to enjoy what God has enabled you to do. God ordered the Sabbath rest for his people for their good and joy. When you understand the very nature and character of God this makes perfect sense. The Sabbath rest was never intended to be a burden but to lighten the burden. It was for the good of man. When Jesus healed on the Sabbath he was doing several things: 1) He was demonstrating that he is the Lord of the Sabbath. He is the purpose of the Sabbath. He is the fulfillment of the Sabbath because he is the ultimate rest for the people of God. 2) He was doing exactly what the Sabbath was intended to do. He was doing what was good for people. This woman was healed of her 18-yearlong condition. Her healing was her good and God loves to do good for his people.

The Pharisees failed to grasp how good, gracious and joyful God is. The good law of God, particularly the Sabbath law became an endless debate over what you could do or not do in order to make much of your righteous efforts to keep the law. To the Pharisees, the Sabbath

(and their rules of interpretation - Mishnah) became an occasion to punish perceived offenders, exercise suffocating control over people and not a means of grace to relieve people to ensure that they would enjoy the good gifts that God had provided. The Sabbath rest was a command so that people would not trust in their work but trust in God. Do you see how the Pharisees turned this inside out. They were now trusting in their efforts at keeping the Sabbath instead of actually resting in God and enjoying him. When you twist the Bible so that you make much of yourself instead of God, you will find yourself with some really whacked out ideas. This is what Jesus is getting at. Do you see? Something is fundamentally wrong with your system when you are angry that a woman was just healed from her demonic oppression and physical bondage.

In recording this account, Luke gives more attention to the response rather than to the healing itself, even though the healing is a wonderful mercy of God.

3. **Freedom and Slavery.** (11-14)

Entering the synagogue was a woman who was in bondage to Satan and literally broken by the weight of it all. Also entering the synagogue was a ruler who appeared to be large and in charge, religious, esteemed and influential. When this woman left the synagogue, it was obvious that she was free and the ruler and those of his ilk were actually in bondage to their own self-righteousness.

For 18 years this woman had suffered from a severe demonic influence that essentially crippled her. *"She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself."* (11b) What a picture of us. Sin affects us profoundly, personally and cripples us in so many ways. Many of us try to hide it. For her, there was no hiding. Her condition was prominent. It ruled and likely ruined most of her life. This woman had suffered this condition for 18 years and she was in the synagogue on the Sabbath. That raises a lot of questions, doesn't it? If you are disabled, do you instinctively want to be around people? If your obvious physical deformity is directly related to a severe spiritual problem, do you want to be around religious people? Do you want to be at the synagogue on the Sabbath where your community gathers to hear from God's Word? And, if you are the ruler of the synagogue, do you want this woman coming? Would she make you and others uncomfortable? But she is here, why? Maybe she heard that Jesus was going to be there. He was and he was teaching. The Word of God was teaching the Word of God. The Word of God was being heard and seen and the congregation that day was about to witness the power of the Word in a way they would never forget.

Her story changes *"when Jesus saw her"* (12). When Jesus saw her, he saw her need and he knew his power. There was no hesitation. He called her over and when he called her over, he did so with a promise. *"Woman, you are freed from your disability."* We know what to expect when Jesus issues a command. In a second, she would know it as well. He gave the promise before she experienced the fulfillment, but she did not have to wait very long. Jesus laid his hands on her and immediately she stood up straight. She knew what to do with her new found freedom, she glorified God. Luke does not tell us the grievous details of how she was in

darkness, nor the grind and bitter existence she experienced for 18 years. But, in a moment, immediately, she was set free. The word of Jesus and his touch was all that was needed.

What an incredible event. In an instant a woman was freed. How could you not be amazed by the powerful grace poured on her and to the freedom and hope she just experienced? Her life was changed. Who wouldn't be thrilled for her and thrilled for her family and community? What an amazing day at the synagogue! Incredibly, the ruler of the synagogue was indignant. He was lit up. He was angry and incensed that Jesus had done this on the Sabbath. He was not only angry at Jesus; he was angry at the people and clearly at this woman. How dare you come to the synagogue on a Sabbath to be healed! Shame on you! Now we see who is really in bondage. The woman knew she had a problem, but this man tries to take a beautiful gift of God and twist it into a sin. This is satanic. This is pure evil. We learn from this text that there were others in the assembly that day that agreed with the synagogue ruler.

Jesus will not let this go unanswered. He will not let them shame this woman or the people who are celebrating God's grace. His words are sharp, his logic is flawless, and their true guilt is exposed. In their Sabbath rules, they are permitted to untie an ox or donkey in order to lead it to water, which is obviously legit. Caring for an animal is not a violation of the Sabbath. But caring more for an animal than you do a woman is so blatantly wrong that only one blinded in heart could not see this. Y'all will untie your animal so that it can get some water, but you would refuse this woman, this daughter of Abraham, your fellow Jew who has been bound by Satan, to be set free because it is the Sabbath? What is wrong with you?!

Luke makes use of the word "all" in v.17. All his adversaries were put to shame. They tried to shame the woman and those who rejoiced in her healing, but instead were the ones who were shamed, as they should be. Then **all** the people rejoiced at **all** the glorious things that were done by him. Perhaps, he ended up doing more.

4. What just happened?

The rulers were given another chance and sadly, and inexplicably they dug in their heels even more. Where are you in this story? Are you embarrassed by the power of Jesus to save and transform a life? Are your rules simply efforts on your part to control your world? Do you find security in systems and laws? Do you find justification and validation in your morals and righteousness? If so, you would make a good synagogue ruler and an enemy of God.

The history of religion reveals the tendency of human nature to reduce their religious life to external ceremonies that become disconnected to genuine heart issues. For example, we are familiar with the C/E Christians. These are the people who attend church at Christmas and Easter. It is what they do. It is a tradition, a practice, a family-friendly event before going to grandma's for dinner, presents. But it is not what they are. The idea of trusting in Christ, engaging with his Word, walking with God, being a member of his church, loving him, enjoying him, having a biblical ethic of sexuality, family, work, finances, and education is not even on their radar. In other cases, people attend a service with regularity, but they do not engage with

their hearts and minds. They know the words to repeat, the mantras, creeds, lyrics and prayers. They know when to stand, sit, kneel and say “amen.” But again, the ceremony takes precedence over personal engagement. Why is that? Why is it easier to find assurance in ritual and tradition instead of genuine engagement? When that is the case, then the ritual is protected at all cost. The ritual becomes the goal instead of God. Beloved, Jesus is the goal. Loving him, knowing him, trusting him, walking with him, engaging with him is the goal, not keeping up the appearances.

Are there obvious problems in my life that I am justifying (excusing or ignoring) because I go to church?

Have you really examined your religion or your view of it?

Something is drastically wrong with my religion if:

- 1) I have to disobey God’s Word in order to obey the rules of the religion.
- 2) The structure or practice covers or excuses blatant hypocrisy.
- 3) The adherence to rules miss the very point of God’s Word.

How does your understanding of the Christian life make much of God and his grace?

How does your view of the Christian life deal with problems? Are people with problems a problem? Or are people with problems opportunities to experience God’s grace?