Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Christ Creates Conflict in the Synagogue
Scripture: Luke 13:10-17
Code: 42-182

Open your Bible to Luke 13. Our lives, of course, are directed, informed, controlled, confined, and given over to the wonder of God's divine truth. Every passage of Scripture, every chapter, every paragraph, every verse is inspired by God and rich with significant meaning. And we are working our way through the gospel of Luke; Luke the historian's great account of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. We are in the 13th chapter. We come to a fascinating incident that is recorded here in verses 10-17; Luke 13, verses 10-17. Let me read this brief passage to you.

"And He," being Jesus, "was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And behold there was a woman who for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit and she was bent double and could not straighten up at all. And when Jesus saw her, He called her over and said to her, ‘Woman, you are freed from your sickness.’ And He laid His hands upon her and immediately she was made erect again and began glorifying God. And the synagogue official, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, began saying to the multitude in response, there are six days in which work should be done. Therefore, come during them and get healed and not on the Sabbath day. But the Lord answered him and said, ‘You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall and lead him away to water him? And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?’ And as He said this, all his opponents were being humiliated. And the entire multitude was rejoicing over all the glorious things being done by Him."

One day, one Sabbath, one synagogue, one town, not even described for us. But the incident is profound. It's really an incident that speaks of conflict, conflict. And I suppose that the great paradox concerning Jesus Christ is that He is the Prince of Peace who came to bring a kingdom of peace to the world, who came to bring unsurpassed personal peace to the souls of men and women, who came to provide eternal peace in heaven, and yet this Prince of Peace has generated more conflict than any other person who has ever lived.

In fact, from the very time of His arrival until now and in the future until He returns again to establish His kingdom of peace, Jesus Christ will produce conflict. At His birth, the conflict was severe enough to result in the massacre of baby boys. His disciples were hated. They were persecuted. They were martyred for preaching His message. The early church was relentlessly targeted for torture and

execution. Throughout all of history true Christians have been in conflict with just about every power in the world. And today, true Christians are still dying for the gospel. And in our less violent society, our more refined society, while we may not be martyred for our faith, Christianity is being pushed out of public discourse and public influence with an aggressiveness not seen against any other ideology.

Jesus creates conflict. It was He who said He came not to bring peace, but a sword to create a division. And that's what you see in this incident, conflict. and conflict at several points. You need to know some things about religion, whether you're talking about Judaism at the time of Jesus or any other religion, apart from the true gospel of Jesus Christ. Whenever the truth comes — spoken, incarnate as in the case of Jesus — conflict results, because error goes to church and so does Satan and so do hypocrites.

And when Jesus comes and the gospel comes, the conflict begins. In the text today, we see an indignant, infuriated leader of the synagogue who seemingly ignores the woman worthy of compassion, mercy, kindness, goodness, rendered to her by Jesus. Who seemingly ignores the miracle, the un...really unbelievable display of power right before his very eyes, and who is entrenched in some kind of hypocritical legalism. Believe me: Error goes to church and so does Satan and so do hypocrites. False religion is full of all of that. If the truth isn't there and if God isn't there and if true believers aren't there; then all that is there is error and Satan and hypocrites.

This is a definitive event because it gives us in this little, narrow story a way to understand this bigger picture. Jesus, this day, exposes false religion at its three most seriously damaging points: its error, its spiritual origins, and its hypocrisy. And there couldn't be a more dramatic place to do this than a synagogue. And there couldn't be a more important day to do it than a Sabbath, because all of the streams of Judaism collected together in a synagogue on the Sabbath. This is the heart of Israel's life. This is where it all came into focus.

You see, they believed that they could please God by being good, by being righteous, by doing certain works and ceremonies, religious activities, and maintaining some moral behavior. And they believed that they were sufficiently doing that so as to have a right relationship with God and to please God. And the whole ministry of Jesus was basically to destroy that illusion. Jesus came and said, you...you think you're spiritually rich. I'm telling you you're spiritually bankrupt. Jesus came to say you think you're spiritually free. I'm telling you you're in bondage to sin and Satan and death and judgment.

