

# **To Seek and To Save the Lost**

## **A Woman with a Disabling Spirit**

*Luke 13:10-17*

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# A Woman with a Disabling Spirit

## Scripture

This is the fourth Sunday of Advent. Advent is the season of the Christian year in which we remember the first coming of Jesus and also anticipate the second coming of Jesus.

In our study of *The Gospel of Luke*, Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem from Galilee. He only had a few months left to live before his death. He knew that he was going there to pay the penalty for sin by his death. He would sacrifice his life in order to reconcile sinners with a holy God.

In the previous section in *The Gospel of Luke*, Jesus issued a very clear warning about the necessity of repentance in order to avoid God's judgment (13:1-9). But in today's lesson we learn that instead of turning to God in repentance and faith, Jesus' adversaries became even more hardened against him.

The scene for today's lesson is that of Jesus teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath. There he heals a woman with a disabling spirit.

Let's read about Jesus healing a woman with a disabling spirit in Luke 13:10-17:

**<sup>10</sup> Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your disability." <sup>13</sup> And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God. <sup>14</sup> 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." <sup>15</sup> 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? <sup>16</sup> And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?" <sup>17</sup> 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 13:10-17)**

## Introduction

In his commentary on Luke's Gospel, Dr. Philip Ryken opens with a quotation from Stephanie Hubach, who is the mother of two boys, one of whom has Down syndrome.

Steph Hubach describes disability as "a normal part of life in an abnormal world." From the Christian perspective, disability is a normal part of life in an abnormal world.

Disabilities are often considered *abnormal*. But if "normal" means something that many people experience, and that nearly everyone is familiar with, disability is certainly normal. We all know people with disabilities. Some are blind, deaf, or lame. Others are physically deformed. Some are confined to wheelchairs. Others are unable to leave their homes. Some are born with disabilities. Others are disabled later in life. It is normal to have disabilities. And it is normal to have friends who have disabilities. Disabilities are a regular part of life.

Nevertheless, a disability is still a *disability*, and this is where the abnormality comes in. Disability is normal only in an abnormal world. It was not this way from the beginning, when God created a perfect world for perfect people with perfect bodies. Adam and Eve were not created disabled, and their children never would have been disabled unless sin had entered the world.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, vol. 2, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 14-15.

Steph Hubach explains it like this:

According to the biblical account in Genesis, tragedy struck with the Fall of mankind – with a devastating impact on every aspect of creation. As Paul states in Romans 8:20, “the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice.” Our world became an abnormal world. . . . Disability is simply a more noticeable form of the brokenness that is common to human experience – a *normal* part of life in an *abnormal* world.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus often met people with disabilities. However, he had the power to heal them. We see Jesus doing that with a woman with a disabling spirit.

### Lesson

The analysis of the topic of healing on the Sabbath as set forth in Luke 13:10-17 teaches us the meaning of the Sabbath.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. The Setting for the Healing (13:10-11)
2. The Healing by Jesus (13:12-13)
3. The Criticism by the Ruler of the Synagogue (13:14)
4. The Rebuke by Jesus (13:15-16)
5. The Response of the Witnesses (13:17)

#### I. The Setting for the Healing (13:10-11)

First, let’s look at the setting for the healing.

Luke said that Jesus **was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath** (13:10). This is the last time – at least in *The Gospel of Luke* – that Jesus was in **one of the synagogues on the Sabbath**. We don’t know which synagogue this was, but it was most likely somewhere between Galilee and Je-

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<sup>2</sup> Stephanie Hubach, “Those with Help to Make Us,” *byFaith*, March/April 2005, 33.

rusalem. And we believe that Jesus was now only months – and perhaps weeks – away from his own death by crucifixion.

As this particular healing develops it is clear that Luke wanted to stress that the healing of a woman with a disabling spirit took place on **the Sabbath**. The footnote in *The ESV Study Bible* notes, “Whereas the incidents recorded in 6:1-5 and 6:6-11 involve Jesus’ *lordship* over the Sabbath, this account involves the *meaning* of the Sabbath.”<sup>3</sup> So Luke is setting up the narrative for his readers to learn something about the meaning of the Sabbath.

Luke captured the drama of the moment by saying in verse 11a, **“And behold, there was a woman”!** While Jesus was teaching in the synagogue this woman entered. Her condition was pitiable. She **had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years** (13:11b)! In fact, her condition was so bad that **she was bent over and could not fully straighten herself** (13:11c). Some medical experts theorize that she suffered from a condition known as *spondylitis deformans*, a condition in which “the bones of her spine were fused into a rigid mass.”<sup>4</sup> Luke, who himself was a physician, perfectly described the woman’s suffering. She was stooped over so badly that her disability affected every aspect of her life. As Ryken says, “It limited her capacity for work, it disturbed her nighttime rest, hindered her relationships, and prevented her from holding her head up high.”<sup>5</sup>

Of course, some people thought that the woman had become disabled because she had done something wrong. But, as far as we know, this woman had done nothing wrong. Jesus in fact called her “a daughter of Abraham” (13:16), indicating that she belonged to those who are justified by faith. Furthermore,

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<sup>3</sup> Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 1984–1985.

