

**THE RADICAL RABBI:  
“A RADICAL TIMING”  
(Luke 13:10-21)**

**INTRODUCTION**

As we resume looking at our “radical rabbi,” we want to continue to stay connected to what his teachings to his disciples and all those following him also mean for the church — Christ’s presence on earth today. We have seen that we now have four pillars to uphold us as we seek to be a church that is truly representative of the Lord Jesus Christ: (1) the centrality of the Bible, of literally sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to and studying the word of God, (2) the centrality of prayer to the God of that word, (3) the centrality of obedience to God through that word, and (4) as both our fourth pillar and our cornerstone, the centrality of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, as that word, the greatest power in this universe — greater than any efforts of man, and greater than any efforts of Satan — making him the greatest cornerstone of all time. And all four of these pillars work together to support the most core value of the church that begins with Christ himself; as Peter so memorably said: “[*Jesus of Nazareth*] is *the Messiah [the Christ], the Son of the living God*” — *Matthew 16:16*. All four of these pillars connect us to our Heavenly Father through his Son; all four place us directly into his presence. And experiencing Jesus through God’s word, experiencing Jesus through prayer, and experiencing Jesus through obedience all lead us to directly experiencing that cornerstone — the insurmountable power of Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords. And as his ambassadors, we who are his church can claim that same power. Christ himself confirmed that kind of power; because he was in fact the Messiah, and because the church was going to be built upon that foundational rock that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, “*the gates of Hades will not overcome it*” — *Jesus Christ, Matthew 16:18b*.

And now, as of last week, we also have the most basic and essential message for the church to present to the world in the name of Jesus Christ: “Repent or perish!” It is a message that focuses without exception on the singular necessity of Jesus Christ to enable us to confess our sins and experience the repentance, the U-turn, of a new life founded in Jesus Christ — a new life based on God-pleasing desires and God-pleasing priorities. As Peter so memorably said: “*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved*” — *Peter, Acts 4:12*.

And now this week, as we continue to follow in the words and steps of our rabbi, we find him in familiar surroundings and facing a familiar argument as he seeks to minister to those to whom he has been sent. So as we begin, let's pause to **come together in a moment of prayer.**

## **TEXT**

***On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and 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 — Luke 13:10-11.***

This is actually quite a remarkable scene. Here you have a woman who has been crippled, according to the Greek, “overcome” by a spirit, again in the Greek, “of infirmity.” In other words, Luke, a physician himself, makes no mistake in identifying the root cause of this woman’s distress: demonic oppression. This oppression had caused her to become so crippled that it had bent her over to the point that she could not straighten herself up at all.

Now part of what is so remarkable about this is that, after 18 years of suffering like this, she still made a point of getting herself to the synagogue. Getting herself ready for the simplest of tasks must have been extremely difficult, yet here she was. And despite so many years of difficulty, her condition had not crippled her against God. She was still faithful in her worship of the God of Israel; she was present on this Sabbath in her synagogue.

It’s interesting to note that the Bible mentions several things that can bow us down:

- 1) Sin: ***My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear. My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly. I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning — David, Psalm 38:4-6.***
- 2) Sorrow: ***Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? — Psalm 42:5.***
- 3) Suffering: ***Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression? We are brought down to the dust; our bodies cling to the ground — Psalm 44:24-25.***

While we don’t know the specific reason for this woman’s oppression, we certainly know the outcome; we could see it.

But then a certain Nazarene enters the picture: ***When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.” Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God — Luke 13:12-13.***

Now on the one hand, we might think initially that Jesus was needlessly exposing this woman to a certain degree of ridicule by publicly calling her forward when one considers her physical deformity but, in a synagogue community such as this one, there likely weren't a whole lot of secrets anyway. And her condition was pretty much there for everyone to see. But the Greek gives us a beautifully tender picture that the English misses: Jesus called her forward to him. I love that. He didn't just call out a name, like he was commanding her, nor did he just call out an impersonal, "Hey, you." He called her to come to him. And why not? He was the source, the one and only source, for what was about to happen.