They thought they were spiritually sighted, that they had spiritual vision, could see truth. He said you are stone blind. They thought they had been freed from any oppressing burden. He says you are oppressed. You are the poor, prisoners, blind, and oppressed, and they hated that so much when He said that they, in His own synagogue in Nazareth after only one sermon, took Him out of town and tried to throw Him off a cliff. And they were His extended family. A synagogue was where everything came together. Obviously they couldn't keep the first and great commandment, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength." Obviously they couldn't keep the second one, to “love your neighbor as yourself." Those levels of perfection are not attainable.

And they couldn't keep even the Ten Commandments and the fullness of the law of God in its completion. The Scripture says if you break one of those laws, you're guilty of all of it. So what were they going to do? Well, they developed a system by which they could keep some selective commandments and do some selective things and convince people that that was enough to satisfy God. And the most important thing to do, because you could do this, was subscribe yourself to the external prescriptions of the Sabbath. And so they started embellishing the simplicity of the Sabbath, which said: Don't work; rest. The Sabbath, Jesus said, was made for man to give him rest. They turned that around and tried to make man fit the Sabbath. They embellished the Sabbath with endless rules and regulations. And it became the defining point of their system.

And because of that, Jesus repeatedly assaulted their Sabbath sensibilities. He knew that if He was going to bring them to understand their true spiritual condition, He had to unmask the hypocrisy of the Sabbath. And so you see repeatedly through His ministry, not just in Luke but in other gospels as well, how He entered into conflict with the Jewish leaders on the Sabbath, whether it was His apostles plucking grain and eating it or whether it was a healing on the Sabbath which occurs in several different places. We see this kind of thing in chapter 6 of Luke. We'll see it again in chapter 14 of Luke.

This was a great point for Jesus to establish the truth, that if they were going to come into the kingdom of God and embrace Him as their Messiah and Lord and Savior, they were going to have to let go of the false system they were in. And the Sabbath was sort of the symbol of it all. And so Jesus comes into the synagogue, as He did commonly, this time to teach, as He did frequently, and all of the points of conflict become identified.

Now you need to know a little bit about a synagogue. A synagogue is not the temple. It's simply the word *sunaggs* in Greek. It means “a meeting place,” a gathering place. And there were many of them.

Some historians tell us that in the Galilee, which was less populated than the southern part of Israel, Judea, in the Galilee there were as many 240 or 250 different synagogues. And in Jesus' ministry over a year in Galilee, He went all through Galilee preaching and teaching in the synagogue. It was the perfect place to go to teach. A synagogue, by the way, was called a house of instruction. It wasn't the temple. That's where you went for the national ceremonies. That's where you went to offer sacrifices. Synagogues had no sacrifices. They...They didn't celebrate the Passover and the other feasts at the synagogue. It was just a gathering place.

They had no pastor, no preacher, no reigning priest. They had a lay board of elders and one of them was the ruler or the chairman of that board. He was responsible to oversee it, but he was the layman. It was a local gathering place for teaching the word of God, the Old Testament. They came into existence out of the Babylonian captivity, you remember? When the Jews were taken captive into Babylon, the time they were in Babylon, of course, they were separated from their house of worship, which was the temple. Before that, there was no such thing as a synagogue.

But while they were in captivity, they first, remember, were gathered together to hear Ezekiel. Ezekiel came in one of the early deportations. He gathered the people around and He talked about what was going on. What God was doing in this time in Israel's life and Ezekiel spoke to the captives, those who'd been deported and that sort of began the...the gathering of God's people to hear the meaning of God's word. And synagogues began to develop among the Jews in exile. And when they went back under Nehemiah to rebuild the city and the temple, they took back the idea of the synagogue and they flourished. In Jerusalem alone there were about 500 synagogues in just that one city.

And so this was a perfect scenario for the ministry of Jesus, one of God's timing issues. And when Jesus came, He could always find the Jewish people, the ones He wanted to reach with the truth of the kingdom gospel gathered on a Sabbath in a synagogue somewhere. And that's where He went, but synagogues were getting less and less receptive to Him, even though He was still, as verse 17 indicates, popular with the crowd, who were just kind of stunned by the power that He displayed in His miracles. The synagogues were getting to be unwelcome and this is the last recorded experience of Jesus in a synagogue. We're only months before His death. This is the last recorded opportunity that He has to speak in a synagogue.