<sup>4</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, vol. 11, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 700.

<sup>5</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, 15–16.

this woman was worshiping in the synagogue. Isn't that interesting? Here is a woman, suffering in the most difficult way, and is yet found with the people worshiping God.

Her commitment to worship ought to cause us to examine ourselves. Do we worship God, in spite of difficulties or disabilities? Or, at the first sign of inconvenience, do we make an excuse to miss worship?

Actually, the woman's disability was not because she had done anything wrong. Jesus said in verse 16 that her disability was due to Satan: he had bound her for eighteen years.

We need to be clear that Satan is not the cause of every disability. Many people are disabled simply because we live in a fallen world. However, it does seem clear that there are occasions where God allows his people to suffer a spiritual attack that causes a disability, and this woman is an example of such a Satanic attack.

Furthermore, this woman's physical disability is a vivid picture of our own spiritual condition. David Gooding says:

The woman's physical condition was not due simply to physical causes. Christ declared it to be a bondage induced by Satan, whose malevolence has always sought from the very beginning to rob man of his dominion and dignity and degrade him into a slave. Few men and women have bent backs physically: but morally and spiritually all men and women find themselves sooner or later bent and bowed by weaknesses of one kind or another from which they have not the strength to free themselves.<sup>6</sup>

Satan may not always cause physical disability, but he is always disabling us spiritually with the burden of our sin.

Well, that is the setting for the healing.

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<sup>6</sup> David Gooding, *According to Luke: A New Exposition of the Third Gospel* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans: 1987), 253.

## II. The Healing by Jesus (13:12-13)

Second, notice the healing by Jesus.

Though he was busy teaching in the synagogue, **when Jesus saw her**, he immediately stopped teaching. Other people may not have noticed the woman. After all, she had been disabled for eighteen years and she had been coming to the synagogue regularly all of those years.

But Jesus noticed her immediately and had compassion on her. **He called her over** to where he was teaching. By now, all eyes in the synagogue were on this woman as she shuffled toward Jesus. Maybe she knew about Jesus. Or maybe not. But Jesus knew about her, and that is what mattered!

Then Jesus healed her. He **said to her, “Woman, you are freed from your disability”** (13:12). As he spoke these wonderful words to her, **he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight** (13:13a). The woman was instantly healed!

I want you to notice the response of the woman. Luke said that **she glorified God** (13:13b). She knew that God had touched and healed her body. And so she stood up straight and tall and started to worship and give all glory to God. Once she had experienced the saving work of Jesus Christ in her life, all she wanted to do was to give glory to God.

This is a wonderful picture of what Jesus Christ does in saving sinners. It is a picture of our own salvation. Jesus first notices our need, just as he noticed the physical disability of the woman. He sees that we are bowed low and burdened by sin and the bondage of Satan. He then became a man, by being born as a baby in Bethlehem on that very first Christmas Eve. He lived a perfect life, and then went to the cross in order to die to pay the penalty for all of our sin. Then, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus calls us to himself. He speaks the words of gospel deliverance to us. He says, “Man, you are free from the

guilt of your sin. Woman, you are free from all the disabling bondage of Satan.” He touches us with his grace, healing us to the very depth of our souls. And in response, we cannot help but sing Jesus’ praises, glorifying God for the cure that is ours through the compassion and mercy of Jesus.

### III. The Criticism by the Ruler of the Synagogue (13:14)

Third, observe the criticism by the ruler of the synagogue.

Amazingly, not everyone was happy with Jesus healing a woman with a disabling spirit. **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” (13:14).**

Instead of glorifying God for the wonderful miracle that had taken place in the synagogue for which he was responsible, **the ruler of the synagogue was indignant.** To be fair, he was not so upset that this woman had been healed. What upset him is that it took place on **the Sabbath day.**

**The ruler of the synagogue** believed that God’s blessing came to people who followed God’s rules. One of the rules was that no work was to be done on the Sabbath, which was of course the essence of the fourth commandment of the Decalogue. Healing was considered to be work by people like **the ruler of the synagogue** in those days, even though it was God who did the healing, and not the healer!

Now, **the ruler of the synagogue** was trying to follow the Word of God. He understood that no work was to be done on the Sabbath. Furthermore, he understood that the Sabbath was a day for rest and also a day for worship. So, if on the Sabbath no work was to be done, and one could only rest and worship, what was the problem? What is the meaning of the Sabbath?



