

Knowing the times (part 2)

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[0:00] pray. Now we're going to read, spend some time in Luke chapter 13, verses 10 to 21. I should have said there's church Bibles available at the back. If you're using one of those Bibles, we're on page 1046 as we continue to think about knowing the times, the times that we happen to find ourselves living in. Verses 10 to 21 of Luke 13. On a Sabbath, Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who'd been crippled by a spirit for 18 years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. 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. 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.

The Lord answered him, 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 18 long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?

When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing. Then Jesus asked, 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. Again, he asked, what shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about 30 kilograms of flour until it worked all through the dough. Amen. So this morning, what I want us to do is to use the story that we've just read to provide a lens on the world that we live in. Think back to that song that we were eventually able to sing in its first line, do we feel the world is broken? And I would suggest it's almost impossible not to. Suffering is all around us, whether we're thinking globally or personally. There is the brokenness inside of us that maybe only we are aware of. The world seems to be infected by evil. The realities of distress and disability are normal in our days.

But there's hope in our story, isn't there? You know, if we feel the world is broken, do we also know that all the dark won't stop the light from getting through? There is in this story a reminder that with the coming of Jesus, God's Son and King, this great mission of mercy, this establishing of His kingdom, He is restoring, He is redeeming, and we see Him stopping Satan in His tracks.

[3:12] And so this story is also giving us a lens by which to see God's plan for His world. Because we need to remember that suffering and evil, while it seems normal to us, is abnormal, in that it was never part of God's good creation at the beginning. And so this miracle helps us to see the promise from Jesus of a new normal, of a world free of suffering, of a world free of evil.

So let's watch and listen together that King Jesus might bring hope, bring hope to us when we feel broken and weary. Four scenes for us to consider. The first is of this woman who has been crippled by cruelty.

The story begins on a Sabbath with Jesus teaching. Jesus was the great teacher. So He's in a synagogue, a place of worship, and into that scene of teaching shuffles this woman. She's been crippled by a spirit for 18 years, bent over, unable to straighten. 18 years of desperate need. Let's try and picture for a moment the impact of this on every part of her experience. Her ability to do her everyday tasks. Her ability to get a good night's sleep. Her relationships. Her ability to worship. Her sense of contentment. Perhaps her dignity. Her standing.

All affected for 18 years. And notice, So the man who wrote this gospel was a medical doctor, Dr. Luke. So notice that Dr. Luke wants to take us beyond just her physical suffering to point out, and this is the only time that he points this out, she'd been crippled by a spirit for 18 years.

[5 : 30] He recognizes there's a spiritual dimension, there's spiritual attack. Notice that Jesus agrees, verse 16. This woman is a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for 18 long years.

Okay, so the very fact that this is the only time it's mentioned, it means that we can't draw a straight line and say, every time someone suffers, there's spiritual attack. But it means it can be the case. And certainly, Luke and Jesus want to shed light on the reality of the presence of our evil enemy, Satan. Described in the Bible as our adversary.

Or as the accuser. The one who hates God and hates God's people and hates God's image bearers. And we need to understand that because that helps to explain the world as it is.

It's been pointed out that one of the the weaknesses of modern materialism, you know, all that we see is all that there is, ignoring the spiritual dimension, it means it's very limited in its ability to explain the depths of evil.

[6 : 41] Because if it's only explained in physical terms, then the problem must be with us.

Therefore, what we need is maybe a little bit more education. Or if we could just change social conditions, or if we could offer better treatments, then we would expect more progress.

But the modern technological West is not seeing progress, are we? Because the problem runs much deeper and is much darker than that. Someone said to me recently that the West is actually getting more Christian in the last 10 years without even trying, in part, as people are recognizing the depth and scale of evil and wickedness is so great, there has to be a better place to find answers than just in us and our own abilities and intelligence.

Notice that the Bible and Jesus helps to account for how deep and complex the problem of evil is by honestly showing us our adversary, the devil, pointing to the reality and power of Satan.

We need to recognize that there is a personal Satan who hates God, who attacks image bearers, who wants to steal dignity and hope and life.

And we see his work in this woman as she has been crippled by his cruelty. Now let's use that as a picture because in truth, that can help us to understand something of the same method that Satan or the devil still likes to apply today.

[8 : 17] He would love to cripple us and to crush us, perhaps not physically, but perhaps mentally or emotionally. Perhaps with weaknesses that we can't escape from, those chains that can bind us so tightly.

Perhaps crippled by a sense of self-hate. Perhaps crippled by the scars of past evil acts. Perhaps crippled and crushed by our doubts or our fears.

