

The Rescuing and Restoring Kingdom

Luke 13:10-21

So we can get our eye in here, Jesus is slowly making His way to Jerusalem. And as He travels He has been pouring truth into the disciples on the one hand and the crowd who comes out to hear Him on the other. And for several weeks now, it has been teaching, teaching, teaching and not a miracle in sight. He has warned the crowd that they need to understand the times and realize what His coming means. He's called them to repent, and so avoid the coming judgment. And He has been clear that His message will divide.

But then, almost out of nowhere, up pops this miracle of Jesus healing this woman. After weeks of teaching we get a miracle – and it stands out so much we've got to ask 'why?' What is Luke, what is Jesus trying to tell us through this miracle?

Well, on one level it's simple: this healing, on a Sabbath, is another warning sign, that calls people to wake up and smell the coffee, and realize what God is doing in their midst.

But there's something else going on here as well. You see Jesus heals the woman in the synagogue and faces down the opposition that follows and immediately sets up two short, pithy little parables about what the kingdom of God is like. And Luke links the healing and the parables with the word 'Therefore' in v18. So this healing and the confrontation that follows must be telling us something about the kingdom, and what God is doing in and through the Kingdom, which the parables cast further light on.

And I think there are four things about the Kingdom of God we need to see here. Firstly, the kingdom is about rescuing people from the power of satan; secondly it is about restoring them as worshippers; thirdly, the kingdom is divisive and fourthly, the kingdom will ultimately triumph and prevail. So the kingdom of God rescues, it restores, it divides, and ultimately, it triumphs.

The Kingdom Rescues

The first thing we can say here about the Kingdom of God is that it is in the business of rescuing people from the power of satan. Here we have a woman, and we don't know anything more about her other than what Luke tells us. She has been disabled and bent double and unable to straighten herself up for the last 18 years. And behind all her troubles is what Luke calls a disabling spirit, literally a spirit of weakness. So this woman, whom Jesus calls a Daughter of Abraham, has seen her life mangled by the powers of darkness.

So straight up we are in the realm of two kingdoms in conflict. On the one hand is the dominion of darkness – that seeks to weaken and disable and wreck people's lives – like this woman; and on the other is the kingdom of God – the Kingdom of a God who makes promises to a man like Abraham – who was an idol worshipper before God took him and promised to bless him and do good to him and prosper him and to take his offspring and make them a light and a blessing to the nations. Not because Abraham had done anything to deserve it, but because this God is a God of grace.

And this dominion of darkness and this Kingdom of God are in conflict. And this earth is enemy occupied territory. And this woman is one of its hostages, one of its victims. She has been disabled by satan – not to the extent that she is totally incapacitated but enough that every day she suffers and every day she struggles.

Now her experience of being bent double and yours and mine of being physically healthy, may be poles apart. And you may be tempted to think her experience bears no relevance to your own. But I want you to consider how satan continues to try and weaken people today, the means he uses to afflict and attack and bind, whether that is yourself, or others you might be reaching out to. You see, he does it with this woman through physical sickness, but what other ways might he do it that you might encounter?

Well first off, he blinds people's eyes to faith in Christ. In 2 Cor 4:4 Paul says that 'the god of this world...' that's satan 'has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.' When your non-christian friend just can't see what you are saying, it's not because you are such a hopeless evangelist, it's because he or she is held hostage and blindfolded. When Jesus told the parable of the sower, and how some of the seed –which is the gospel- falls on the path, birds come and devour it. And those birds, Jesus says, are a picture of the devil who, He says, 'comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.' (Luke 8:12) – Jesus doesn't tell us how satan does that, but he does it.

Then, like this woman, there is physical sickness. Now Jesus and the gospel writers are very nuanced in their view as to where sickness comes from. In Matt 4:24 Matthew writes, 'So [Jesus'] fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them.' So they are distinguishing between psychological, spiritual and physical causes. So there is nothing 'primitive' about the New Testament's approach to sickness. But within that they are clear, and this woman is an example, that satan can afflict people physically. And let's face it, knowing how your own psychological health and physical health are so intertwined, means there should be zero surprise that satan's malign influence could demonstrate itself in areas of someone's health.

