

The Uncomfortable Sayings of Jesus

“Should not this woman...whom Satan has kept bound for 18 long years, be set free on the Sabbath day...?”

Passages: Zechariah 2:10- 3:4
Luke 13:10-17

The sermon series that we started last week is entitled, *“The Uncomfortable Sayings of Jesus”*.

Now, the *Uncomfortable Saying* that we are going to look at today is found in Luke 13, verse 16. Jesus has just seen a crippled woman in the synagogue and healed her. Being on a Sabbath, when no one was to work, a heated discussion ensues with the ruler of the synagogue. Jesus’ final words to him are in the form of a simple question:

“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?”

Now, some of you may be wondering why I have placed this verse in my list of *“the uncomfortable sayings of Jesus”*. What makes it *uncomfortable*?

There are two reasons (both of which begin with the letter 'S'):
Satan and **Sabbath**!

1. The uncomfortable reality of Satan.

Back in 2009, a research group in the US did a nationwide survey of Christian adults and their spiritual beliefs. It found that 40% of Christians surveyed *“strongly believed”* that Satan was not real. He was, in their words, *“just a symbol of evil.”* Another 19% of Christians surveyed said they agreed *“somewhat”* with that perspective. There were another 8% who had no idea what they believed about Satan. In total, 67% of Christians surveyed were *“sceptical”* about Satan’s existence. (Do you believe in Satan, or am I making you feel uncomfortable?)

But you know what? If you asked a further question linking sickness with Satan, I guarantee that this percentage of sceptics would increase even more! Why? Well, the fact is that modern Western medicine has persuaded us to see all sickness within a scientific framework. I mean, who of us would even dare to

publicly suggest that someone's sickness came from Satan? We would be ridiculed; run out of town for such a comment!

And that's why I've listed today's passage as one of *the uncomfortable sayings of Jesus*. For, whether you like it or not, **Jesus certainly believed in the reality of Satan**. Even more *uncomfortable* is the fact that **Jesus believed that Satan can be the cause of a person's sickness!** That's exactly what happens in today's story. Jesus points to a little old lady who has been bent over like a horseshoe for the past eighteen years, knowing that there's a lot more to her story than what meets the eye! The woman is "bent over" because she is "bound" by Satan!—tied up, like a tethered animal. Satan is behind her affliction. He is the one who has bent this woman out of shape! He has caused her body to become physically twisted and deformed!

Of course, the beauty of this story is found in the fact that, as soon as Jesus speaks the Word of God over her-- "**Woman, you are set free from your infirmity...**" she immediately stands upright again! Jesus has liberated her from Satan's bondage through the Word of God! In fact, He has liberated her without her even looking for it! Note that the woman did not come to Jesus. Rather, He was the one who went to her. He was the One who spoke God's Words of freedom over her! He was the one who laid His hands on her and brought God's touch of consolation and compassion to her physical body. In every step, God in Christ was moving towards her in the desire to set her free.

And that's why the lesson of the story is far bigger than this woman's personal healing. From this story, we understand that, **in Jesus Christ, God has come to do the same for all of humanity—to set us all free from Satan's grip**. He did not wait **for us** to recognise our need and come to Him. He did not wait for us to look in the mirror and see how bent out of shape we are! God has come to us. God has joined us in our affliction and in the very depth of our deformity. God, in Jesus Christ, has taken on the full weight of our "bent-ness" on the cross and rendered it *powerless* over us!

That's the lesson of this story—a universal lesson! In fact, even as the story unfolds, we discover that this woman is not the only one who is "bent". The ruler of the Synagogue is also "bent", enslaved by the evil spirits of pride and religion. We might even say that his misshapen spirit is far worse than the physical deformity of the woman, for Satan has control over him and yet he has no idea of how bad his affliction really is! **He cannot see that he is sick!**

Friends, Jesus has come to liberate the world from Satan's deceptions and lies; to liberate us from all the things that twist our bodies, minds and spirits out of shape. Indeed, every one of the healings recorded in the NT is meant to encourage us (today) to believe that, through Jesus, the Kingdom of God has arrived on earth! The final victory over every disease and every work of Satan has begun! And even though we might not always see the evidence of this reality, the Apostle John confidently declares (in 1 John 3:8), ***"The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work."***

Do we have the same confidence? **Do we believe**, not only that Satan exists and is constantly seeking to deform our lives and twist our bodies and minds, but **that he has already been defeated through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ?**

If not, why not? Has our scientific worldview overruled the Biblical worldview? Are we so bold as to say that Jesus' understanding was, in some way, limited or inadequate...and that *"Now we know better"*?