And you get the reason why, because of the attitude of the leader. Up to this point, the ruler of the synagogue had the right to determine who would speak, who would teach, who would explain the Scripture. Maybe this guy was a little ambivalent until he heard from Jesus and saw what happened. And then he affirms the conventional wisdom of the Jewish leaders, the party line that Jesus is not

from God, He can't be from God because He's a violator of the Sabbath. He's a violator of our law. He's a violator of our religion. And, of course, Mark 15:10 says they did all of this out of envy.

But let's look, first of all, at His conflict with error, verse 10. "He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath." That's all it needs to say. You say I don't see any conflict there. I do. You say, “Where's the conflict.” The conflict would come in His teaching. Israel was apostate. That is they had defected from the true faith and in the place of the true faith, they had substituted a legalistic system, a system of self-righteousness that Jesus had to confront. That's why they finally killed Him.

And that's why after they killed Him, the population of Jerusalem then went after the apostles, to stop this message. And what was it they hated about the message? Well, what they hated about the message was the indictment in it because it overturned their whole view. There are only two ways that you can believe you can come to God; either on the merits of Christ or on your own merits. It's either by grace and grace alone or it's by works or some mixture of grace and works. It's only two things. There's only two kinds of religion in the world. The religion of divine accomplishment, the religion of human achievement, Christianity, the true gospel is the religion of divine accomplishment: God does it all, you simply believe. Every other religious system in the world is a religion of human achievement. They were in human achievement. They had satisfied themselves with their own self-righteousness. They had self-esteem. They had all this pride about their religion, etc., etc., etc., and Jesus literally struck at the very heart of the system.

And that's why they tried to kill Him after one sermon in His own hometown. That's why ultimately He ended up on the cross. And so we know what He taught. If you go back to chapter 4, Luke doesn't have to tell us in chapter 13 what He taught. We know what He taught, because it says in chapter 4, verse 43, He said to them, "I must preach the kingdom of God. And I must do it to the other cities also for I was sent for this purpose." And He kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea. He went through all Judea where He is as we were reading in 13, and what did He do? He preached the kingdom of God. And what is the kingdom of God? Is the sphere over which God reigns. God rules. God reigns over a sphere, a realm.

And what is that realm? It is the realm of those who believe in Him. He reigns over the souls of those who belong to Him. He is the king over His own children. And Jesus said in John 8:44 to the Jewish leaders, "You are of your father the devil." You have your king. Jesus came, saying, "I've come to deliver you out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. I've come to deliver you from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of God. I've come to rescue you from sin and death and hell. I've come to show you the way into God's kingdom where you will be ruled over by a gracious, merciful,

benevolent, loving God."

And you remember in the great sermon in chapters 12 and through chapter 13, verse 9; that long discourse. Jesus said, "You must turn from the false religion. You must start fearing the true God not men. You must confess me as Lord. You must yield up your life to the Holy Spirit. You must stop being materialistic. You must stop pursuing the world and pursue this kingdom." And He added, of course, "and you better do it fast, because you don't know when I'm coming back in judgment and because you don't when you're going to die." Remember that in the beginning of chapter 13? You don't know when a tower's going to fall on you or a tidal wave. You don't know when somebody's going to come in and take your life. You're not in control of your death.

And Jesus went everywhere preaching salvation and that's synonymous with coming into the kingdom. Come into God's kingdom. "I am the way, the truth, the life." But you have to recognize that you're not there now, that you're in the devil's kingdom. Well, that was just more than they could bear. They hated Him for that. And so He was teaching in the synagogue and you know what He was teaching. He was teaching about the kingdom. And it wasn't a brutal kind of teaching. It was gracious. It was compassionate. It was loving. It was merciful. It offered them salvation, but at the same time, it confronted the phoniness of their system, and the false hopes of their self-righteous, legalistic hearts.