Perhaps crippled and unable because of an addiction. Perhaps weakened by sinful habits and patterns. We need to recognize the reality and the power of Satan.

But we need to recognize that he is not equal to Jesus. C.S. Lewis in the Screwtape Letter said that people can make two equal and opposite mistakes when it comes to the devil.

One, we can deny that the devil exists. But secondly, we can take an unhealthy interest in him and we can live in great fear of him when the one who we should honor and fear is the one who is far greater.

[9 : 29] It's Jesus. Maybe you feel like this woman today. Maybe you feel like you've dragged yourself to church and you feel that sense of being spiritually crippled.

You've come to the right place because in Jesus there is the hope and the promise of deep healing. Because our second scene moves us from this woman being crippled by cruelty to being cured by the compassion of Christ.

We don't know what the woman's expectation was that day as she went to worship but we do know that she met Jesus. Jesus, the friend of sinners and sufferers. Jesus, a saviour of compassion.

Jesus, the Lord of King, the Lord and King of mercy. And she was wonderfully cured. Look with me at verses 12 and 13. 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. Notice again how often we're told Jesus saw her. Jesus picked her out of the crowd.

[10 : 48] We don't know if this woman and her condition mattered to anyone else but it mattered to Jesus. Jesus wasn't scanning the room for the very important person section.

No, he has his eyes on those who need his mercy. Notice too that Jesus didn't just see her Jesus saved her. Look at the freedom language. You are set free.

That prison of her pain Jesus has ripped the door open and given her release. That slavery to Satan instantly broken.

Notice here is one of the times when Jesus doesn't just speak he also acts he put his hands out and he touched it. Jesus loves crossing barriers to show how much he loves people.

There was a great stigma about disability. There was a great stigma of men in their dealings with women but Jesus crosses those barriers to show his compassion and his care.

[11:53] Jesus triumphed in her also. There was a spiritual battle taking place over her heart and her life and wonderfully there was no context.

Jesus Jesus is the light who always drives out the darkness. That's why he came. Remember Jesus is on this journey to Jerusalem and he knows that that road is going to take him to Calvary. He is the king who will go to the cross and there on the cross a great spiritual battle will take place and Jesus will fight and Jesus will defeat Satan.

Jesus will deal with sin. Jesus will win the battle over death in his suffering in his dying in his rising so that he is able to give as a gift his merciful love and salvation to you and to me.

This woman's story though unique to her is a story big enough to include your story and mine when we understand that Jesus who is the creator of us all is the one who sees us.

[13:15] He sees us today however you came in however you feel about yourself whatever those crippling effects of suffering and weakness you live with Jesus sees you and Jesus came to save you to break that power of evil and darkness to give hope and light and life to forgive sin and guilt to restore the image of God in us to set us free from shame and condemnation to bring God's love to you.

The heart of Jesus in the synagogue was a heart moved by compassion. The heart of Jesus in heaven is unchanged. He still loves.

He still shows mercy. I just want to pause on this scene to ask a couple of questions.

The first question is what about healing? That is an important thing. Maybe many of us have wrestled with this in our own experience or with others. Why doesn't he fix me personally or why does he permit so much suffering either in my family or in the world?

Does he even care? Many people even Christian people have those questions. They're not just questions that are talked about in a philosophy class.

[14:57] They're deeply personal questions. Questions with no easy answers. But there are some thoughts to share briefly. One to encourage us to recognize that Jesus can still heal.

Sometimes Jesus heals people instantly. Sometimes he does that through modern medicine and over time. but he doesn't always heal in this life.

For the people of God there is promise for healing that is eternal. But he doesn't always heal in this life. It's important for us to recognize that Jesus at the same time does care about our physical needs and our spiritual needs.

We see that through his ministry. And we see that because our future hope is a physical hope. Perfect physical life and a renewed physical creation where we have perfect physical resurrection bodies where we meet our risen, perfected, glorified Jesus.

The physical matters. We also know that Jesus does care about suffering. Isaiah 53, that great reflection on the suffering servant.

[16:10] He took up our pain and bore our suffering. We can never say of our God and our Savior that he doesn't care, that he is distant. He knows by experience suffering.

We have a God that we pray to who understands. But we also need to recognize that in this world as it's scarred by sin, suffering will always be normal.

And that explains the priority that sometimes surprises people when it comes to Jesus. Jesus' first and most important priority is for the deeper healing, for spiritual healing, dealing with the problem of sin that separates us from our God.

I got that phrase, deeper healing, from Joni Erickson Tadda. Many of you may have heard of Joni. She has been paralyzed for over 50 years.

She has gone through bouts of cancer. She's always a wise and mature voice to listen to on questions of suffering. She is somebody who longed for a number of years for physical healing until she read actually in Luke chapter 5, the story, if you remember, when there was a paralyzed man let down from into a room where Jesus was teaching.

[17 : 39] and everybody could see what this man's great need was or so they thought until Jesus said to him, son, your sins are forgiven. And Joni understood then that as significant as being freed from being unable to move, it's not as significant eternally as being free from sin.

She talked about fixing a back or fixing legs or fixing a body as like finger work, easy work for Jesus. But forgiving sin was the hard work requiring the strong arm of salvation.

Our redemption required the blood of Jesus to be spilled, those strong and loving arms to be stretched out on the cross for that. But in that deeper healing, and we need to understand this, in that deeper healing when we are right with Jesus, when we are right with God, there is the promise that one day in the new creation, there will be complete healing for all eternity of body and mind. No more paralysis, no more being crippled, there will be joy that lasts forever. There is the promise in the gospel of that new normal.

Let's move to our third scene. criticism. And it may take us by surprise as we meet cold-hearted criticism. So imagine the drama that's just happened in this synagogue.

[19 : 15] Jesus is teaching, woman walks in, he stops to pay attention, he talks to her, he touches her, her back straightens. And if we were to stop the action there and to ask the question, what happens next?

I imagine we're expecting what we see at the end of verse 17, the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing. That seems to make absolute sense, doesn't it?

But we also get that other reaction. We get the reaction of the super-religious, living by rule keeping as a way to be right with God.

Listen to this man, indignant, angry, upset, 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.

Not celebrating, he's criticizing. This is the wrong day of the week to be healing someone. It got me thinking about the badge that sometimes you see, the sticker that sometimes you see, not all disabilities are visible.

[20 : 22] The women's spiritual disability was really clear for all to see. But these Pharisees, unable to see their spiritual disability and inability, nor were the people around them.

They were slaves. This man was a slave, but he couldn't see it. He was far from God's heart of mercy. He was far from God's kingdom. This synagogue leader, when he criticizes Jesus about what he's doing on the Sabbath, he has lost the plot, both of God's plan for the Sabbath and God's plan of salvation.

Jesus has called himself the Lord of the Sabbath. And if we were to ask Jesus, he would say, the Sabbath is a perfect day for a miracle. It's the perfect day to set someone free.

Why? Because the Sabbath always spoke about rest. A rest to enjoy and to worship creation and to worship and to enjoy the creator God.

And what's happened on this Sabbath, this woman has been given rest. Rest from her pain. Resting so she's able to glorify God.

[21 : 44] And, wonderfully, she's become a new creation. redemption. It's a great day for this miracle. The Sabbath also spoke of redemption and rescue.

The people of God were told, every Sabbath, you are to remember that once upon a time you were slaves, but God set you free. Jesus, the Savior King, has acted to give this woman freedom and rescue.

It's a great day for this miracle. mercy. And the Sabbath also spoke of mercy. Look with me at verse 15.

It says, 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 to water? Then you should have done the same. Jesus is saying, God made provision for mercy for animals in the Old Testament.

Mercy for them. There must be, by God's design, mercy for suffering people too. So when we think about how we use our Sunday, don't we see it as a wonderful gift from God?

[22 : 59] Here we have this moment in the hustle and bustle and the busyness of our weeks. Here is a time to rest, to worship. Here is a time to remember our salvation and our Savior.

And we have Sunday as a day for showing mercy, for showing kindness to one another and also to others too.

We can give the gift of Sabbath to other people as we seek to show mercy. But in this synagogue leader, we are being reminded, aren't we, of the danger of cold-hearted religion, of a lack of love and grace towards others, of a desire to find fault, of a failure to celebrate God's work in the lives of someone else.

We also see a level of foolishness, a foolishness that presumes that the problems of evil can be sorted by us.

The problem lies too deep. We need to be running to Jesus to find help. He is the only Savior. Jesus calls him a hypocrite.

[24 : 18] He was wearing a mask, looking really religious, while his heart was not right towards God, not looking to him for salvation. And that too stands as a warning, doesn't it?

We can so easily fool others with how we are, how we're doing spiritually. We can even fool ourselves. But we need to understand that we can never fool God.

We need humility. We need repentance to turn from our sin to trust in Jesus. That we would run to him to find the compassion that this woman found.

Last scene, and it's about the coming of the kingdom in verses 18 to 21. So in this scene, Jesus moves from being the hero and the focus of the story to become a storyteller.

And these stories are connected to what's just happened. He wants us to understand the significance of the woman's story for our story and for the story of the world.

[25 : 19] Because what's happened here in this synagogue is that Jesus, in this moment, he's interrupted the normal. suffering and evil is normal until Jesus arrives.

And his grace touches the broken and healing comes. Suffering and evil is normal until the kingdom of God breaks into the present. That's what we see happening in that synagogue.

And these parables, really simple parables about small things that grow, you know, the tiny seed that becomes the huge tree, the little bit of yeast with that spreading influence that goes through the dough, is intended to say to us that the miracle is like that seed, it's like that yeast.

What we saw in the synagogue on that day was one victory of Jesus over Satan in the life of one. But that brings with it the promise of greater victory.

It anticipates the cross and the resurrection. It points to his ultimate victory, to his return, having dealt with sin and evil and Satan forever to establish a perfect world and a kingdom with no end.

[26 : 31] These stories are saying to us that what Jesus does in that one woman's life, he will do in the lives of billions of people since her. He would do in our lives today if we would ask him.

Jesus is saying what happened in that synagogue will spread across the globe. hope so that there are hundreds of millions of followers of Jesus worshipping him today from every nation.

That the mercy and compassion that was shown in that synagogue, that that influence would spread, would spread by the work of the Spirit.

It would spread through the work of the people of God. It would spread as men and women and boys and girls who love Jesus would seek to live like Jesus, to show kindness and compassion and mercy.

And as people would come to hear the good news that there is a Savior for them, bringing healing and hope and comfort and joy. Jesus in this story and in his stories, Jesus in his journey to the cross is preparing us for that wonderful promise of a new normal.

[27 : 46] that in Jesus' kingdom, the kingdom that has no end, there will be no sickness, no pain, no disease, no brokenness, no fear, no suffering, no death.

That in the coming of Jesus is the answer to the problem of evil. It will not be fixed by education. It will not be fixed by peace treaties.

It will not be fixed by better health care or moral self-improvement. It will only be fixed in and through the work of King Jesus in his first coming at the cross and the resurrection as he comes into hearts and lives and as he comes again as the king of glory.

Jesus is good news for broken, weary, suffering people. for people like us. He promises mercy, compassion, salvation with the hope of future glory to come.

Let's pray and give thanks. Lord Jesus, we thank you that this story gives us a window into your plans and purposes, your mission of mercy.

[29 : 09] Lord, we thank you that you saw and you saved. You touched and you triumphed. Lord, thank you for your glory displayed in that woman's healing and pushing back the darkness of Satan and letting the light of God shine on that day.

Lord, thank you that that light continues to shine. Thank you for the promise that we have of certain salvation when we trust in Jesus, of the forgiveness of sin, of the removal of guilt and condemnation, of the hope of a new heavens and a new earth.

Lord, we pray that in our weakness we would come to you for grace and strength, that we would keep looking to Jesus, or you'd help us to look to Jesus as Savior for the very first time today, that we would turn from our sin and depend on him and live with hope for that new normal that the Bible promises, that Jesus promises through his death and resurrection.

We pray all in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, we'll finish our time this morning with a hymn. Our God will go before us.

Just a reminder, we have tea and coffee after the service, and we meet again at 5.30, if you're able. So let's stand and let's sing together. Our God will go before us and guide us by his presence.

[31 : 13] What confidence this promises, we will never walk alone.

The unknown pass through shadows, our hearts fear not tomorrow.

For every step is faithfulness, is the truth that lies away. Our God will go before us.

The Lord of hosts is with us. God will go before us and guide us. The Lord of hosts is with us. The Lord of hosts is with us and guide us.

For his grace will bring us home. The Lord of hosts is with us and guide us. The Lord of hosts is with us and guide us.

[32 : 17] Though evil forms against us. Though heaven will defend us.

The gates of hell shall not prevail. For the battle is the life.

Our God will go before us and guide us. Our God will go before us. The Lord of hosts is with us.

Though praise the one who leads us on. For his grace will bring us home. For his grace will bring us home.

Now send us with your presence. And lead us home. And lead us home. To heaven.

[33 : 20] Where songs of sorrow strain no more. And thy revery breath is praise.

Our God will go before us. The Lord of hosts is with us.

Oh praise the one who leads us on. For his grace will bring us home.

Our God will go before us. The Lord of hosts is with us.

Oh praise the one who leads us on. For his grace will bring us home.

[34 : 18] Close with these words from Romans 15. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him. So that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.