

JESUS HEALS A CRIPPLED WOMAN

Luke 13:1-17

Key Verse: 13:12,13

“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.”

In last week’s passage Jesus taught us to be ready because the Son of Man will come at an unexpected time. Last week four new babies were born into the Chicago UBF world: Mary Lomahan, Caleb Kim, Grace Koh, and Susanna Henkins. In each case, their mothers knew approximately when they would come, but not exactly. So they had to be always ready, and their husbands had to be always ready. Finally, the moment came and each mother was rushed to the hospital and each child was born at God’s appointed time. In fact, this was training to be ready for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Just as those parents had to be ready, all of us must be ready for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. We can be ready when we learn Jesus’ servant attitude toward God and others. We can be ready when we keep our lamps burning with God’s promise in our hearts. We can be ready when we live as faithful and wise managers for the children of God, that is, as one-to-one Bible teachers who give spiritual food at the proper time. We can be ready when we give our hearts to make America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. May God help each of us to be ready for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

In today’s passage Jesus deals with the fatalism of fallen men. Jesus urges us not to dwell in a sense of punishment. Instead, we must repent sincerely and bear fruit to God. Jesus teaches not only through his words, but with a demonstration of his love and power by healing a crippled woman on the Sabbath. Jesus came to set us free from our infirmities so that we may worship and serve God forevermore. May God help each of us to repent and be set free by our Lord Jesus Christ.

First, repent or perish (1-5).

Look at verse 1. “Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.” Some Galileans were offering sacrifices at the temple. Perhaps in doing so they had revealed their hope that God would overturn Roman rule and liberate Israel; Galileans were known for their hotheaded resistance to Roman rule. But the Roman governor Pontius Pilate gave orders to include these Galileans in the sacrificial offering, mixing their blood with that of the sacrifice animals. It was gruesome and tragic. Perhaps the men who told Jesus about this were shaking their heads as they spoke. They might have expected Jesus to feel sorrowful or to explain why God punished those Galileans.

How did Jesus respond? Look at verses 2-3. “Jesus answered, ‘Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.’” Here Jesus tells us how to see the tragic things that happen in the world. He tells us what not to think and what we must do. We must not think that tragedy comes in proportion to sin and that worse sinners receive more suffering. One of fallen man’s hobbies is to find worse sinners than himself. When something bad happens to that person, he thinks it is God’s righteous judgment. Then he comforts himself, saying, “Well, at least I am a little better than him.” But Jesus says, “I tell you, no! But unless you repent....” We must not think about others’ sins as though we are in God’s place. We must repent our own sins. This is so important. The more one repents, the more he realizes he is a sinner who needs to repent. St. Paul was the greatest missionary and most fruitful gospel worker. But he said, “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst” (1Ti 1:15).

Jesus does not want us to think fatalistically. Fatalism interprets all the bad things that happen as God’s inevitable and irreversible punishment for our sins. It is true that God punishes sin. But fallen men, like Cain, have a terribly unbalanced view of punishment. God does not delight in punishing men for their sins. In fact, it is his last resort, after doing everything he can to save men. John 3:17 says, “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” When Jesus said, “I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish,” he is urging them to repent so they may not perish but have eternal life. Jesus really wants to save men from their sins. Jesus really wants to save men from the power of death. This is why Jesus came to this world.

When something unfortunate happens, we must not sit down in fatalism. We must repent. It may seem hard to repent when we are sorrowful or grieving because of misfortune. But it is the way to receive God's help and to have spiritual victory. When we repent and turn to God, we can overcome self-centered thinking. God opens our hearts and minds to have his perspective on things. Most of all, he forgives our sins and gives us his love in our hearts so that we do not suffer from doubt or from gloomy speculation. He protects us from the devil and gives us the wisdom and courage to work things out. When Dr. Jim Rabchuk went to Russia as a short-term missionary, he was enticed and deceived by a Russian woman. She took advantage of his shepherd's heart as a means to immigrate to America. It seemed to be a tragic event for him and for God's work. But Dr. Samuel Lee and Mother Barry did not become fatalistic about this. Nor did they let Dr. Rabchuk become fatalistic. They encouraged him to repent and come to God for his mercy. Dr. Rabchuk shared his Bible testimony every Friday night at our leaders' meeting. At the same time he finished his Ph.D. in physics at UIC. He translated 62 lessons of Luke's gospel material from English to Russian. He received intensive message training from Dr. Lee. Once Dr. Lee met with him right after having a painful biopsy and trained him from his recovery bed. As the fruit of repentance, Dr. Rabchuk became a man of God's deep grace, an excellent Bible messenger, and a Ph.D. shepherd with many sheep under his care. By the way, God also blessed him to establish a beautiful family with Miss Jennifer which is now a most fruitful house church. The influence of his repentance has spread all over America and even the world. The time of tragedy and terrible difficulty is the time to repent before God and ask his mercy.