And so this obviously set up conflict. And wherever the truth is taught, it produces conflict if it's taught in a place where error prevails. And as I've said, error prevails in a lot of places. I've been thinking about the Shepherd's Conference and what I might speak on in the keynote address and I'm not really sure yet, but I...I keep watching tests coming along and I keep seeing the evangelical church being tested and failing the test. And by that mean error comes along and evangelical church embraces it. Another kind of error comes along and they embrace it. Another bit of error comes along and they embrace it. All of this is a test and the church has largely failed the test. It's discerning faculties are...are weak. And so it's subject to spiritual AIDS. A deficient immune system and can get killed by almost any heresy.

Error always goes to church because Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, infiltrates the systems of religion, particularly Christianity even true Christianity and plants his seeds of error there and a gullible, witless, uneducated, undiscerning church becomes a victim. Well, the synagogue was a place where error had settled down and found its home. And all you had to do was: Go in and teach the truth and that would create the conflict. He always preached the kingdom. Thirty-one times in the book of Luke the kingdom of God is mentioned. And even after His resurrection, before His ascension and the forty days it says He spoke to them things pertaining to the kingdom of God. It was always

about God's kingdom, how to become a part of His kingdom, by confessing Jesus as Lord, Messiah, Savior.

It was always His message and it always generated hostility among those who were content in their self-righteousness. In chapter 4, they try to throw Him off a cliff when He preached that. In chapter 6 in verse 11, it says they were filled with rage and discussed together what they might do to Him. In chapter...at the end of Chapter 11, verse 53, they were so hostile they started plotting against Him. And that's how it went.

So He confronts, first of all, their errant theology with gospel truth, which no doubt generates some hostility on the part of the ruler. And if you drop down to verse 17 for a minute, all His opponents, it says. There were people in opposition to Him and certainly their opposition to Him had to do with what He said. Now the conflict intensifies as you come to verse 11. "And behold there was a woman." Jesus was the master of the moment, the sovereign Lord of every event and He's going to use this woman to intensify the conflict and to bring it out in bold relief. This is such a great story. "There was a woman, who for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit and she was bent double and couldn't straighten up at all." Believe me, this woman was an outcast. The Jews had the...the theological viewpoint that if this was the condition you were in, you were a bad person.

Remember the blind man in John 9, and who sinned, this man or his parents? Remember Job? All his friends said well, Job, you've done something wrong. There's some sin in your life. You're not coming clean, buddy. That's why you got all the suffering. The basic view of theology was if you suffer, you're being punished by God. So here was a woman, who for eighteen years, had been looked at and scorned. Here was a woman doubled over in a terrible position physically, perhaps a more a terrible position socially. And to boot, she's a woman. And women belonged out of sight and in the back of the synagogue.

Now all of a sudden she becomes the centerpiece of the whole day. And Jesus puts her front and center and makes her the focal point of everything. And I love this about Him. He... He reveals His utter indifference to their system of rank and status. He reveals His utter indifference to their perception of privilege. He reveals His complete indifference to their sense...sense of achievement. He had no affection for their honor system. He honors the outcast woman and He humiliates the ruler. He has no affection for their perverted Sabbath. And He supersedes their authority with His own. He has no interest in their self-righteousness, seeking to be elevated. And He elevates one they would seek to sweep away.

As soon as we get into verse 11, we move from a conflict with error, which is only alluded to in verse 10, to a direct conflict with Satan. This is the second point of conflict. Whenever you go into an environment of false religion and you bring you the true message of Christ you will engage in a conflict with error and you will engage in a conflict with Satan. And that's exactly what happened in this case. It's symbolized by this woman. She had, for eighteen years, had a sickness caused by a spirit.

And as I said, the devil goes to church. Demons went to church and particularly in the time of Jesus, they were exposed and surfaced. I think they always go to church. I think all false religions of the world are filled up with people in one degree or another who are subject to Satan. To what degree they may be possessed or demonized, only God knows, and the devil. But you remember back in chapter 4, Jesus was preaching in a synagogue and a demon... They usually like to keep under the screen I guess you could say, below the surface, they don't want to reveal themselves in a religious environment. They hide. But in that case the power of Jesus exposed this demon living in a man and the demon screams out of the mouth of the man. "What have you to do with us? Is this the time of our judgment?"