But for many of us, that is not going to be the battlefield. The real fight lies in the area of temptation and bondage to sin. That is where Jesus faced it in the desert, and it's where we will face it. He weakened this woman physically, and he will try and weaken us spiritually – through temptation and sin. And that is going to come especially in the temptation to worship, and to give your life, to something other than God. Because if the enemy can get you there, he's got you. And there are two areas that the New Testament highlights as high-risk areas, that I think are especially pertinent to us as a church, where satan tries to take Christians out. The first is the area of pride. In 1 Tim 3:6 Paul warns leaders against becoming 'puffed up with conceit' – because, Paul says, they risk falling into the condemnation of the devil. Pride and the desire for self-glory was what brought satan down and he will try and bring others down the same way. Now whilst that is directed to church leaders I think it is just as pertinent to those of us who lead

outside the church or who are just privileged and blessed by God which we are, because it is so easy to become prideful and to look down on others. And it's in that context of talking about pride and humility that Peter says the devil is like a roaring lion seeking whom to devour.

But the second area the New Testament highlights as high risk for Christians – where people, in Paul's words, can fall into 'the snare of the devil', and be 'captured by him to do his will' (2 Tim 2:26) is to descend into quarrelling and arguing over secondary issues. And this is so pertinent to a church like us. Satan binds and weakens this woman physically and he will attempt to weaken churches doctrinally and relationally. And whether that is people being taken captive by false teaching, or through satan's scheming that destroys love, and forgiveness and unity between Christians – the Bible says it's the work of the enemy. And if we wanted to, I suspect that together we could name 10s if not 100s of churches that have been torn apart by Christians going to war against one another and behind it all stands satan, rubbing his hands in glee.

So here is Jesus, in the synagogue on a Sabbath morning, and here is this woman bound by satan for 18 years – a picture of how the enemy desires to weaken people, and bring them into bondage and neutralize them, and Jesus launches a rescue operation. And Luke tells us, v12 'when Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, 'Woman, you are freed from your disability.'"

With just a few words, Jesus frees her from 18 years of imprisonment. Now, after 18 years you'd probably think no change was possible, that this was her lot, that she had better just live with it. And you may look at your life, or your friend's life, or your family member's life – and you see how satan has taken captive and you think it's hopeless, and there will never be freedom from this sin, or there's no hope for this marriage, or this broken relationship, and it's been like this for years, and Jesus comes and sets this captive free with a word. He severs her bonds and He breaks her chains.

You see, the domain of darkness seeks to entrap and ensnare through temptation and sin and pride and division, and to leave us, like this woman, weak and unable to stand up straight, but God has launched a counter mission, and through Jesus and the gospel of the Kingdom, He rescues and delivers and sets free. As Paul says in Col 1:13 'He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved son.'

But Jesus does more than rescue us. Through the gospel he restores us to what we were meant to be.

The Kingdom Restores

Jesus calls the woman over, declares her free from her disability, lays his hands on her and she is immediately made straight, and in response Luke tells us in v13, 'she glorified God.' When she realizes that she has been set free, this woman worships. When she realizes Jesus has broken her chains she glorifies God.

Now in Romans chapter 1, Paul explains that the great folly of humanity is worshipping that which isn't God. We have 'exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images' (Rom 1:23), we have 'worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator.' (Rom 1:25). And that goes deeper than simply worshipping carved idols, it means we have supplanted God with something else, and give our lives, and make sacrifices to things that were never meant to have the ultimate place in our lives; whether relationships or career or money or academic success. And we do so thinking that these will give us joy or identity or fulfillment. But as much as you chase after them, thinking they will serve you, you become enslaved to them and you find you cannot do without them, and when they are undermined, and your career stalls or the relationship fails, your life and what you built on them crumbles.

And the Kingdom of God has come not only to rescue us from the power of Satan, but to restore us to right worship. To put our lives back in kilter by making God the one we worship and live for. You see, Jesus sets this woman free and she worships. And he sets us free from the shackles of sin, not to say thanks and goodbye and let me go and find another idol to fill the void of my life, but as the apostle Peter says, so 'that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.' (1 Peter 2:9).

You see when you realize what God has done for you in Jesus, you have to worship, don't you? You have to give him the ultimate place in your life and your affections. When you realize that God sent His Son to die in your place to bring you back to Him, when you realize that every sin has been atoned for, and that grace upon grace is yours, and that He has opened the door of the prison and you can go free, joy overflows from your heart, and it's directed at Him. As the truth of God sinks in, praise and worship just have to swell up. That's why Paul can say in Ephesians 1:6 that the gospel, God choosing us, and calling us and adopting us as His children, through Jesus, is all 'to the praise of his glorious grace.'

