



THE GOSPEL OF
Luke

SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 13:10-21

To understand more about compassion and the kingdom of God.

“A Disabling Spirit”

It is not uncommon for Christians to associate the idea of “a spirit” or “demon” to a scary, monstrous kind of creature (no doubt because of depictions in television and cinema). However, it’s important to note that in the Gospels there are times when we come across a “disabling spirit” like the one in Luke 13:11a: “And behold, there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years.” What apparently gives this away is the fact that she “was bent over and could not fully straighten herself” (Lk. 13:11b). Given that the woman would have been expected to remain invisible in society because of her ailment (coupled with the fact that she was a woman) led Jesus to heal her; we have already seen Him “moved with compassion” for someone before healing them (Lk. 7:13). The point is that sometimes reading the New Testament requires us to adjust what we *think* about certain people, places, or actions. In this case, the demon or spirit, while clearly malevolent, doesn’t *appear* to be malevolent, nor does it appear at all! Regardless of the form it takes, Jesus recognizes that it has been effectively tormenting a woman for the better part of two decades, and Jesus takes action.

Lord of the Sabbath

Verse 10 begins by demonstrating the rabbinic nature of Jesus’ ministry: “Now He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath.” The Sabbath is holy (Ex. 20:8), and was not a day permitted for work (Lev. 23:3). A woman approached Jesus “who had a disabling spirit for eighteen years,” and “when Jesus saw her, He called her over and said to her, ‘Woman, you are freed from your disability’” (Lk. 13:11-12). The act of a rabbi speaking to a woman was exceedingly rare, and given that this is on the Sabbath means that it was likely after

the Sabbath service since women were not allowed in the sanctuary of the synagogue. To touch the woman was even more unheard of, but Jesus was not interested in following the man-made laws of His time: “He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God” (Lk. 13:13). This drew the ire of “the ruler of the synagogue” (Lk. 13:14); he became “indignant” that “Jesus had healed on the Sabbath” (Lk. 13:14). His interaction seems to be less with Jesus and more to the people watching, indicating he was attempting to turn the people who had come to see Jesus against Him.

Note that when Jesus answers the ruler of the synagogue, Luke is careful to call Jesus “Lord” (Lk. 13:15). This is no doubt intentional. Luke has already previously established Jesus as “the Lord of the Sabbath” (Lk. 6:5), and this interaction reiterates it. The trouble with the ruler’s reasoning is that he has equated the gracious healing of God to work, two things that are not the same. Jesus responds by reasoning with the crowds in a way they will understand: “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? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?” (Lk. 13:15-16). If it is ok to unbind a lowly animal, how much more reasonable is it to unbind a “daughter of Abraham?” That Jesus refers to the woman in this way is important for a couple of reasons. For one, it reaffirms the full inclusion of women in the covenant community, and two, it is an appeal to the Jewish people to look kindly upon her based on her covenant connection to the great patriarch.

This answer was seemingly sufficient: “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” (Lk. 13:17). Truth has a way of putting to shame those who are in error. Paul reminds young Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2, “Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” The truth of God’s Word has a way of rebuking those who are not walking within its bounds. Christ, the living Word of God, is never in error, and therefore anyone who challenges Him is proven wrong and foolish. Jesus’ rebuke to the religious leaders of His day sufficiently put them to shame, not because Jesus was good at debate, but because he was *right* and they were *wrong*.

The Kingdom

After this exchange, Jesus continued to teach the crowds by parables. It’s important to note that these two parables form the center of this chapter, and chapter 13 is the midway point through Luke’s Gospel. At the very core of this Gospel, we find two simple parables about the nature of the kingdom of God. Below is a breakdown of each of the parables.

MUSTARD SEED

Jesus first tells a parable about the kingdom of God by likening it to a mustard seed: “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” (Lk. 13:19). This parable is found similarly in Matthew 13:31-32 and Mark 4:30-32, and Jesus’ introduction to the parable is similar to Isaiah 40:18.

Luke 13:18: “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it?”

Isaiah 40:18: “To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?”

This parable harkens back to the Old Testament, specifically to passages such as Ezekiel 17:23 and Daniel 4:9-21, where the inclusion of Gentiles is likened to a tree that birds find and make nests within. The kingdom of God is for all peoples, regardless of their social standing.

LEAVEN

Next, Jesus compares the kingdom of God to yeast, which is at first a bit strange. Generally, yeast or leaven is used to describe something negative (See: Matt. 16:6; 1 Cor. 5:7; Gal. 5:9). However, Jesus is not speaking metaphorically about leaven, but about the physical quality of it. Leaven, when it is put into the dough, is at first indistinguishable, but when activated is seen to quickly expand. In this way, the kingdom of God is at first unnoticeable, but as it grows, it grows quickly and becomes visible to all: “It is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, until it was all leavened” (Lk. 13:21).

The point of both of these parables is to demonstrate the nature of Jesus’ ministry and what it will eventually lead to. Jesus is ushering in the kingdom of God with every action He takes, and yet, it is unnoticeable to crowds and religious leaders. However, it will eventually become tangibly seen in the church through the Great Commission.

What About Now?

One takeaway is the need to have compassion on people who are spiritually (and emotionally and physically) disabled. It is within the heart of Christ to look upon those who are broken and give life and freedom to them. The Gospel is truly about seeing captives set free (Lk. 4:18). Therefore, in an effort to be more like Jesus, Christians would do well to see those who are oppressed and look upon them with gentle kindness. Another takeaway is the importance of the church. The church is the visible kingdom of God on the earth, or at least she is intended to be. How the church conducts herself before the world, proclaims forgiveness of sin, and warns of coming judgment is important to the mission at hand.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Luke 13:10-11. Where was Jesus and what was He doing? What day was it? Who appeared to Him, and what was her issue?

2. Read Luke 13:12-13. What did Jesus do when He saw her? What did He say? What happened when He laid His hands on her?

Day Two

1. Read Luke 13:14. Who became indignant towards Jesus’ healing? Why? What reason did he give?

2. Read Luke 13:15. What did Jesus say in response? What did He say the crowds do every Sabbath?

Day Three

1. Read Luke 13:16. How does Jesus connect this woman to the previous example He gave?

2. Read Luke 13:17. What was the result of Jesus' answer?

Day Four

1. Read Luke 13:18-19. In your own words, explain the meaning of the parable of the mustard seed.

2. Read Luke 13:20-21. In your own words, explain the meaning of the parable of the leaven.

Week 52 Discussion: Compassion

In Luke 13:10-21, Jesus has compassion for a woman with a disabling spirit (Lk. 13:11), and is chided by the ruler of the synagogue for working on the Sabbath. However, the healing was not a work, but an act of compassion, and a fulfillment in some way to the good news Jesus came to proclaim (Lk. 4:18). Talk as a group about the importance of demonstrating compassion to broken and hurting people, and how it is worth our time and efforts even on days of rest.

1. Icebreaker: What is the most compassionate thing someone has done for you in your life?
2. Do you enjoy receiving compassion or giving compassion more?
3. What does compassion have to do with humility? How are the two connected?
4. Who in your life needs compassion? Have you shown it to them yet? If not, why not?
5. Why is showing compassion sometimes really hard?
6. How can the church be more compassionate in general?

Takeaways:

1. Jesus heals a woman on the Sabbath and then rebukes the ruler of the synagogue for his indignant spirit.
2. Jesus tells two parables concerning the kingdom of God.