So she came up to Jesus and he said, doubtless with an overwhelming sense of command authority, "Woman, you are free." And then he placed his hands on her. And then, in an instant, a whole bunch of truly amazing things became transparently real for everybody present at that moment: wonderful compassion, awesome healing ability, and complete sovereign power over any and all demonic designs. No matter that this woman had been bound for 18 years (or 18,000 years for that matter), one word from Jesus Christ, and she was completely free — now, immediately — and with that same one word, Satan was completely defeated — now, immediately — and expelled.

And her reaction? "Praise God from whom all blessings flow!" She praised God; in the Greek, she glorified, she honored, she magnified almighty God in front of all those in attendance. Now this was a synagogue service nobody was likely soon to forget. Everybody was rejoicing.

Well, almost everybody was rejoicing — except one person, ironically just as much a witness to this miraculous moment as everybody else, who had a somewhat, shall we say, different, response to this healing: ***Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue leader said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath" — Luke 13:14.***

Now Christ very obviously could have healed this woman on any day of the week. But he deliberately chose the Sabbath — meaning that this was also going to be a teaching moment that went far beyond the miracle. You see, there were specific rules for what could and couldn't be done on the Sabbath — most of which had come out of the "traditions of the elders." Among those was the notion that, apart from whatever work might genuinely be required to actually save somebody's life — in other words, an understood medical emergency where a life hung in the balance — any other level of medical care rendered on the Sabbath was considered to be unnecessary work, and therefore unlawful. Jesus of Nazareth was being

charged with defiling the Sabbath by healing this woman on such a sacred day. Jesus of Nazareth had broken Sabbath law.

Now this synagogue leader might seem like a complete meathead but this charge could potentially be a very serious matter. The religious leadership was bound and determined to do whatever was necessary to rid themselves of this Nazarene, and a major part of their anger had been fueled by his completely callous disregard for their precious traditions — as he had once again just demonstrated. But for Jesus to accomplish what he needed to accomplish as Savior of the world required him to be without sin — specifically so he could be seen very literally by God as without spot or blemish to take on the sins of everybody in the world by offering his perfect life in trade for their imperfect ones. So the question was an important one: Whose standard was he obligated to — the traditions of the elders, or the law of his Father? Whose standard would he be carrying to the cross?

But you know, at the same time, as we look at this story, we can't overlook the fact that there were actually two people crippled this day: the woman, of course, but also this synagogue leader. But when you think about it, his bondage was far worse. Yes, this woman had suffered greatly in her body, but his was a spiritual bondage of the mind and heart that threatened his entire eternity. I mean, here you had a guy so beholden to the dictates of his traditions that he completely overlooked the joy that should have accompanied the miraculous healing that had taken place right in front of his own eyes. And he was so blind to the reality of who it was who was teaching in his synagogue and who it was who had so graciously performed this wonderful miracle of healing that he actually wound up in blatant opposition to the very Son of God. Talk about playing with a handicap! And more to the point, talk about being blindfolded from the inside!

But Jesus had an answer for this spiritually blind individual: ***“You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then 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?” — Luke 13:15-16.***

Christ's answer was perfect. No, he was not bound by their oral traditions. Their traditions were hole-y — as in filled with all the holes you will find in any manmade religion versus all that is found in the perfect wisdom, justice, judgment and love of the one and only God. And his answer points out their blind disregard for all the people for whom they were meant to be loving, tenderhearted shepherds. “You guys take better care of your animals than you do your people. What a joke! You pitiful hypocrites. Don't you think this woman, a prisoner of Satan for 18

years, should be set free? And is not the Sabbath the perfect day for that freedom to be declared?” Christ had spoken of the Sabbath at the beginning of his ministry, and the words would still be appropriate here: ***“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” — Jesus Christ, Mark 2:27b.***

And the result? ***When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing — Luke 13:17.*** I love how the Greek expresses the response of his opponents: They were disgraced and ashamed, literally “put to the blush.” In this moment of opposition, they were embarrassed — as well they should have been. In the meantime, the people were filled with joy at all the wondrous, glorious things they were seeing with their own eyes.