When Jesus said, "But unless you repent, you too will all perish," he is also teaching the universality of death and the two kinds of death. When the bystanders reported the tragic death of the Jewish worshipers, they were, in some way, detached—as those reporting about others. But in fact, death is the universal experience of all men. It is not just other people who die. Everyone dies. At God's appointed time we will all die. One hundred years from now, none of us will be here. The question is not whether or not we will die, or even when we will die. It is what happens after death. For those who repent, death is a sweet release from the agonies of this world and entry into God's kingdom. When Jesus was being crucified on the cross, there was a robber on one side of him. This man had been tried and condemned and was being duly executed. But in that terrible situation, he was not swallowed by fatalism. When he heard Jesus' words, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing," (Lk 23:34a) he saw God in Jesus. He believed Jesus' love and saving grace. He said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Then Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (Lk 23:42,43). For this man, death was entry into eternal life in paradise, the kingdom of God.

We have the opportunity to repent as long as we have breath. But after death it is too late. Thus, the tragedy of mankind is not the physical death that comes upon all men. It is eternal punishment that comes upon those who do not repent. Jesus said, "Unless you repent, you too will all perish." Here "perish" refers to the second death—eternal punishment in the fiery lake of burning sulfur (Rev 21:8). Unrepentant sinners are like men on "death row." It's just a matter of time until they go to eternal punishment. They could die suddenly at any moment, and be in hell forever. There is nothing preventing this except the grace of God that keeps them alive in the hope that they will repent. Thus, to Jesus, repentance is most urgent for sinners. It is more urgent than obtaining insulin for a diabetic. God allows men to live in spite of all their wretchedness and evil-doing, in the hope that they will repent. We must not abuse God's kindness. We must repent. Romans 2:4 says, "Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance."

This teaching was so important that Jesus repeated it again with a different example. Look at verses 4-5. "Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." May God help all people everywhere to repent, beginning with me.

Second, produce the fruit of repentance (6-9).

After hearing Jesus' message, "Repent or perish," people might have been frightened. But Jesus had something more to say, that is, that repentance produces fruit. To help them accept it, he told them in parable form. Look at verse 6. "Then he told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any.'" It was common in Palestine to plant fig trees in vineyards to maximize soil production. If the fig tree was of good quality, the owner could harvest sweet figs as well as delicious grapes. However, if a fig tree did not produce fruit, only many leaves, it would be immediately cut down to conserve the soil. So, this particular fig tree was in trouble. Look at verse 7. "So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, 'For three years now I've

been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?" Here the fig tree refers to the religious leaders of Israel who were given so many privileges in the vineyard of Israel, but were not producing fruit that pleased God. The words "Cut it down!" refer to God's impending judgment. They echo the message of John the Baptist who said, "The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire" (Lk 3:9).

However, in the parable, there was a caretaker who interceded on behalf of the fig tree. Look at verses 8-9. "'Sir,' the man replied, 'leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.'" The point is clear. The religious leaders had a limited time to produce fruit. They must produce fruit or perish. What was the fruit God wanted? First of all, he wanted them to grow in their inner men to practice God's justice and the love of God (Lk 11:42). He also wanted them to teach their people the word of God until they raised many godly men and women and became a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. But the religious leaders had not been producing fruit. In their blind selfishness, they were soaking up all the nutrients in the soil for their own pleasure. God would not allow this indefinitely. Their situation was like that of a tree before the lumberjack—his ax was already raised to cut it down. They must repent immediately and produce fruit, or perish (Lk 3:8).