They want to show up in church, but they want to show up in church hidden in the false religion and the people's lives, both leaders and people. And you remember Jesus cast the demon out of that man, but Jesus was constantly confronted with demons in His ministry and in synagogues. This woman had a sickness. The word is *astheneia* in Greek. It means a weakness. It's a very generic word; could mean an illness, could mean a disease, could mean just weakness. That would be its primary meaning.

There's no clinical pathology given here. There's no particular description of what was wrong with her. There's a lot of people who might speculate at what she had. All it says is she was bent over double and couldn't straighten up. That's all you need to know. You can just see that. That's the way she was. And it was caused by a spirit, caused by a demon. In fact, verse 16 says, "Satan has bound her for eighteen long years." Why? I don't know why. How? I don't know how it was that she exposed herself to this demon or why this demon picked on her or why Satan did this to her at the front. I don't know what the motive of hell was, but I do know that God allowed that to happen for this day.

She couldn't straighten up. She was bent over. She had bent over for eighteen years, shuffling around all her life in a humiliated fashion. And when Jesus saw her in verse 12, He called her over and said to her, "Woman you're freed from your sickness." Without even confronting the demon,

without referring to the demon, He dispelled the demon and ended the illness. Jesus picked her out of the crowd. This is sovereign. He initiated it. Doesn't say anything about her faith. Doesn't say she came to be healed. Doesn't say anything. She just probably shuffled off to the synagogue like she always did.

Maybe in the back of her mind there was word that Jesus was going to be there and she knew, everybody knew, that He was a healer. Maybe she hoped, but she certainly didn't pull herself up, because He had to say to her, "Come over here." Probably called her out of the shadows where she had spent most of those eighteen years. She was going to be the lady who provided the impact that day. He's the initiator. Nothing about her faith whether she believed or didn't believe. We don't know anything about her spiritual condition at all, either before or after. We don't know if she became a true believer in Jesus Christ that day; doesn't tell us.

Like to think she did. We don't know that. What Jesus did was totally sovereign, totally independent of her will, her wish, her faith or anybody else's for that matter. He healed people sometimes who had faith and sometimes who didn't. He healed people who asked for it and some who didn't. He healed people near and He healed people far. He healed people He was looking at and people He couldn't see. He cast demons out of people at will constantly. He had power over physical illness. He had power over the realm of demons. He cast demons out any time He chose to.

Acts 10:38, Luke writes, "He went about doing good in healing all who were oppressed by the devil." And here was one. "Woman, you are released," is the Greek. "You are released." The verb is what I call...I'll make a new category for the Greek language, a divine passive. "Woman you are released." He, the Divine One, freed her. And it's a perfect tense which means it was permanent. Simultaneously as He spoke, He laid His hands upon her in a touch of compassion, compassion she never saw from the ruler of that place.

He often did this. He often touched people: touched blind eyes, touched deaf ears, touched dumb mouths, touched crippled limbs. He healed with a word and a touch. He healed with or without faith. He healed not psychosomatic disorders, but organic illness. He healed people from demon oppression and possession. And He always healed immediately. There's no such thing as a lingering healing, a multiple phase healing. There's no such thing as: I was healed and slowly, I'm getting better. He healed everything, everyone He wanted to heal, completely, instantaneously, and permanently. And it says immediately laying His hands upon her and saying what He said, she was made erect again.

Now, we'll tell you this is more than just the casting out of a demon. Something had to happen to a spine to go up straight after 18 years in a bent position. You say whoa boy, after she was healed, she would need some serious therapy. Nobody healed by Jesus needs therapy, nobody. It's contained in the deal. You bypass the therapy to the wholeness in the instant of the healing. All His miracles were like that. The verb means she was made straight. It's really kind of a metaphor I think for what God wants to do for Israel.

If they would admit that they were spiritually bent over, what relief. I mean, she had shuffled off to the synagogue like so many other Sabbaths. In all those eighteen years, who knows what was going on her heart. She shows up, she's in the back in an obscure place, Jesus sees her, brings her up front. You can imagine her face is red, her ears are burning. She doesn't know what's going to go on. She's embarrassed. She's mortified, she's fearful. All of a sudden in an instant, eighteen years of bondage and she's released. She's standing erect and immediately she began glorifying God. Of course, that was a very Jewish response.