Jesus also wanted to teach a lesson about freedom, which is appropriate as freedom is certainly a part of what this story is all about. Three times in these verses, we have seen pictures of somebody imprisoned finally being set free or “loosed”; we see it very clearly in the NKJ version of this story:

- 1) ***“Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity” — Jesus Christ, Luke 13:12b (NKJV).***
- 2) ***“Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it?” — Jesus Christ, Luke 13:15b (NKJV).***
- 3) ***“So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound — think of it — for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?” — Jesus Christ, Luke 13:16 (NKJV).***

In the Greek, the idea of being “loosed” is to have your bonds “destroyed or dissolved,” literally “melted off,” the result being to be set free, to be set “at liberty.” After 18 long, tortured years, this woman was finally “at liberty” from his physical bondage. And obviously what a wonderful thought when it comes to being set free from sin! But what should be equally obvious is the love that Christ had for this synagogue leader. While his language is tough — calling somebody, especially somebody in a position of authority, a hypocrite will not endear you to most people — his desire for this man is the same as it is for the woman, and the people watching and listening in the synagogue, and any other onlookers that were taking this all in as well — healing, in his case, from those ruthless “traditions of the elders” that held him in his sins, and in his sinful viewpoint of all those people whom God had placed in his care.

Then Jesus shares a couple of brief parables, both of them introduced with a question. The first one: ***“What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his***

***garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches” — Jesus Christ, Luke 13:18-19.***

Now the mustard seed would have been the smallest seed known to people in that time and place. But despite its extremely small size, what grew from it was something large enough to even allow the birds of the air to perch, literally “to lodge” and to nest in its branches. Christ in comparing the kingdom of God to such a small seed is telling the crowd that, while the visible kingdom that Jesus is founding may appear to be small, the reality is that it going to grow and develop right on into its fulfillment in the glories of eternity, when his kingdom will be all there is.

Now this also would have been a surprising picture of the kingdom of heaven for Jews. As they had believed that the Messiah would come as an all-conquering warrior arriving to expel all foreign conquerors on the way to Israel being restored as a great and powerful nation, so too was the belief that the kingdom of God would come in an apocalyptic display of overwhelming power as God brought deserved judgment on all evil. So to understand the arrival of the kingdom of God in such an insignificantly small way — a mustard seed — would have been startling to Jewish ears.

***And the second: “What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough” — Luke 13:20-21.***

While this parable also reflects the idea of growth — from small to large — this second parable reflects the kingdom as one that is largely hidden, overlooked and ignored, by the rest of the world, much like yeast, easily visible when first introduced into dough, but disappearing over time even as it is being worked into every portion of the dough. But at the end of time, the kingdom will be gloriously revealed in all its God-enriched fullness and beauty.

And the lesson to this entire audience was that they certainly can cling to the “traditions of the elders” if they choose to. But, in the meantime, there is a living, breathing, growing kingdom of God that is going to continue to increase and develop without stopping right up until the end of time. It may start out small — as almost nothing at all (the mustard seed) and as barely perceptible (yeast worked into a mound of dough) but the eventual worldwide growth and influence of the work of the kingdom of God is assured. And, at the end of history, it is God’s glorious heavenly kingdom, which Christ was here laboring so faithfully to present, that will remain. Satan will be defeated — and his kingdom destroyed in the fires of eternal hell.

## APPLICATION

I'd like us to focus on three specific lessons from this story: The first is one that we've seen played out in so many ways. While the outcome of Satan's influence is bondage and pain (the woman prior to Christ's healing), the outcome of Christ's influence is freedom and relief (the result of Christ's healing).

You want to know why *Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light* — *Paul, II Corinthians 11:14b*? If most people actually understood for real what the outcome of a life lived outside the redemptive power of Jesus Christ was certain to be — an eternity of unspeakable bondage and pain, horror and agony in hell — you'd have to think they'd be seeking Christ with every fiber of their being. But they don't. Why? The “angel of light.” Satan makes sin attractive, and fun, and satisfying; otherwise he could never tempt. He strokes the ego with lies about the greatness and goodness of our self — and therefore what our self deserves, what our self is capable of. Again, that's “angel of light” talk. And despite the fact that sin is the ultimate dead end, generation after generation of people suck up Satan's lies like a “Hoover Deluxe” — because he tells them exactly what they want to hear.

