

INTRODUCTION

I recently read a funny story that illustrates how most of us are never satisfied. Frank and Mabel had been married for 40 years. Frank turned 60 a few months earlier and they were celebrating Mabel’s 60th birthday. During the birthday party, Frank walked into another room and was surprised to see a fairy godmother appear before him. She said, “Frank, this is your lucky day. I’m here to grant you one wish—what would you like?” He thought for a moment, and said, “Well, I would really like to have a wife who was thirty years younger than me.” The fairy godmother said, “No problem.” She waved her wand, and “poof” suddenly Frank was 90 years old.

I imagine old Frank was a little bent out of shape by the way that turned out!

I have a friend in Alabama, Jack, whose favorite expression was “bent out of shape.” When he was upset about something he always said he was “bent out of shape” about it, and I recall he stayed “bent out of shape” much of the time. And, Jack, if you order this tape, don’t get all bent out of shape, because you know I love you like a brother.

In the passage of scripture today we are going to look at two people who were bent out of shape; one was a woman who was *physically* bent out of shape and the other was a religious man who was *spiritually* bent out of shape; one was crippled by a spirit of weakness and the other was crippled by a spirit of legalism and bitterness. Jesus was able to help one of them, but the other one stayed bent out of shape. Let’s read about them in Luke 13:10-21:

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. 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 ruler 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 his 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 eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?”

We’ll stop here and read the remaining verses at the end of the message. I love to study what Jesus did and what He said because He is still doing the same things today, and His words are still fresh and powerful for us. Many of you may be “bent out of shape” today for a variety of reasons. If you will pay attention to Jesus today, He can set you free. First, let’s consider a woman:

I. BENT OUT OF SHAPE BY SUFFERING (10-13)

Jesus was still trying to reach the Jews, so we find Him teaching in this synagogue. The Jewish Sabbath begins at sunset on Friday, and most synagogues still have services on Friday evening, so this is probably on a Friday night. The opposition against Jesus is growing, and this is the last time in Luke’s gospel that we find Jesus in a synagogue.

He saw a poor woman who was so bent out of shape she couldn’t stand up straight. This was more than just a case of osteoporosis; she had been this way for 18 years. I can just picture her bent over so she couldn’t look up and see the sky. She had spent the last 18 years looking down into the dirt at her feet and everyone else’s feet. No doubt, eating and drinking were difficult and she could only rest curled up in a fetal position.

Remember, Luke is a physician. Dr. Luke uses interesting words to diagnose her condition. He doesn’t use the word that would mean “illness, disease, or injury.” (Greek words *malkia* or *nosos*). In verse 11 he uses the phrase “crippled by a spirit.” Then in verse 12 Jesus uses the word “infirmity.” It’s the word *asthenia*, which doesn’t mean “sickness caused by disease” it means “weakness.”

It’s probable her weakness was caused by demonic influence because Jesus says in verse 16 she had been “bound by Satan” for 18 years. Demonic spirits can provoke physical problems but not every illness or disease is caused by demons. There are 26 recorded miracles where Jesus heals someone of a physical problem and only seven of those are caused by demonic influence.

Demonic spirits can influence a person in a variety of ways. Remember, the term “demon possession” doesn’t appear once in the New Testament; it’s simply the word “demonized.” Jesus cast demons out of many people but this encounter is different. First, elsewhere when Jesus cast a demon out of a person, he never touched the person; He simply commanded the demon spirit to depart. In this passage Jesus touches the poor woman. A second difference is when demons are cast out, it is always a dramatic, almost scary experience. Remember the demons that entered the pigs and they did the “swine dive” and committed “suicide.” In this case, the woman simply stands up straight.

A lying spirit had convinced this poor woman that she couldn’t stand up. From the language Dr. Luke uses it seems she had no physiological cause for her affliction. Physicians today can testify of the amazing connection between the mind and the body. Some people are literally sick because they *think* they are sick and there is no organic or physical reason to explain their illness. They are just as sick as someone who has an infection but the illness started in their mind.