The blind man in John 9 when he was healed did the same thing, began glorifying God. Sure, sure. Remember the blind man said "Look what are you arguing? You're arguing about who He is? Nobody could do this unless He came from God. Come on. Nobody can do this unless He came from Him.' She knew who had sent Him. Did she know that He was the Son of God? Did she know that He was deity incarnate? Did she know He was the Messiah? Don't know what she knew, but she knew God had acted through Him, and she glorified God. She thanked God. Anybody would.

And so the Lord goes into a synagogue, confronts error with His teaching, confronts a demon with His healing. But the big confrontation was His conflict with hypocrites. And this you see in verses 14-16. Here's the real conflict that day. Verse 14, "And the synagogue official," this would be the ruler of the synagogue, the *archisunaggos*. This is the ruler. He has a responsibility to oversee the whole operation. He's the religious establishment man. He's the typical legalist who has little or no compassion for people. Know this folks about false religion. False religion can be brutal. It can be brutal.

If you ever wonder what it was that could possibly allow for Martin Luther to produce the kind of Reformation that God used him to produce, all you have to know is this: Martin Luther attacked a system that had smashed, crushed, brutalized its people. And they knew it and they were sick and tired of suffering the brutality of the system. And the final straw for Luther was the selling of indulgences for amounts of money taken out of the pockets of poor people by which they could buy

years off purgatory for their friends, relatives, and themselves.

This kind of oppression that stripped the poor of the bare minimum that they had left was the last straw. So when Luther launched the Reformation, he had a ready crowd of people who were sick of the abuse of that false system. And that's why it wasn't very long that a new confession of faith was written in Germany, and Protestantism was launched and the Catholic Church basically had to walk away with its tail between its leg from not only Germany but other countries in Europe influenced by that Reformation.

People were ready. They were sick of the oppression. The Pharisees had done the same thing. Matthew 23:4, they tie up heavy loads, lay them on men's shoulders unwilling to lift them with a finger; just add law after law, ritual after ritual, regulation after regulation; hundreds and hundreds of them, even for the Sabbath day. So the Sabbath became the most dreaded day of the week. It paralyzed you. That's why Jesus said, it wasn't made to make you uncomfortable. The Sabbath was made for man, for your rest, for your enjoyment, not man to fit into some narrow conscription.

But the synagogue official, he was an establishment man and he was going to wield the club and he was going to make it as tough as he could. Legalists do that you know. They have little or no compassion for the suffering, and legalistic religion is harsh and brutal and merciless and loveless. This is sort of the archetypal legalist. He's just seen a woman, a woman who needed mercy and compassion and tenderness and kindness, released. You would have thought he would have joined in on the chorus and said let's all stand and sing glory to God. But Luke describes him with one word: synagogue official, indignant, *aganakte* in the Greek text, intense displeasure.

They've broken the system. That by the way is exactly how the system felt about Martin Luther and everybody else who violated the system: anger, displeasure. Jesus had already unmasked and confronted error that day. He'd already unmasked and confronted the demon that day and now He was going to unmask false religion and boy He did. That's the reaction of a man who has no heart, a man whose heart God has never changed. That's not a godly reaction, because God is a God of compassion, is He not? Do you ever ask why did Jesus come and heal? Jesus could have done a lot of miracles to prove He was God. He could have done anything, right? He could have created a house. He could have created a temple. He could have created a mountain, could have caused the sea to disappear. Could have spun up in the air and spun around like a helicopter and flown around and landed.

Could have done a lot of things to prove He was God. What did He do? He healed people and He healed and basically banished illness from Israel. Why? Because He was not only showing divine power, but He was showing the heart of God as a heart of what? Compassion. But this is compassionless legalism. They make people suffer. And the official was infuriated at the miracle, never denied it. They never did. No Jews denied His miracles, they couldn't. The Jews in the end even bribed the Roman soldiers, you remember, to lie about the resurrection. They never denied it. They couldn't deny it. It happened.

Oh by the way, in case you might think that miracles produce faith, they don't. Miracles strengthen faith, but only God's Holy Spirit can produce faith and only in the penitent. People go around today claiming to do miracles. What do they think? They think by these miracles that somebody is going to be saved. It's repentance that changes the heart. It's belief in the true gospel of Christ. Here's a man who saw a miracle. It didn't matter to him at all, because his heart wasn't broken and contrite.