It's for this reason I have classified this verse as one of the *Uncomfortable Sayings of Jesus*. We must no longer be part of the 67% who sit on the fence over this one. We must decide. Why? Because Jesus invites you to participate with Him in Satan's final downfall! But if you don't believe in Satan, you'll be useless in the fight against him! **Are you starting to feel uncomfortable?**

Let's move on to the second aspect of this verse that makes us feel uncomfortable:

2. The uncomfortable question of the Sabbath.

Many years ago, when I had first arrived at this church, I got into a discussion with one of our 8 o'clock members about the Sabbath. She was convinced that, as Christians, we need to keep the Sabbath. I foolishly replied that she was being "legalistic". I told her that we no longer need to keep the Sabbath because Jesus kept it for us. He fulfilled its requirements. Therefore, it is finished and we are free from its obligations. (To put it simply, I didn't believe in the Sabbath and I felt uncomfortable with anyone who did!)

Looking back on that exchange, I hate to admit it, but I was wrong!

You see, I had failed to see that **the Sabbath Law was** (and continues to be) **a good gift**, given by God so that His people might flourish! I had failed to realise

that the Sabbath was (and still is) essentially about **life, health and security!** I had failed to understand that the Sabbath was (and still is) essentially about **community**; designed by God so that His people might come together and find blessing in ever-deepening relationships with God and with each other.

Of course, Jesus knew and appreciated this. That's why, every Sabbath Day, he would go to the local synagogue and join with the faithful in the reading of God's Word. Surely, He didn't do this out of legalism! And when He told His disciples that He hadn't come **"to abolish the Law, but rather to fulfil it"**, He certainly had no desire to see the Sabbath Law pushed out of the way so that we would no longer have to obey it. Rather, He was saying that He would now lead us into *a new appreciation* of the Sabbath by revealing its beauty and the deeper truths which undergird it. He would also send us His Holy Spirit on us that we might understand and willingly keep the Sabbath Day holy.

Keep this in mind as we go back and read verses 10-14 again.

¹⁰ On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, ¹¹ 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.¹² When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity."¹³ Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.¹⁴ 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."¹⁵ 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?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?"

Now it's obvious-- Jesus was well-aware that it was **the Sabbath Day!** So, why did He heal the woman on a day when no work was to be done? There's only one reason: In Jesus' mind, **healing wasn't work!** You see, *although the Sabbath Day was given as a day for us to rest in the perfection of God's creation, wherever God's creation had been damaged, the Sabbath Day was designed to **reclaim it** and restore it to perfection!* This is essence of all healing.

Let your mind go back to the very first Sabbath! In 6 days, God created the heavens and the earth. Everything was perfect, right? That's the reason why God rested on the seventh day, and why He invited the whole creation (the

perfect creation) to rest with Him. That's the reason why there was to be no work on that day, for it was meant to be a day when all creation was in perfect harmony! Nothing was needed! No work needed to be done!

But, what would have happened if God, having finished the 6 days of creation, looked out on all He had made and said, "*Hold on! Something is still not right. Someone is sick.*" ? What would He have done? **I'm sure He would have immediately stopped the Sabbath celebrations until everything was made perfect again!**

That's the reason why Jesus (as well as thousands of other men around Israel) **preached** in the synagogue on the Sabbath Day. What is preaching? Is it work? Not at all! The duty of the Rabbi was two-fold:

First, they were to remind God's people of the perfect world that God had made; to turn their hearts and minds back to the glory of their Creator and to His perfect work of His Creation on their behalf. It was a time for the community to rejoice in God's perfection! And that's why Israel's Rabbis could stand up on the Sabbath Day and preach! Preaching helped God's people to rejoice in the glorious beauty of God's perfect handiwork! No one was surprised or shocked about it. Everybody knew that the Rabbis weren't working. They were simply being a channel of God's grace ...and no one batted an eyelid!