Jesus, on the other hand, tells us exactly what we need to hear — often things we don't even want to think about — our helplessness, our inability, our ignorance, often our flat-out stupidity. How dumb do you have to be to believe that a moment of sin, a moment of doing wrong but feeling great, should carry more weight and more importance than eternity? That's “angel of light” talk, too — which Jesus categorized like this: “[*The devil*] was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” — *Jesus Christ, John 8:44b*. The freedom from Satan's binding power that this woman experienced, only as a result of Christ's intervention in her life, illustrates how Jesus remains available to “unbind” us from Satan's power to live our lives in his power, freeing us from every weapon of Satan's with which he seeks to bind us.

The second lesson is such a wonderful, “flesh-and-blood” picture of what Paul shared in his second letter to the Christians at Corinth: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!* — *Paul, II Corinthians 5:17*. But then what is often overlooked is that that “new creation” that comes by means of being found “in Christ” should be as noticeable to the world as was the change in this woman — from hunched over to standing tall. Our new life should be observable because our new life is permanent — not just

something for Sunday mornings but something for every moment of every day. One of the greatest testimonies we have available to us through the transforming work of Christ is to simply be seen as now different from before Christ — different reactions, different joys, different priorities, different viewpoints — all because he has now seated himself on the throne of our life. All that has changed should be available for the world to see — and then to want to inquire: “What happened to you?” What happened is this: Jesus is on the scene!

And how about those times of worry, about stress, about the angst that characterizes so many of our days? Folks, if you are saved, if you are born again, “redeemed by the blood of the Lamb,” Jesus is on the scene. ***“[S]urely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 28:20b.*** We have a choice: to live life all bent up like this poor woman, or live life upright. What made the difference for her should be what, every moment of every day, is making the difference for us: Jesus is on the scene! Do we believe that? Do we believe that Jesus is on the scene? Do we believe we can live “upright?” We can; that’s what living with Jesus on the scene can mean!

And especially at this time, where our country is divided in so many ways, it is our citizenship in heaven (Philippians 3:20) that should be one of our most prominent and visible character traits — as individuals and as a church. We do not live for this world; we do not exist to take in the experiences of this world. We are here to represent our Master with his gospel — and we are to do it from the standpoint of someplace not here being our home, our heritage, our reward, our inheritance. Not a single one of those words apply to planet earth. That is “truth of Jesus” talk. And that’s what we are here to communicate to the world in which we have been placed.

## **CONCLUSION**

And, as we close, the third lesson is that religion, the rules made by man in an attempt to imagine pleasing God, accomplish nothing. This synagogue leader was only benefiting himself in his position — or so he thought. At the end of the day, the only thing being accomplished by this guy was spiritual damage. Relationship with God was something that never entered into his equation of what his position was actually supposed to mean. But all he wound up with, as did virtually all of Jewish religious leadership at the time of Jesus, was words and rules that meant nothing.

Contrary to what the world thinks, or what the world has been led to believe, Christianity is not a religion; it was never intended to be. Instead, it is a

relationship between God and man through the redemptive and reconciling work on the cross of *one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people — Paul, I Timothy 2:5-6a.*

Which means that, as a people redeemed by the cross, we represent God through Jesus Christ. We do not represent a denomination or a specific church body or anything ahead of representing God and his Son, Jesus Christ. The reason is simple: Being E-Free doesn't save anybody. Being a part of this specific church family doesn't save anybody. What saves people is the salvation that is only found in Jesus Christ; he is the only way, truth and life — and those realities are what we represent. Praise God that we are a part of a church and denomination that loudly and proudly proclaims the truth about Jesus Christ — but it is Christ's truth that saves.

When critics of Christianity mention the incredible harm that religion in general and Christianity in particular has done to the world, unfortunately, in many regards, they are correct. Part of that is history. But an unfortunate part of that has been the misrepresentation of our faith by people who were not interested in the least in Jesus Christ, but were incredibly interested in the power or prestige or whatever they thought that Christianity as a religion could give them. If something else could have served them better, they would have jumped out of their robes quicker than you could say Ecclesiastes.

Like the hymn says so well, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand; all other ground is sinking sand. All other ground is sinking sand” (William Mote, *The Solid Rock*, 1834). That's the truth — and that's what we represent. There is nothing else — and there is nothing better! Let's pray!