Far better that you would preach the sinfulness of sin and the wretchedness of the unbeliever and the judgment of God upon that unbeliever and the grace of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ than that you would do a thousand miracles. And what was his issue? Verse 14, he was indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath. That had become the most cruel day of all days. Sure Deuteronomy 5:13, 14, and 15 when the law was repeated, it said this, "Don't work on the Sabbath. Don't let your animals work." Rest. What a wonderful gesture on God's part, right? He didn't want to turn it into the worst day of the week. He wanted it to be the best day of the week.

But in their foolish kind of religion, trying to make themselves holy in their eyes, they'd accumulated all these rules that they could keep on the Sabbath and convince themselves in spite of the rest of stuff going on in their heart and in their life, they were OK with God because they kept the Sabbath. Well, he's going to challenge Jesus, but he has no courage, so he doesn't speak directly to Jesus. Verse 14 says, "He began saying to the multitude." Didn't have what it took to face Jesus on this. So he says to the multitude in response, “There are six days in which work should be done. Therefore, come during them and get healed and not on the Sabbath day."

We're going to put a stop to this. You can do this on Sunday or Monday or whatever. There's all kinds of days for this and he therefore indicts this poor woman who came to be healed. He endeavors to bring on the head of Jesus a violation of the law of God. But of course, there's nothing in the law of God that says you can't help somebody on the Sabbath. Any deed of mercy, any necessity was perfectly acceptable on the Sabbath and their Jewish law even said it. The Mishnah even said that you could do anything for a person or an animal that was necessary or merciful. And Jesus, Himself,

in the 12th chapter of Matthew had told them, you know, you've got...you've got the whole idea of the law of God wrong. Do you remember when David's soldiers were hungry and they went into the temple and ate the show bread, because they were hungry. And feeding men who were hungry was more important than the symbolism of the show bread.

And He said on another occasion if you have a lamb that falls in the ditch on the Sabbath, you get it out don't you? They were such hypocrites. It really was the hatred they had for Jesus. He was going to... He was going to make up a rule that you can't heal on the Sabbath. There could never be such a rule in Judaism, because nobody could heal anyway. So how would that rule develop? So the Lord answers him in verse 15. The Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites!" He was direct, as always, you spiritual fraud, "Does not each of you on Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall and lead him away to water him?" Well, He got them, because they did that.

In fact, in the Mishnah, the codification of Jewish rabbinic law, it prescribes that you can do that. You can take your animal if you put no burden on his back and lead him to water or to eat. It even gives you a maximum of 200 cubits that you can go. And they even have some prescription about how wide the well is so you can see how they encumbered these things. But it was perfectly fine to do that. You phonies!

And by the way, this isn't the first time He said this or the last. Calling them hypocrites was pretty routine because that's what they are and all advocates of false religion are hypocrites. They don't know God. They don't know the truth. They are really the tools of Satan. It's a terrible thing to say, but it's the truth. You're a phony, He said. Verse 16, "And this woman, a daughter of Abraham, as she is," a Jewess, He says the same thing in Luke 19 about Zaccheus, a son of Abraham. It means a Jew or Jewess. "She's one of your own people." This is not a Gentile. "This woman, a daughter of Abraham, as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years," Jesus says, emphasizing the terrible duration of this suffering, "should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?"

He takes the opposite view. This is the perfect day to do this, set her free. This is the best day to do that. And by what category was this work? What was the work? Jesus saying, "Woman you are freed from this weakness"? Or was the work her standing up? What was the work? It's a very common way for the Jews to reason all through the New Testament from the lesser to the greater, from the animal to the woman, from bound for eighteen years to being released from being tied up to being freed. This was a great moment in the life of that woman.

