

## The Cast | People Engaged In the Story of Jesus Christ

### *Bent and Broken*

Luke 13.10-22

March 19, 2017

*And He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. <sup>11</sup> And there was a woman who for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was bent double, and could not straighten up at all. <sup>12</sup> When Jesus saw her, He called her over and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your sickness." <sup>13</sup> And He laid His hands on her; and immediately she was made erect again and began glorifying God. <sup>14</sup> But the synagogue official, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, began saying to the crowd in response, "There are six days in which work should be done; so come during them and get healed, and not on the Sabbath day." <sup>15</sup> But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall and lead him away to water him?" <sup>16</sup> "And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?" <sup>17</sup> As He said this, all His opponents were being humiliated; and the entire crowd was rejoicing over all the glorious things being done by Him.*

*<sup>18</sup> So He was saying, "What is the kingdom of God like, and to what shall I compare it? <sup>19</sup> "It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and threw into his own garden; and it grew and became a tree, and THE BIRDS OF THE AIR NESTED IN ITS BRANCHES."*

*<sup>20</sup> And again He said, "To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? <sup>21</sup> "It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened."*

*<sup>22</sup> And He was passing through from one city and village to another, teaching, and proceeding on His way to Jerusalem.*

We've been looking at the gigantic cast of characters who appear in the FOUR AUTHORIZED accounts of the life of Jesus Christ (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John).

Many of these characters are named...and the earliest readers of these documents could have located these characters and asked them about their encounters with the Main Character...eyewitnesses.

Many OTHER of the characters are UN-named and sometimes that's an indication of their social-status that they were...unimportant...unknown...people on the margins of society... AND that's certainly the case with the woman we meet today...a bent woman who is unnamed and unknown and living on the fringe... AND there's another character known NOT by his name but by HIS TITLE/position, a synagogue official...sort of like a minister or pastor.

And here Jesus Christ is found for the last time (in Luke) IN A SYNAGOGUE. He's teaching about His main topic, the Kingdom of God i.e. what it looks like when God asserts His reign and reclaims people and the whole creation... And Jesus the Teacher USES two striking images for the Kingdom of God (the tiny mustard seed and the seemingly inactive leaven/yeast).

But these metaphors (a tiny seed and YEAST) pictures of God's reign only come up after an awkward interruption at church that day... So today we look in on that weird and wonderful disruption at a Sabbath day worship service in an unknown synagogue....and how the whole event gives us a glimpse into Jesus Christ's central idea, the Kingdom of God.

Q: What's the core content of Jesus Christ's teaching? A: The Kingdom of God and HERE HE REALLY HELPS US SEE IT. Let's look at 1) The Way of the Bent and Broken 2) The Way of the Kingdom and #3) The Way for US in the modern world.

The first time we saw Jesus in a synagogue was in Luke CH 4...in His hometown of Nazareth and it was THERE that He issued His own mission statement as foretold by the Prophet Isaiah: And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (4.17-19)

And NOW, in His LAST synagogue appearance, Jesus is still carrying out that MISSION...to set captives free and here...those things are actually happening: the "glorious things" of the Kingdom for everyone to see!

But apparently NOT everyone does see and that's the conflict in this scene...there's a bent woman held captive AND an important man who's broken/bitter.

The woman is physically bent... and broken in many ways...probably in pain...and also ostracized from her community...she's a pariah.

Some of you may know the name, Susan Sontag; she was a very brilliant writer and social critic who died in New York in 2004. She was first diagnosed with cancer in the late '70s and she soon realized that the cancer was bad enough but the unexpected sense of shame and guilt that came with the disease was worse. The metaphors we use like "battling cancer" or "fighting" or "struggling" often have the effect of keeping people away from treatment...looks like defeat.

She looked at TB (19<sup>th</sup> C) and cancer (20<sup>th</sup> C) and asked, "Why can't we just see these as diseases ...why do we somehow turn disease into a test of willpower...and then if you get worse there's a sense that YOU'RE NOT fighting hard enough....so the sickness is compounded by the shame."

And the truth is, there's always been stigma attached to disease...and as enlightened as we

claim to be (in the West) we still do it...but it was even worse for people in traditional and ancient cultures.

This poor (unnamed) woman is living in a time/place where the connection was even more explicit – “she’s not fighting hard enough and she probably DID something to GET this terrible condition.”

It’s called a “spirit” and as I said last week...I’m not exactly sure how to understand that...except to acknowledge that our scientific explanations are great but not always adequate...but whatever the connection there’s no indication that she brought it on herself.

She can’t walk upright...she’s like a beast of burden ...looking down. And can’t easily make eye-contact with other people and there’s this punitive attitude all around her. And...we all feel... a little unsure around people like this...people with disabilities and abnormalities. We wonder, “should I be doing something? Should I hold the door for her? Will she want something from me?”

And again, in that culture, there was guilt and shame and the sense that she had DONE something to deserve this...AND YOU ADD UP THE COST of this affliction...the physical pain/discomfort and the social/relational implications and the spiritual sense of inadequacy and the nagging idea: “maybe God IS punishing me?”

AND... 18 YEARS!... “She was bent double and could not straighten up at all.”

But there is another kind of “bent-ness” standing up so straight, close-by to our pitiful woman... not so easy to see/detect... but in the scope of things even worse than her condition. There’s a man with status and a position/title... a minister/pastor. And while Jesus helps the more obvious disorder, He does not (at least at THIS point) He does NOT help this synagogue official...who is broken NOT in body but in soul...