For years, people told the woman, “Stand up!” And she would say, “I can’t!”

“Look up!”

“I can’t!”

“Lift up your eyes!”

“I can’t!”

When asked why not, she would say, “I just can’t!”

Some of you have a good case of the "can'ts" too. Stop drinking! "I can't!" Stop looking at pornography! "I can't!" Stop abusing drugs! "I can't!" Stop being bitter! "I can't!" Forgive that person who hurt you! "I can't!"

You need for Jesus to deliver you from your "can'ts" today. Have you ever seen a circus elephant tied to a small wooden stake outside a circus tent? That grown elephant could easily rip the wooden stake out of the ground. But when elephant handlers are training baby elephants, they use a strong iron anchor bar and drive it deep into the ground. When the baby elephant tugs and tries to get away, he can't and experiences the pain of the shackle on his leg. Finally, he gives up and stops pulling. Gradually as the elephant grows up, they replace the iron anchor bar with a wooden stake. That's why the grown elephant doesn't pull away; he doesn't think he can, so he can't. It's not the stake in the ground keeping him in place; it's the thought in his mind that keeps him there.

One the devil's greatest tools is to try to erect a stronghold in your mind to make you think you can't do something God has told you to do. That's why the Bible says in Ephesians 4:27, "Do not give the devil a foothold." If you give the devil an inch, he'll take your smile; he will rob you of your joy.

Meanwhile, back at the synagogue, notice the steps Jesus follows to deliver this woman. First He looks at her, and then He calls her. I wonder if Jesus bent down and looked into her eyes? I imagine Him as He looks into those fearful but hopeful eyes. He smiles and says, "Ma'am, you are set free from your infirmity." She is still bent over, so Jesus reaches out and touches her. I love verse 13. It says, "Immediately she straightened up and praised God." I don't know what she said or sang; it just says she started praising God. If she were around today, maybe she would have sung, "Love lifted me, love lifted me! When nothing else could help, love lifted me."

Now, that leads us to our **LIFE LESSON: WHEN JESUS TOUCHES YOU YOU'LL STRAIGHTEN UP AND PRAISE GOD!** Maybe you feel the weight of the world has doubled you over. You feel bent out of shape because of the burdens you have to carry. Worry and anxiety can bend you over. Heartache, pain, frustration, and suffering can bend you over. Some of you have lost your jobs, you've been hurt, abused, or rejected and it seems as if you can't look up. You may be trapped in some sin, or carrying around some deep, dark secret and you feel bent out of shape. People say, "Just look up!" And your reply is "I can't!" They say, "Just shake it off!" You say, "I can't!"

Jesus wants to do the same for you that He did for this woman. First, He sees you and He knows your pain. You can hide your pain from others behind a smile, but Jesus sees you. Next, He calls you to Himself. "Come to me all you who labor and are bent over with care, and I'll give you rest." Next, He speaks to you to let you know that you can set free from your weakness. But, best of all He touches you. Every time you encounter Jesus is worship, He touches you.

Here's His word for you: "Straighten up." If your marriage is a mess and you feel bent over from the burden, let Jesus touch you, then straighten up and praise Him. If addicted to something, Satan has you bound, let Jesus touch you, then, straighten up and Praise Him. My friend, you can't be touched by Jesus and stay the same. Let Him touch you and deliver you today.

Now, this poor woman was not the only crippled person there that day. We also see a man who was:

II. BENT OUT OF SHAPE BY RELIGIOUS RULES (14-16)

The poor woman who had been set free was praising the Lord, and all her friends were rejoicing and shouting, “Hallelujah, Praise the Lord!” But the leader of the synagogue couldn’t stand it. This was out of the ordinary, and he didn’t like it one bit. He became indignant—bent all out of shape. In the midst of the rejoicing, he jumped to his feet and ordered everyone to be quiet and stop rejoicing. Things are NOT going to get out of hand in HIS synagogue! He even quoted Exodus 20:9 to justify his action. There wasn’t going to be any healing in HIS synagogue on the Sabbath. No siree! It’s one thing to quote scripture, it’s another thing to correctly apply it!

