

The Great Sayings in the Gospels, 103
Small Things
Luke 13:10-21

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10 And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath.

11 And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself.

12 And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity.

13 And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.

14 And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day.

15 The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering?

16 And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?

17 And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him.

18 Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it?

19 It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it.

20 And again he said, Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God?

21 It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

Introduction:

Here we have a seemingly straightforward story from the life of Jesus which became oddly and strangely skewed as it worked itself out.

There is a form followed here which I think I have often missed as I have looked at the deeds and parables of Jesus. There is a story and then the story is followed by one or more parables. We have seen in several past messages from the gospels that the story often was closely related to the event and somehow taught an important lesson. But, I fear that I have frequently looked at this text and failed to see the connection between the event and the parables. After all, what do mustard seeds and leaven have to do with a woman being healed? In this case, it seems, they have quite a bit to do with it.

First, the story:

Jesus was teaching in a synagogue somewhere either in Judea, or in Perea, the region just across the Jordan from Judea. It was on the Sabbath day, which has quite a bit to do with the account. It may have been Jesus' last appearance as teacher in a synagogue, at least it is the last one recorded in the gospels. The language suggests (*Hendriksen, NT Commentary*) that a woman

came in after the meeting had begun and she was in a bad way. She was so crippled in her back that she could not straighten up or even look up but was bent nearly double. I have seen only a few folks in my life in this condition and it always has seemed as if they were in great discomfort. But this woman's body was not suffering primarily from a physical condition as a spiritual one.

Luke does not record that she approached Jesus or asked Him in any way for help but that Jesus called her to himself, laid His hands on her and delivered her from the evil spirit that had caused her to be so crippled.

The 'ruler of the synagogue,' the one who was responsible for organizing the meetings and who designated the chief speaker of the day, became quite angry. Rather than show anger to Jesus, he rebuked the audience, demanding that they not submit to healing on the Sabbath but on one of the other six days of the week. It seems like a barely veiled rebuke of the poor woman who had been healed.

The Sabbath was a huge day for the Jews and they were strictly forbidden to work or do many other things on that day. It was, of course, commanded in the 10 commandments and ever since the Jews had returned from Babylonian captivity some 300 years prior there had been a very determined effort to keep the Law of Moses. In addition to not working, they were not to build a fire, cook food, or travel but just a short distance. The ruler of the synagogue had seen the actions of Jesus as violating the 4th commandment.

The affliction of the woman was something that you and I would have considered as purely physical. There is at least one medical condition and probably more that are known to cause these symptoms. She had been this way for a long time and Luke recorded from the beginning of the story that the condition was because of a demon, a spirit of affliction.

A few words about evil spirits and illness:

- They enjoy creating suffering in human beings. There are several accounts of demons causing pain, discomfort and even insanity in people that Jesus encountered.
- They can create symptoms of every illness known to man, and maybe some that men cannot figure out.
- But probably only a very small percentage of the sick are under the influence of an evil spirit. Most are just sick from some natural cause.
- Only careful and prayerful examination by one who is very wise spiritually can determine if an illness has spiritual causes.
- Ignorant and foolish people have created confusion, hurt, and damage by trying to administer spiritual healing when they did not have the wisdom to be doing so. There are also the frauds and charlatans who make their living by pretending to do so.

Jesus laid His hands on her and healed her, maybe the only time the scriptures speak of Him laying hands on one afflicted by a demon. It may have been that she was not 'possessed' in the classic sense but only under physical attack. Normally, Jesus only spoke to the demons and commanded them to depart.

The words of the ruler of the synagogue were taken by Jesus to suggest that this matter of healing the woman was too small a matter, too light and insignificant, to be taken up on a Sabbath day and the Lord took that matter 'Head-On,' which is the Biblical way to deal with hypocrisy.

You see, the Jews had figured out that there were some things that had to be done even on the Sabbath. Animals had to be watered, those which fell into pits from which they could not get out had to be helped, people had to walk at least a short distance to get to the synagogue, and the priests still had to carry on the ceremonies at the temple. So, these things were allowed.

In the attitude of the ruler Jesus rightly saw hypocrisy. How could it be important enough to water an animal on the Sabbath and not important to free a woman from the bondage of a demon? Is an animal more important than a person? (Even women, who were not held in high esteem?) Is it more important to loose the animal and lead him to drink than to loose a prisoner of the devil? This was the position which the 'ruler' was taking and if he held to it, Jesus condemned him and all those who sided with him as hypocrites.

This was not the only encounter that Jesus had with Jews over this issue. All three of the Synoptic gospels record an incident in which some came to Him asking if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:20-14). In John 5:1-10, He turned the tables on some of them and asked them the question but they refused to answer. In John 7, He re-visited the issue, pointing out that they circumcised people on the Sabbath, making the ceremonially clean, but forbade Him to make men well.

So, it was this event, the healing of the crippled woman and the hypocritical anger of the ruler of the synagogue which prompted Jesus to give the two analogies, or parables, first of the mustard seed/plant and then of the leaven in three measure of dough.

But our question is, "what does a tiny mustard seed growing into a tall plant lodging birds and leaven in three measures of dough have to do with a woman being healed?"

Both of the analogies/parables speak of something very small becoming something very large or very influential, but how does this apply. One commentator made the following observation:

"Within forty years of Jesus' death (and resurrection - 1d) the gospel had reached all the great centers of the Roman world and ever so many out-of-the-way places besides." (Hendriksen, NT Commentary, Luke, p.703.)

But I would suggest that maybe Jesus had a more local and immediate application in mind, one that would impact these very attenders of this synagogue and this town where these people lived. This "small" act of grace would grow into a mighty movement right there.

This 'little' act had planted a seed which was going to grow into a mighty tree and many were going to find shelter in the gospel and find hope in Christ from the burning wrath of God as the birds found shelter in the mustard bush from the heat of the sun. Remember that in the days after Pentecost, disciples went out from Jerusalem in all directions preaching the gospel with power. This village could not have been far from the city and certainly Jesus would not have had it missed after giving such a prophecy here.

We also need to see that Jesus had planted some very 'subversive' ideas into the minds of the audience there at the synagogue that day, ideas which would permeate the whole area, like yeast permeates a lump of dough. Think about it:

- there are things more important than the rigid enforcement of the Sabbath.
- a woman is of more value than a donkey.
- Spiritual bondage should be addressed when God's people meet to worship.
- Jesus outranks Moses.
- Hypocrisy in leadership is to be rebuked.
- People may receive help directly from Jesus without 'permission' from religious leaders.
- God will bypass religious leaders when they are hypocrites.
- The fact that God may help some in a religious service does not mean that He endorses the leader of that service.
- It is OK to call a hypocrite a hypocrite to his face and in public. (We assume the same goes for other sins.)

1 Tim 5:19-20

19 Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.

20 Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.

All of this 'yeast,' these subversive ideas, Jesus had introduced here in the short episode. They were destined to work themselves through the community and 'infect' the people thoroughly so that they would be prepared for the New Covenant message of the church.

Applications:

A 'day' is not more important than the needs of someone in trouble.

Drop 'seeds' - small kernels of truth into conversations with loved ones, especially those who may be in sin. Then pray that God will use them.

"Infect" others with radical ideas from God's Word. Force them to remember important things that you believe. They will call them to mind when they remember you, maybe years after you are dead, and things that were important to you will take on a different texture for them.

Ask God for opportunities. Give thought to things you want others to remember as associated with you, what you might say "if"....

I guarantee you that Jesus thought and planned much what He would say in particular situations.