But it surfaced the conflict at its fiercest level, and tells us why Jesus was eventually crucified. Verse 17 sums up the result. "And as He said this, all His opponents were being humiliated." Boy they hated that. What could they say? They were dead in their tracks. The people knew what could be done on the Sabbath. Believe me they knew it well and they knew that they...they watered and fed their animals on the Sabbath. They knew that. And I'm sure they were trying to figure out where was the work here. They had been unmasked. They had been stripped. Their pretense had been uncovered. They looked like fools. They were... They were put to shame. That's a compound verb, *kataischun*, they were fully shamed, publicly; both that ruler and all who agreed with him, called the opponents of Jesus. They were all shamed. They were all humiliated. Now they weren't humbled in the righteous sense. They didn't become penitent and say wow, I am a hypocrite. I need to deal with this. I...maybe this is Son of God. Not that. All this did was make them more angry and more bent on getting Jesus out of the picture.

But there was another response. Look at the rest of verse 17, the entire multitude, those left "was rejoicing over all the glorious things being done by Him." They were just absolutely blown away by what was happening. And I'm sure some of them who were there were already the followers of Jesus. Some may have been believers in Him. But this is their typical response. Back in Chapter 9, verse 43, they were all amazed at the greatness of God. Everyone was marveling at all that He was doing. I mean, that was pretty much the typical response. They were just stunned and floored by it. It doesn't necessarily mean that they put their full trust in Christ. We could wish that that were true. Some did. Chapter 16, verse 16, some were pressing into the kingdom. And it is true in verse 31 of chapter 13, look at that, verse 31 of chapter 13, some of the Pharisees actually came to Jesus and told Him to go away and depart for Herod wants to kill you. There may have been some among the Pharisees who were beginning to see the light.

But in the end the stunned crowd, the marveling crowd, the wondering crowd, well, they become very fickle. They hail Him as Messiah on the day He enters Jerusalem and they cry for His blood on Friday. And so He creates the conflict. There is the big crowd that's fascinated and there are His enemies who are indignant.

But in the midst of it all, let me just close with this, you see that Christ is in conflict with error, with Satan, and false religion. And it is ever always so. And all of this surrounds a woman miraculously delivered. But there's a final picture here that I just want to leave with you. This woman is symbolic of the saving work of the Lord. She is a... She should be unforgettable in the memory of every believer, because she's such a wonderful analogy.

The Lord passes by the religious and self-righteous, passes by those that say and think they're good, passes by the religious leaders, and the Lord chooses the lowest of the low. One who would have been deemed to have been a sinner of some massive proportions to have suffered such a fate. He ignores the proud and He chooses the humble. The Lord sovereignly chooses. The Lord sovereignly delivers. The Lord sovereignly straightens up the one who is bent over. The Lord sovereignly produces praise.

This woman then is a picture of the sovereign work of the Lord in salvation, a picture of the enslaved, oppressed sinner under the burden and bondage of Satan, hiding in the shadows, aware every moment of suffering the weight and the burden of sin hopeless, robbed of dignity, bent over like an animal, the image of God defaced. So is the picture of the sinner shuffling one day into the presence of God to hear the word of God. She is met by the Lord and He out of His sovereign love delivers her, straightens her up. This is the picture of the work of God in salvation. God offers salvation to the outcast, the humbled, those bent over by the weight of sin, who will come and hear Him and He will turn them into true worshipers and He bypasses the curious and the self-righteous. Join me in prayer.

In this account, Father, Christ certainly triumphed. The release and the restoration of one unknown woman in an unnamed synagogue in Israel was in one way a very small victory. But from that tiny seed would grow a tree that would reach across the world. This is an illustration of the wonderful saving work that You do that knows no bounds. You're still straightening up the bent. You're still bringing the outcast out of the shadows into the light. You're still turning the sad and broken-hearted into the rejoicing.

We thank You for your truth. We thank You for its power. We thank You that You have redeemed us. We ask, oh God, that You would redeem others today, that somewhere in this congregation there might be a man or a woman that You will look on and You will draw to Yourself; and to that man or woman, You will say, “Be released from your sickness.” And they who have bent over under the weight of sin will stand erect to praise You. For all of us for whom You have done that, we will continue to praise and thank You. Now Father, we ask that You would work Your work in all our hearts. We rejoice at what You've done for us, picking us out of the crowd and straightening us, as it were, to praise You. Thank You for this undeserved and gracious gift, and may there be many this day who will receive this eternal blessing. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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