Apparently, the synagogue ruler had a few others who agreed with his action because Jesus addressed His words to a group. I like the way Eugene Peterson paraphrases it in *The Message*: “You frauds! Each Sabbath every one of you unties your cow or donkey from its stall, leads it out for water and thinks nothing of it. So why isn’t it all right for me to untie this daughter of Abraham and lead her from the stall where Satan has had her tied these eighteen years? The Jews had made so many loopholes in the Sabbath laws, they had figured out a way to untie their livestock and lead them to water, even if the water was more than a Sabbath’s walk away. Jesus accused them of treating their animals better than they treated people!

Sadly, the descendants of this self-appointed religious expert are still with us today. These uptight folks are relying more on a set of strict religious rules than on a liberating, joyous relationship with God. These people are often called legalists or religious traditionalists. You can usually spot them when other folks get happy in the Lord and start praising God. Like the man in our text, they are quick to complain. They still get upset when they see someone having a good time in the Lord: why? I guess it’s because they think religion ought to make you miserable, and if you are enjoying yourself, you can’t be very spiritual. Most of them have perfected what I call the “Baptist Holy Look” that is an expression that looks like a cross between acid indigestion and a migraine headache.

Those who have been set free by Jesus are under the constant scrutiny of these legalists who are ready to condemn any unexpected exuberance.

It’s nothing new. It was happening 3,000 years ago. In 2 Samuel 6 there is an interesting story about King David. The Ark of God had been out of Jerusalem for a long time, and finally David arranged to have it brought back to the city of Jerusalem. As the priests were carrying the ark into the city, David got so excited that the Bible says he, “danced before the Lord with all his might!” I don’t know exactly what that means, except I suppose David was so full of joy he just got happy feet. One of his wives, Michal, saw him and despised his behavior; she got all bent out of shape. She mocked him and in words dripping with sarcasm accused him of being “undignified.” I love David’s reply. He didn’t let her rob his joy, he just said, “I will celebrate before the Lord and become even MORE undignified, because my dignity isn’t as important as celebrating the goodness of God.” (2 Samuel 6:12-22)

Sam Jones was a Methodist Evangelist who lived and preached late 1800s. He was known to be extremely plain spoken. Once he was preaching about how some people refuse to get enthusiastic about God because they were afraid they might lose their “dignity.” He said: “Dignity is the starch of the shroud. The more dignity a fellow has the nearer dead he is. I expect to be as dignified as some of you when they put me in my coffin.”

Every church has what I call “the cold water committee.” Whenever the fire of God starts burning in the hearts of some folks, they rise up and pour cold water on it. Whenever there’s a new and creative way to do church, they pour cold water on that idea. The cold water committee is not an elected committee, the members are self-appointed. They think it is their job to make sure things don’t get out of hand in their church. Their favorite phrases are “we don’t do things like that around here” or “we’ve never done it that way before.” Like the ruler of the synagogue, these people may even quote a little scripture, but they are more into rules than into the liberty Jesus gives. I hope you make sure you don’t become a part of that committee and don’t pay any attention when someone on that committee corners you to complain about something going on in the church that they don’t like.

The Jews weren’t the only ones with religious traditions. Baptists have religious traditions, too. W. A. Criswell wrote about a vivid memory he had as a boy in church. A respected banker in his little town was an active member of his boyhood church. The banker was accused in church of dancing and after a long, bitter, acrimonious, called business meeting, the banker was voted out of the church. There are some religious traditions that are completely benign. But when you allow traditions to overshadow the Word of God, that’s when they become dangerous. Jesus said in Mark 7:8, 13, “You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men...thus, you nullify the Word of God by your tradition which you have handed down.” God is always at work in the NOW and a tradition always anchors us to the past. Someone has written a clever definition of a religious tradition. Religious tradition: “A clock that tells you what time it was.” It’s sad to say that many churches and many Christians still want things to be the way they “used to be.” When they sing about “the old time religion” they aren’t talking about 2,000 years ago in the book of Acts, they are talking about church in the south in the 1950s and 1960s!