The Kingdom is about God rescuing us and restoring us as worshippers. Which is why the Sabbath day was such a great day for Jesus to perform this miracle on. You see, if the Sabbath is *the* day to rest and worship God – what better day to rescue and restore this woman. It is exactly what should be happening on the Sabbath! But not everyone saw it that way. The good news of the Kingdom rescues, it restores, but it also divides.

The Kingdom Divides

Two weeks ago we saw how Jesus said he hadn't come to bring peace – no cessation of conflict – but division, and as Jesus heals this woman we get an example of just the kind of division He brings. Whilst the woman is glorifying God, and the people in the pews are rejoicing, the synagogue ruler criticizes and complains, and judging by the fact that Jesus uses the plural 'Hypocrites', some, at least, were agreeing with the ruler. So, to quote one commentator, whilst the woman is made straight, the ruler is shown to be warped! (Wilcock).

But why does the ruler react the way he does? A woman who has suffered for years is healed in his church and he gets huffy about it. Why is that? Well, what's

interesting is that he is not against healing per se. In v14 he says, 'There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed.' So it's not that he's against healing. It's that he wants God to do it on his terms. He had constructed a box of his view of the Sabbath and he wanted God to work inside that box. And when God didn't, he couldn't recognize it, he couldn't accept it. He was happy for the woman to be healed, but only on his grounds, with God bending to his sensibilities as to how God ought to act. He was more interested in the outward form, the externals of Sabbath observance, than seeing people who were bound being set free.

You see, Jesus doesn't simply divide between believers and atheists. The kingdom also divides what we might call 'Jesus followers' from religious folk. Jesus polarizes, and he polarizes between people who take their religion very seriously and those who embrace Jesus. And like this synagogue ruler it is possible to take religion seriously and get hot under the collar about it, and still miss what God is doing through Jesus.

And having heard the synagogue ruler out, Jesus exposes the man's inconsistency. V15 'Then the Lord answered him,' - note how Luke calls Jesus Lord there, because this is about authority and the battle for authority, between Jesus and satan and Jesus and religion - "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it?" You untie your animals to care for them, so why do you complain when I untie this woman, whom satan has had tied up for 18 years. You hypocrites!

But here's the challenge for us. You see it's easy, isn't it, to prefer the safe and the ordered and the boxed in god of religion, to the rescuing and restoring God of the Bible. You see, even today redemption is a messy business, because sin is messy. And just as it was possible for this synagogue ruler to forget what the Sabbath was really about, if he ever knew, so it's easy for us to forget what we are called to be about, what the Kingdom is about, and we lose sight of being in the rescuing and restoring business. And so in our determination not to stray from the truth of the word of God, we have to keep this in focus - we are here to rescue people from the power of satan and see them transformed into worshippers. Which is why our vision as a church is rooted in the gospel AND radical transformation.

So the kingdom rescues and restores and divides, but through these two little parables Jesus tells us it will also, ultimately, triumph.

The Kingdom Triumphs

Having put his adversaries to shame, as Luke puts it in v 17, Jesus tells the synagogue these two parables. And the first one is of a tree that grows out of a tiny mustard seed, the smallest seed these guys would have known.

Now, the Jews were expecting Messiah's kingdom to come with decisive, full-on, overwhelming power. And they might have looked at Jesus and questioned, is this it? And Jesus is saying, what starts small and seemingly insignificant, will

grow big and the opposition of satan and of men, like this ruler, won't be able to stop it. And in this tree of the Kingdom, Jesus says in v19, 'the birds of the air made nests.'

Now, there are some organizations that grow in such a way that they lose sight of their values, they lose their way, and in the process of becoming successful and dominant, their people get trampled on. Not so the kingdom. The Kingdom will triumph, it will grow, but just as the birds nest in the branches of the tree, so people – like this woman bound for 18 years - will find rest and shelter and safety in the kingdom.

And then Jesus says in v21, that the kingdom "is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour until it was all leavened."

Now three measures of flour is a lot of flour, it's the equivalent of 40 litres, so she was cooking for one big family! But it only requires a little bit of leaven to make the whole batch rise. And the kingdom may start small – with Jesus and his bunch of motley disciples – but it will permeate the whole world, and its penetration will be total. And you may be tempted at times to think that your input in another's life is miniscule, and not worth it, but whether it is a word of encouragement, or a verse of scripture, or praying for them, God takes these small things and uses them as leaven in someone's soul to cause the heart to rise.

So, the Kingdom of God is about rescuing and restoring people as worshippers. And whilst that kingdom divides, it will also, ultimately, triumph. It may start out small, whether on the world stage or in a person's heart, but by God's grace it will grow and its power to transform is total.