Likewise, Christians must bear the fruit of repentance. St. Paul may be the best example. He was once a very legalistic and ambitious Pharisee who was ready to kill Christians to advance his cause and career. But when he met Jesus, he realized he was wrong. He admitted his sin before God. Then Jesus forgave his sin and the Holy Spirit began to work in him to sanctify his inner man. He became the most gentle and sacrificial shepherd for the early Christian church. He could embrace Onesimus, a runaway slave, with the love of God (Phm 10). We must ask ourselves, "What is the fruit of my repentance?"

Third, "you are set free from your infirmity" (10-17)

It seems that St. Luke relates this event, not in chronological order, but to reveal Jesus' saving grace as our good shepherd in contrast to the religious leaders' hypocrisy. Jesus came to set us free from all kinds of bondage to live as God's precious children. Look at verse 10. "On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all." Luke says that this woman had been crippled by a spirit. Of course, her body was crippled so that she could not straighten up at all. But worse, her inner person was crippled, bound by the power of the devil. She could not look up at God. She could not praise God or worship God. She had no hope or vision to be useful and productive. She could only look at the ground in resignation and groan in deep fatalism. She must have asked, "Why did this happen to me?" She had been in this condition for a long eighteen years. No one had paid attention to this woman.

But Jesus noticed this woman. Look at verse 12a. "When Jesus saw her, he called her forward...." The moment Jesus saw her, he stopped teaching and paid full attention to her. He understood her deep agony of soul and took up her burden. At the same time, Jesus saw the hope of God for her to be a fruitful woman of God. Jesus was ready to do anything to help her get well. So he called her forward. It was not easy for her to come. But when she heard Jesus' invitation, she sensed his shepherd's heart; she trusted him and obeyed. She came, step by awkward step. Then Jesus said, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity" (12b). As Jesus spoke, the power and love of God touched her soul. She was released from Satan's grip. But her body, which had been crippled for so long, did not respond right away. So Jesus put his hands on her and gently helped her straighten up. She felt a heavy weight lifted from her body and spirit. She could straighten up for the first time in eighteen years. She could look up at God. She realized God's love for her. She realized God's hope for her to live a fruitful life. From deep in her soul, joy welled up and she praised God. People in the synagogue also praised God. Heaven rejoiced and angels sang.

Here we learn that Jesus is the Messiah who sets us free from our infirmities. Isaiah 53:4-5 says, "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." Sin burdens our souls so heavily and cripples our spirits. The devil uses our sin to bind us as prisoners under his power. But Jesus died on the cross for our sins, shedding his holy blood to purchase our freedom. Jesus says to each of us, "you are set free from your infirmity." Praise Jesus!

However, someone was not happy. It was the synagogue ruler. He felt Jesus ignored his synagogue rules. Probably, he felt that he would lose control of the synagogue. So he tried to assert his authority by saying, very officially, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath." He seemed to refer to the Bible, but he did not mention God or the meaning of the Sabbath. In fact, he did not know God or his tender mercy toward men. He was not a good shepherd. He was a burdensome legalist. He was like an unfruitful fig tree that drained resources from a fruitful vineyard.

Look at verse 15. "The Lord answered him, 'You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water?'" Jesus rebuked the religious leaders for their hypocrisy. In the name of the Sabbath law they forbid the healing of suffering souls. But they did not hesitate to water their own oxen and donkeys. They were like a father who made his only son ride in the back seat of the car while his puppy rode in the front.

Jesus went on. Look at verse 16. "Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?" Jesus was not breaking the Sabbath by healing this woman. He was fulfilling the true meaning of the Sabbath by helping her find rest for her soul in God. Jesus had great love and respect for this woman. He calls her "a daughter of Abraham." To Jesus, she was worthy of honor, together with Abraham, David and all the faithful in Israel's history. It was because she had faith in the Messiah, like the faith of Abraham. Out of his shepherd's love, Jesus would not allow her to be bound even one more minute. Jesus set her free from bondage and enabled her to praise God and serve God. Jesus knew he would be persecuted for healing her on the Sabbath, but he decided to pay the cost in order to save this woman. Jesus is the good shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep.

Look at verse 17. "When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing." Even Jesus' opponents knew he was right. Ordinary people were delighted. Jesus is the Messiah who sets us free from our infirmities to worship and serve God.

In this passage Jesus teaches us not to give in to fatalism. We must repent and bear fruit as of first importance. Jesus sets us free from our infirmities to worship and serve God now and forevermore.