Here’s the **LIFE LESSON: GOD’S LAWS AREN’T TO TIE YOU DOWN, BUT TO SET YOU FREE!** The law of God was never intended to restrict you, but to set you free. Jesus said the Sabbath was made for man—not man for the Sabbath. In Galatians 3:24 Paul is writing to a group of Christians who have forfeited their liberty under grace and have slipped back into the straightjacket of the law. He says, “The law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.” Legalists don’t enjoy their faith—and they don’t want anyone else to enjoy it either.

A legalist is someone whose list of rules is longer than God’s and they want to impose their list of rules and regulations on others. Max Lucado wrote: “Legalism has no pity on people. Legalism makes my opinion your burden, makes my opinion your boundary, makes my opinion your obligation. Nothing will keep a Christian more immature than trying to keep a long list of rules.” (*Up Words*, May 1993)

Learning to ride a bicycle is hard because you have to learn balance. You know why a bicycle can't stand up without a kickstand? Because it's two tired. (sorry) Learning to ride a bike involves attaining balance on two wheels. When my daughters were learning, we bought them little bicycles with training wheels. They were small wheels attached to the bike that kept it from falling over. Training wheels made it easier to learn how to balance the bike. God's laws are like training wheels. They help you as you begin to learn how to balance freedom with responsibility. But training wheels on a bike are only temporary. When Lance Armstrong won the Tour de France, I didn't see any training wheels on his bicycle, did you? As you grow as a Christian you can learn how to balance your life on God's two primary commands: love God with all your heart and love your neighbor as yourself. You won't need the training wheels of all the rules and regulations of the Bible. A legalist is still using training wheels. Jesus said you "Shall know the truth and the truth will set you free!" (John 8:32) But the truth will make you mad (angry) before it sets you free!

You may not be bent out of shape like the crippled woman, but are you bent out of shape like the man crippled by legalism and rules? Jesus wants to set you free today. The word "bent" can be used as an adverb meaning "to have a strong inclination or disposition." We see some people:

III. BENT ON THE JOY OF GOD'S KINGDOM! (17-21)

Let's read the rest of our passage beginning in verse 17:

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 of the air 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 a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."

Jesus' statement about setting animals free on the Sabbath was a powerful repartee that shamed the religious legalists. In light of verse 17 ask yourself: Am I delighted about all the wonderful things God is doing in our church? Or are you a little skeptical? The common people heard Jesus gladly, but the religious people stayed irritated. It's still true today.

These two simple parables of the Kingdom explain why we should be full of joy. The Kingdom of God is not a bunch of rules; it's having a personal relationship with the King. One of the best definitions of the Kingdom of God is found in Romans 14:17, "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking (religious rules), but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." You are enjoying the Kingdom when the Holy Ghost of God is filling you life and you have right standing before the Father. In addition you have inner peace and a joy that can't be contained. Notice two life lessons from the parables:

1. His Kingdom starts small but grows large

A mustard seed is tiny, but it has something in it that a grain of sand doesn't: life. The mustard plant in Galilee has brilliant yellow flowers and can grow to be over 9 feet tall. Tiny birds can build nests in its branches. Like that seed, the Kingdom is alive and although it starts small, it grows. That's true of the Body of Christ, the church. Jesus started with only 12 men, and one of them was a fake. He told them to change the world—that's a pretty small seed. On the Day of Pentecost, there were only 120 people in the upper room and today there are over 2 billion Christians. It started small, but it has certainly grown. It's true of individual churches. Green Acres started with less than 300 people 47 years ago—that's a pretty small seed. Today, we have almost 11,000 members and have started over twenty mission churches during that time as well.