But there's more to preaching than simply declaring the glorious perfection of the original creation! The second role of preaching was to *restore* perfection whenever and wherever it has been corrupted—particularly in God's people! This is exactly what Jesus is doing here! He sees a crippled woman in the crowd and goes out to her. Why? Because God's perfect world is in disorder! And **as God's Word goes forth from Jesus' mouth, the same Word that created the universe brings about the re-creation of this woman.** She is healed. You might even say that she is "perfected" in Christ!

People have often asked me if I am breaking the Sabbath because I preach on Sundays. But, like the Rabbis of old (and like Jesus), I can say the same thing—that I am not working, but God is working through me.

Indeed, shouldn't this same healing happen every time we gather (on this, our Sabbath day)? Isn't this the reason why we come and spend the Sabbath together-- because we all know that, like the woman, we, too, are twisted and

deformed and need the Word of God to straighten out our twisted minds and hearts? Don't we come to hear God's Word so that God might bring us back to His perfect ways...to the perfection of God's original creation?! It is God's Word (not mine) that has the power to bring the wayward sheep back home!

But, of course, this is exactly where Jesus gets into trouble! The ruler of the synagogue has misunderstood the purpose of the Sabbath, and thus accuses Jesus of '*working*' on the Sabbath! But, Jesus hasn't done anything different. **It's still the same 'Word of God'.** The only difference is that Jesus is now specifically applying God's Word to this *woman*: "***Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.***" In Jesus' mind, setting this captive woman free was the same as a farmer opening the barn door to let the animals go out to pasture!

And so, in the end, the accusation is baseless...and you know what? **Everyone in the crowd knows it!** Verse 17 tells us that "***All the people were delighted with the wonderful things he was doing.***" Indeed, **what better way could there be to spend the Sabbath Day, than by watching the Father set another captive free by the power of His Word!?**

And, of course, the healed woman doesn't think Jesus has broken the Sabbath, either! In fact, she doesn't even go up to Jesus afterwards to thank Him for healing her. Rather, we're told in verse 13 that, "***immediately she stood up straight and began praising God***". On this Sabbath Day, she knows that her healing is God's work, accomplished by God's Word and she directs her praises heavenward, for God has restored this one part of His broken creation!

Now, let's see if we can summarise what we have discovered in today's passage. Two points:

First, in our modern, Western world, not only have we dismissed **Satan** from our worldview, but we have lost the big picture of the **Sabbath** as well. And you know what? **The two are intrinsically related! For both deal with the invisible realms!** They both form part of the invisible battle that God is currently waging to restore His world to its pre-Fall perfection! For the Bible tells us that **Satan** is God's greatest enemy and that this planet is their battleground. And although God originally created this world in perfection (and after six days of making it so, He gave us the *seventh* day as a **Sabbath** that we might *rest* in that perfection), the fact is that the enemy, Satan, seeks to corrupt, and twist, and destroy God's perfect world—and, so far, he has done a fairly good job of it!

The **second** point follows on. As the Apostle John has said, ***“The Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil.”*** How would He do this? Well, one way was by re-establishing the original purpose behind the Sabbath Day. Indeed, **to simply honour and obey the Sabbath is perhaps the most important thing we can do in the battle to defeat Satan and reclaim this world for God and His perfection!**

The fact is that, when Jesus healed the crippled woman on the Sabbath, he was fulfilling – not violating – the Sabbath law. For the Sabbath was given, not only as a day of reflection, but also as a day of re-creation, that we, like this woman, may be set free from Satan’s grip of lies and deceit; that we, like this woman, might be restored to our original health and wholeness, resulting in corporate praise to God.

Instead of working, we are called to come together and to sit under the Word of God so that He might do His work on us...that our own disfigured minds and twisted hearts might be renewed and restored. **We come together that God might do His work in us**—that He might heal us and bring us into a greater degree of His perfection. And we come together to pray for the healing of the nations. In the end, the Sabbath Day is the day when we invite God to work in us and through us, to defeat Satan on this earth!

So, please do not be seduced by the modern worldview which says that **Satan** doesn’t exist and that you don’t need to honour **the Sabbath** to be a good Christian. These are lies that the Christian church has, for far too long, swallowed...to the detriment of God’s Work to bring this world back to its original perfection!

Satan and **Sabbath**. Two reasons why this verse from Luke 13 is in my list of the uncomfortable saying of Jesus.

Let’s pray.