#### IV. The Rebuke by Jesus (13:15-16)

Fourth, look at the rebuke by Jesus.

Jesus not only rebuked the ruler of the synagogue but also all those who agreed with the ruler of the synagogue. **“You hypocrites!”** he said. **“Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it?”** (13:15). The synagogue ruler and all those who agreed with him certainly led their animals to a place where they could get water for their animals. Their manmade rules allowed them to lead their animals on the Sabbath to water as long as they did not carry a load. They could also travel up to about one thousand yards for pasturing.

Jesus pointed out that their law allowed them to be kind and merciful to their animals on the Sabbath. Then he argued from the lesser to the greater, and said, **“And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?”** (13:16). Surely, if people will be kind and merciful to animals on the Sabbath, one should most definitely be kind and merciful to people as well.

And here is the meaning of the Sabbath. Yes, people are not to do any work on the Sabbath. And yes, people are to rest and worship on the Sabbath. But, in addition, people are permitted – indeed, encouraged! – to do works of necessity and mercy on the Sabbath. *The Westminster Shorter Catechism* states, “The Sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days; and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God’s worship, except so much as is to be taken up in the works of *necessity and mercy*.”<sup>7</sup>

Jesus extended mercy to this woman when he healed her.

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<sup>7</sup> *The Westminster Shorter Catechism: With Scripture Proofs*, 3rd edition. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996).

And he extends mercy every time to a sinner whom he saves by his grace. Jesus now wants his disciples who have received his mercy to extend mercy to others that are in need.

Ever since the resurrection of Jesus, the Sabbath is no longer to be observed on the seventh day of the week. It has now shifted to the first day of the week, the day we call Sunday or the Lord's day (Revelation 1:10). That is the day on which Christians cease from their "worldly employments" and rest and worship God. In addition, God's people also use the day for acts of mercy. There is no better day than the Lord's day to proclaim the good news of Christ's mercy and to release people from their bondage to sin and Satan. The Lord's day is a wonderful day to minister to people's physical and spiritual needs. It is a day for ministering to the sick, the elderly, and the friendless. You can go to their homes, or you can have them in to your home. It is a day to extend the mercy of Christ to those in our community who desperately need the mercy of Christ.

## V. The Response of the Witnesses (13:17)

And finally, notice the response of the witnesses.

There were two responses to Jesus healing a woman with a disabling spirit.

*First, notice the response of Jesus' adversaries. As Jesus said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame (13:17a), as they should have been.*

*And second, notice the response of the people. Luke said in verse 17b that all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him. What a marvelous response to the mercy of Christ.*

## Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the topic of healing on the

Sabbath as set forth in Luke 13:10-17, we should know that any time is appropriate for God's healing and restoration.

When Jesus healed a woman with a disabling spirit on the Sabbath, it was a sign of things to come. Jesus will do the same for us, if we will only come to him for mercy. Jesus will save each person by his mercy until that great and glorious day when the effects of sin and Satan are broken forever, and we shall see him face to face.

Steph Hubach writes about the overwhelming grief she suffered at the death of a friend's severely disabled child. After the funeral she went away to be alone with her tears. When she returned, a man with Down syndrome noticed that she had been crying and confronted her.

"Do you love Jesus?" he demanded.

Steph was not in the mood for conversation and tried to disengage. But the man was not to be deterred.

"Ben loved Jesus," he said, referring to the boy who died. "And Ben is with Jesus! And he grew up!"

Steph mumbled a polite response, but the man with Down syndrome would not stop until he knew she understood what he was saying. He became very animated. He strutted around the church, gesturing wildly with his arms.

"And he can walk!" the man said.

Finally he stopped right in front of Steph, looked into her face, and said, "And he can *see* him!"<sup>8</sup>

That man with Down syndrome understood that one day there will be a new normal for every broken-down, body-weary, sin-disabled child of God who is tired of suffering in this abnormal world. We will experience that new normal ourselves, if only we will go to Jesus for the healing that only he can give.<sup>9</sup> Amen.

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<sup>8</sup> Hubach, "Those with Help," 35.

<sup>9</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke*, 25-26.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons)
2. [www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp](http://www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp)
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**PRAYER:**

Our Father, thank you for the miracle of Jesus healing a woman with a disabling spirit.

Again we see the divine power of Jesus. We see him speak words of healing. And we see him heal the woman by his touch. But, most of all, we see the mercy of Jesus.

Each one of us needs the mercy of Jesus. Will you extend your mercy to us, even now? Will you touch that person who is not yet free from the bondage of sin and Satan, and free him or her? Will you enable that person to sing your praises and glorify God with us who have experienced the mercy of God in Christ?

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**BENEDICTION:**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!