But this is also true personally. When you first enter the Kingdom of God, you don't fully understand the impact it has on you. It's a small part of your life, like a mustard seed. But if you are truly growing as a Christian, the older you get, the influence and impact of God in your life grows and grows until knowing and serving God becomes the single most important goal in your life.

Sadly, some people receive the seed of God's Word, but for a variety of reasons the seed doesn't take root, and they soon drop out and are never heard from again, except maybe on Easter or Christmas. Can you testify today that God's influence is growing larger and larger in your life? If you can, the seed has taken firm root in your heart.

2. His Kingdom changes every part of your life

If you are going to bake good bread, you can take a pinch of yeast and put it in the bread dough. Like a mustard seed, yeast is "alive." I didn't realize this until I accessed the Fleischmann's Yeast web site. It says, "In yeast, there are thousands of living, plant-like micro-organisms. When activated by warm liquid, and fed by sugar or starch, the yeast releases tiny bubbles of carbon dioxide gas. This gas is what makes the dough rise and achieve its light texture after baking."

Yeast acts as a catalyst to change the nature of the bread dough. Just a tiny bit of yeast can affect an entire lump of dough. That's the point Jesus is making. The kingdom of God is a living catalyst that changes every part of your life. You cannot have an encounter with God and stay the same. Yeast also works invisibly on the inside of the dough. Religion attempts to change people from the outside in, it's very interested in *appearances*. However, the Kingdom of God works invisibly on the inside of your life, and, like yeast, God changes you from the inside out. The Kingdom of God is NOT outward appearance or behavior, it is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Are you allowing the Kingdom of God to change your life?

CONCLUSION

Whatever is broken in your life, Jesus can fix it. If you are bent out of shape by suffering, Jesus sees you and calls you. He came to set you free from Satan's bondage, and when He touches you, you will never be the same again! You may be bent out of shape by religious rules, a miserable legalist. Jesus came to set you free from the chains and weights of the law. Will you let Him?

He wants you to be delighted in what He is doing right now—and that can only happen when you allow His Kingdom to be real in your life.

We are all like old Humpty Dumpty. The words to that little rhyme go:

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall;
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall;
All the King's horses and all the King's men;
Couldn't put Humpty Dumpty back together again.

Some of you know the problem: you've fallen and you can't get up. We live in a world of broken people. Life is fragile; it should be handled with care, because people break easily. All the self-help programs, and the religious rules can't fix the broken hearts, broken hopes, and broken homes of people around us.

Jesus Christ was the only person who ever claimed to be able to heal broken hearts. So I've written a last stanza to Humpty Dumpty. It goes this way:

Jesus Christ came to your wall;
And on the Cross, He died for your fall;
Regardless of death and in spite of your sin;
Through grace, He can put you together again.

OUTLINE

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LIFE LESSON: WHEN JESUS TOUCHES YOU YOU'LL STRAIGHTEN UP AND PRAISE GOD!

II. BENT OUT OF SHAPE BY RELIGIOUS RULES (14-16)

"You frauds! Each Sabbath every one of you unties your cow or donkey from its stall, leads it out for water and thinks nothing of it. So why isn't it all right for me to untie this daughter of Abraham and lead her from the stall where Satan has had her tied these eighteen years?" *Luke 13:15 (The Message)*

Jesus said, "You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men...thus, you nullify the Word of God by your tradition which you have handed down." *Mark 7:8,13*

LIFE LESSON: GOD'S LAWS AREN'T TO TIE YOU DOWN, BUT TO SET YOU FREE!

"The law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law." *Galatians 3:24*

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LIFE LESSONS:

1. HIS KINGDOM STARTS SMALL BUT GROWS LARGE

2. HIS KINGDOM CHANGES EVERY PART OF YOUR LIFE



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes