

In the previous passage of the parable of the fig tree Israel and all of us were warned that God has blessed us and expects those blessings to produce fruit in our lives. If we do not turn from our selfishness and become part of the vine of Jesus, which is to let His life produce good fruit in us, we will be cut down (John 15:5,6ⁱ). He was specifically addressing the hardness of the hearts of many in Israel. The passage for today illustrates that hardness of which Jesus spoke.

¹⁰ Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. ¹¹ And behold, there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. Luke 13:10,11 One of the attendees that Sabbath was a woman who had an affliction that is believed to be spondylitis deformans. Her vertebrae had fused together in an arch, causing her to always be hunched over with her face toward the ground. It began eighteen years earlier. Spurgeon describes her previous condition as "walking about as if she were searching for a grave."

When I lived in a small Japanese town in Hawaii, I saw a woman in this condition and thought of this passage. It saddened me to see how she could not straighten herself. She leaned on a cane as she shuffled along with her face always toward the ground. I wanted so badly to do what Jesus did here, but I did not have the faith (Matthew 9:29ⁱⁱ).

¹² When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your disability." Luke 12:12 We don't know what Jesus was teaching on that Sabbath, but according to Luke's account, the main lesson turned out to be what took place after Jesus' message. Jesus called her to come to Him. Women were probably sitting separate from the men. She would have had to lean on a staff while sitting and turn her head to the side to see and listen to Jesus. She rose and stepped forward in faith. Jesus pronounced her free from the affliction. Think of the stunned silence as the congregation waited to see what would happen!

¹³ And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God. Luke 13:13 Jesus laid his hands on the woman. I imagine His hand on her shoulders gently pushing them upward until she stood fully straight. When her body stood erect, he says of her praise that "she was the most eloquent woman in the universe." It was her words, her eyes, her uplifted arms and her suddenly liberated and now soaring spirit all glorifying God. I'm sure those in the synagogue were overwhelmed at the sight and glorifying God with her. When we witness a miracle, our souls can't help but soar in praise to the One to whom nothing is impossible (Matthew 19:26ⁱⁱⁱ).

What had to happen for that to be possible? The vertebrae would have to un-fuse, the muscles would have to move to a position they hadn't moved in eighteen years! Those of us who have had to fix a limb in one position for a period of time and then tried to get full movement again know how painfully difficult that is. I once injured a knee, and after it had healed, I complained to a doctor that it didn't have full motion. He suddenly pushed into the position I did not think it would move. I almost went through the roof. Our muscles have a memory and will not go beyond what they are accustomed to without a great deal of pain. For this woman to stand straight, numerous miracles had to instantly occur throughout her body. She must have felt the wonder of the changes going on inside her. Only God can do that (Luke 1:37^{iv})!

Was the great I AM there when she was bound by Satan eighteen years earlier? Of course He was. Why did He let it happen? We can't answer. Was He there when Philip Matthews was formed in the womb? We know He was for only He could create a stomach that did not form naturally. Was He there when Philip passed on to glory? He is I AM and therefore we know He was. Is He there in you or your family members desperate situation that you cannot understand? He is! ¹⁷ *For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,* ¹⁸ *as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.* 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 Can we mortals with our finite minds understand why God heals one and not another? No way! But we can trust I AM because He is there at the beginning and at the end. He is Alpha and Omega. He knows what He is doing!

¹⁴ *But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, "There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day."* Luke 13:14 Not everyone was caught up in the moment. Jewish legal interpretation of Levitical Law of not laboring on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:9,10^v) forbade any kind of healing except to save a life. The ruler of the synagogue was so legalistic, that instead of praising God for the wonder that had occurred, he cited the oral law declaring this healing was breaking the rules. Jesus had violated the tradition of the elders.

Kent Hughes calls the synagogue ruler's heart "a slab of ecclesiastical granite." He goes on to write of this leader, "His heart was pumping great amounts of formaldehyde. He breathed arsenic. He fancied that he was a lover of the Law and its protector. However, his lack of love for the woman showed that he did not love his neighbor as himself which shows that he did not love God (1 John 4:12^{vi}). The cold synagogue leader was about to be 'iced' by Jesus."^{vii} Certainly Jesus could have told the woman He could heal her tomorrow. But Jesus had a lesson for the ruler and the entire congregation. The Law had been misinterpreted. The heart of God was being misrepresented.

¹⁵ *Then the Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it?"* Luke 13:15 Hypocrites! It is a word taken from Greek plays. An actor would play a number of roles holding a different mask in front of his face for each role portrayed. We get our expression "two-faced" from this. What was the hypocrisy of the ruler and all who held to oral tradition? The legal loopholes included saving an animal that fell into a cistern or needed water. The hypocrisy Jesus was pointing out was that they could do something to rescue their animal in need but not another human. If you can care for an animal in need, then certainly you should care for a person in need.

¹⁶ *And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?"* Luke 13:16 This woman was their relative, a descendant of Abraham. What better day to set her free than the Sabbath? The Sabbath was given to man as a day of rest and refreshing (Exodus 23:12^{viii}). Was this healing not a blessing of rest and refreshing? She was tied up like animals were tied, only it was Satan who had bound her. Just as they untied animals to lead them to water, this woman was loosed from Satan's bondage. The Sabbath was to be a blessing not a curse (Mark 2:27^{ix}).

Satan bound this woman. Some afflictions are from Satan. Job's illnesses were. Other illness seems to be a case of living in a fallen world and allowed by God to strengthen and mature us (James 1:2-4^x) and to reveal His glory (John 9:3^{xi}). Paul's affliction was called a messenger of Satan, but God was using it to keep Paul humble and reliant upon God's grace (2 Corinthians 12:9^{xii}). Some believers give Satan too much credit, seeing him behind everything. Others speak as if he doesn't exist. The truth is somewhere in the middle. But we should know that just as this woman was loosed, God can set us free from any attacks of the enemy or help us endure. Greater is He who is in us than He who is in the world (1 John 4:4^{xiii}).

¹⁷ As he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame, and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him. Luke 13:17 What Jesus was saying was obviously true. Why had no one put it that way before? TRADITION! Traditions can be good, and they can be bad. This tradition of not helping someone on the Sabbath was contrary to the spirit of the Law. Man had made rules that usurped the very Law they were meant to uphold (Mark 7:9^{xiv}).

Isaiah 58 describes the fast that God accepts as helping those in need. The whole chapter addresses religious hypocrisy, but let me give you two verses that apply specifically to this text. Speaking of a true fast God says, *⁶ "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?" ⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?* Isaiah 58:6-7

The synagogue ruler was objecting to Jesus loosing the bands of wickedness on the Sabbath. Religious activity that ignores the needs of others is hypocritical. Loving God and our neighbor goes together (Luke 10:27^{xv}). The synagogue ruler proved his lack of love for God in that he could not rejoice with the liberation of this woman. Jesus put the two loving God and our neighbor together because one results in the other and testifies to the genuineness of the other. John the Beloved wrote *²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.* 1 John 4:20

Jesus' adversaries were ashamed. They should have been! They were heartless. They showed they really didn't care about the woman's condition. It revealed that their religion was disingenuous. The people got the message, and they sensed the kingdom of God was among them. Any open-minded person who cared about others would get it. They rejoiced at the wonderful things done by Jesus (Luke 7:16^{xvi}). What good hearted person wouldn't rejoice to see people healed and oppressive religious leaders exposed for their hypocrisy? Does our religion affect the way we care for others' needs?

I'm so blessed to serve a congregation that steps up and helps when someone in the congregation is sick and needs meals. You are there to help those who are incapable of doing something and to give financial help when it is needed. You give to the benevolent fund. You are generous in mission support. It is important that we be led by the Spirit in acts of generosity. We must be motivated by the heart of God and never for self-recognition (1 John 3:16^{xvii}). Let us always examine our hearts to be certain that our religion does not keep us from God's heart for those in need (2 Corinthians 13:5^{xviii}).

We should not read the following verses as a break in the setting. Jesus is responding to the situation when He spoke these illustrations of the kingdom. *¹⁸ He said*

therefore, “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? Luke 13:18 Jesus had just demonstrated that the kingdom of God could not be stopped by Satan or by men or by traditions. It was important that, despite the coming appearance of defeat when Jesus was crucified, people understood that nothing could stop what He had started (Matthew 16:18^{xix}). He illustrated this with two parables comparing the kingdom to two everyday objects: a mustard seed and leaven.

¹⁹ It is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden, and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.” Luke 13:19 Mustard plants grow wild all over Israel. A mustard seed is quite small. I think you could get four to six on the head of a pin. Though people did not know how big the world was at the time, they probably had more wonder for the size of the world than we do. There were far regions of land and sea of which little or nothing was known. Jesus’ ministry in the little country of Israel was like the smallest of seeds. Even His crowds of thousands were insignificant to the vast ocean of humanity. How big is the mass of a full-grown mustard plant compared to its seed? Perhaps it is a million times larger.

When the crucifixion took place, the followers of Jesus may have thought the movement was over, that Satan had won, and that all hope was lost. But nothing could have been further from the truth. It was about to begin to grow, for Christ, the seed, had been planted and was about to burst forth in abundant growth (John 12:32^{xx}). Jesus used the same picture to describe His soon coming burial when He said, *²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.* John 12:24 He was predicting the fruitfulness that would come out of His death and resurrection (Hebrews 12:2^{xxi}).

²⁰ And again he said, “To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? ²¹ It is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, until it was all leavened.” Luke 13:20,21 Leaven is used as a picture of sin in many Bible passages (Matthew 16:6^{xxii}), but here Jesus is using its rapid rate of expansion to show the exponential growth of the kingdom of God. Yeast will permeate a large amount of flour overnight because its multiplication is exponential. Every believer is supposed to disciple people to be followers of Jesus and teach them to disciple another person who in turn does the same. You know you have made a disciple when that person makes a disciple. That is the kingdom explosively advancing.

We have discussed before how Christianity influenced the entire world for good and changed many evil customs, raising the value of life, education, charity, sciences, and many other things we take for granted today. I wrote a sermon on the topic entitled *What If Jesus Had Never Come*, borrowing from a book by James Kennedy. It is an important topic to bring up in our current culture that thinks the Christian faith as a detriment.

In Luke 12:49^{xxiii} Jesus declared that He had come to cast a fire into the earth and earnestly desired it was already kindled. He could see the good that would come, the lives saved, the bride formed, but also the overall effect of decreasing suffering in the world. Do you long for the good effects of life in Christ to touch those you meet, for God's kingdom to advance, and for that cleansing fire to spread? We certainly should!

The Apostle Paul told Timothy, *¹ You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, ² and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.* 2 Timothy 2:1-2 I hope you all watched *Sheep Among Wolves Volume 2*. Our Iranian brothers and sisters

are part of the fastest growing church in the world. They do it by finding the hurting and the needy and sharing the Bible stories with them. Those spiritually hungry people want to hear more. The more they hear the more they become disciples and in turn share with others. It is the Great Commission in Matthew's Gospel. *¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*" Matthew 28:19-20

I think we have been hung up on the method of telling people the Romans road and then leaving them on their own. There is certainly nothing wrong with sharing the evangelistic message. Jesus tells us to do so in Mark 16:15^{xxiv}. But that is just the beginning. We need to go on from there to disciple them to be followers of Jesus (Luke 14:27^{xxv}), to know what He taught, and the need to teach it to others. It's not mass marketing, but rather investing quality time. That is when the kingdom of God makes solid advances by transforming lives.

But that all begins with us knowing what Jesus said and taught (John 14:23^{xxvi}). We can't relay the stories if we aren't familiar with them. **Regarding discipleship, it takes one to make one.** We can't give them Jesus' words unless we know them. The reason I write devotionals is to help people get familiar with the Word and what it means to us today. It is one way some of you are helping disciple friends, sharing with them something they can read each day that will help them grow in their love and faithfulness to Jesus. Our most obvious disciples are our children and grandchildren. But then we need to reach out from there to those whom God brings into our lives. Pushing them to make an instant decision in some cases pushes them away. Telling them stories from the Word that applies to their lives will draw them in and stir their curiosity to know more.

Our passage today has encouraged us to pray for the sick and to beware of religiosity keeping us from serving others in need of Christ's love. I hope you saw that we cannot always understand God's hand, but we can trust His heart. It has encouraged us that nothing can stop the advance of God's kingdom. And I have invited you to be a part of that by obeying Jesus' Great Commission by making disciples.

Questions

- 1 Describe the setting.
- 2 What did Jesus say and do?
- 3 What was the response?
- 4 What was the synagogue ruler's reaction?
- 5 What was Jesus' response?
- 6 What was Jesus' message?
- 7 What was the first analogy of the kingdom?
- 8 What was the second?
- 9 What messages do the analogies convey?
- 10 What does Jesus ask us to do?

Benediction/Prayer: Lord Jesus, we come to you knowing we are in need of your divine power. Help us to not stop praying that we may be filled with the knowledge of Your will with all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that we can live in a way that is worthy of You and pleasing to You, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the

knowledge of You. May we be strengthened with all power according to Your glorious might, with all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to You for qualifying us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. Amen!

ⁱ **John 15:5-6 (ESV)**

⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

ⁱⁱ **Matthew 9:29 (ESV)**

²⁹ Then he touched their eyes, saying, "According to your faith be it done to you."

ⁱⁱⁱ **Matthew 19:26 (ESV)**

²⁶ But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

^{iv} **Luke 1:37 (ESV)**

³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God."

^v **Exodus 20:9-10 (ESV)**

⁹ Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates.

^{vi} **1 John 4:12 (ESV)**

¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

^{vii} Hughes, Kent - Preaching the Word - Luke, Volume II: That You May Know the Truth.

^{viii} **Exodus 23:12 (ESV)**

¹² "Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your servant woman, and the alien, may be refreshed.

^{ix} **Mark 2:27-28 (ESV)**

²⁷ And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

²⁸ So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

^x **James 1:2-4 (ESV)**

² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

^{xi} **John 9:3 (ESV)**

³ Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.

^{xii} **2 Corinthians 12:9 (ESV)**

⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

^{xiii} **1 John 4:4 (ESV)**

⁴ Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

^{xiv} **Mark 7:9 (ESV)**

⁹ And he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!

^{xv} **Luke 10:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."

^{xvi} **Luke 7:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!"

^{xvii} **1 John 3:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

xviii **2 Corinthians 13:5 (ESV)**

⁵ Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

xix **Matthew 16:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

xx **John 12:32 (ESV)**

³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

xxi **Hebrews 12:2 (ESV)**

² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

xxii **Matthew 16:6 (ESV)**

⁶ Jesus said to them, “Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

xxiii **Luke 12:49 (ESV)**

⁴⁹ “I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!

xxiv **Mark 16:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.

xxv **Luke 14:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

xxvi **John 14:23 (ESV)**

²³ Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.