He’s a spiritually unaware kind of person. He used religion just like the 19<sup>th</sup> C atheistic philosophers feared...used religion to dominate weaker people and keep them subjugated... AND NOW...the King of the Kingdom has come into this religious man’s turf.

This Teacher who is powerful and yet disruptive and liberating and healing has come INTO the church service and all the leader can see is DISRUPTION!

He’s living a life of order and control and predictability... “there’s a protocol ...there’s a right way to DO THINGS and THIS AINT IT!”

He gets his security/identity/significance by being “the man who keeps things on track!” And NOW the train is DEFINITELY off the track...and this is NOT gonna happen – NOT on MY watch and not in MY synagogue!”

And the MAN...to his credit...is appealing NOT just to his own opinion but to the Law of Moses. "And THAT is NOT something to fool around with! The Fourth Commandment (Sabbath) ought'a be taken seriously!"

"This nameless woman has been sick 18 years! This is NOT an emergency!... This WORK could be done on any other day...she's waited THIS long...she can wait another day...NOT on the day when work is forbidden!"

And notice the minister is apparently threatened that Jesus is the focus and the insecure minister appeals directly to the people. He attempts to shame this outsider/teacher and says, in effect, "I'm the official interpreter of the Bible around here and this guy's a rookie!" But Jesus points out that THIS man is bent...he's twisted and broken more than the woman was AND most tragically...the man is oblivious to the Kingdom of God (that he just witnessed) he's unaware of God's priorities and even unaware of the purpose for the Sabbath!

In fact, Jesus Christ calls him a hypocrite and then points out that the man's understanding of Moses is bent/broken. This minister thinks that barnyard animals are more important than the Children of God... "this daughter of Abraham".

"Wait a minute!" says Jesus... "I know you guys WORK to untie your ox and donkey on the Sabbath because the animals want food and water after being without it for a few hours overnight... So why shouldn't we untie this child of God who's been waiting a lot longer than overnight?!"

The Sabbath – and if you read Deuteronomy CH 5 you'll see it in black and white – the Sabbath was given as an expression of mercy NOT as an obstacle to mercy... IT WAS GIVEN TO CELEBRATE that our slavery in Egypt was OVER...and NOW instead of slaving 24/7 we get a whole day...every week to rejoice/rest and celebrate our freedom!"

Jesus Christ is ALSO appealing to the Law and He is showing that HE IS THE APPOINTED INTERPRETER of the Law... NOT the opinions of this synagogue leader or the Jewish rabbis. And now this bent and broken pastor is indignant...and humiliated (17): "As He said this, all His opponents were being humiliated; and the entire crowd was rejoicing over all the glorious things being done by Him."

So there it is...more than one kind of brokenness and bent-ness... Jesus helps the one who is obviously broken but He humbles and breaks the one who looked straight... Jesus brings the man's twistedness to the surface.

Now quickly Jesus Christ makes this whole scene an object lesson on the WAY OF THE KINGDOM (point 2).

v. 18 – “THEREFORE, He was saying, ‘what is the Kingdom of God like and to what should I compare it?’”

In other words, “You have just seen the glorious things of God’s Kingdom... God returning things to how they were meant to be... so let me tell you HOW God’s Kingdom functions: it’s like a mustard seed and it’s like YEAST introduced to a huge amount of flour (3 pecks – feeds 150 people!)”

And what the Teacher is saying is – the Reign of God is NOT what you’d expect... YOU think trumpets and important people and fireworks... but it’s actually very earthy...sort of easy to overlook...and YET IN its smallness...it has results that are outrageous and astoundingly GREAT AND GLORIOUS...and immense!

God’s Kingdom is the upside-down kingdom where important people get humbled but the woman of shame gets lifted up. Isn’t it GREAT how Jesus Christ does this? “When Jesus SAW her...” He sees the invisible...He notices.

And He didn’t go to her...sitting in the back...in the shadows...on the fringe...NO! He calls her into the center (where He was standing) – OUT of her shame and isolation and INTO the spotlight with HIM...back into community...He touches her and includes her!

In HIS Kingdom, the broken/isolated and prisoners are healed and set free to realize the great purpose of life – to glorify God and enjoy Him forever (and that’s exactly what she does in this scene!) But the proud...the controllers, the self-confident who know exactly how it is...the ones bent inwardly who want to stay there – THEY end up broken and humiliated.

The Kingdom of God will overthrow all demonic evil that keeps people enslaved and unable to look up and celebrate with God... and the liberation will happen in ways that LOOK inconsequential like some throwaway invisible woman being healed/set free.

The real Reign of God is like mustard seeds and yeast – so small BUT disproportionately consequential ...often unnoticed but earth shattering.

In God’s Kingdom – He comes into our bent-ness and He becomes broken and isolated and stripped and shamed... He’ll be bent in two carrying that cross “like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.” (Isaiah 53.3) He will be burdened and bent under the weight of MY SIN...so that I could look up...could glorify God and be free!

It was a criminal’s death...easy to ignore...on a Friday afternoon...outside a small city...a mustard seed that becomes a great tree... a refuge for all the helpless...a dwelling for the bent and the broken (“and the birds of the air nested in its branches.” [19] Ez.17.23)

Now this is a fantastic story but what to do about it in the modern world (#3 - The Way for US in

the modern world)? How do we apply it?

Well...maybe we could use the old narrative exercise: PUT YOURSELF into the story... With which character do you most identify?

Is it the BENT-OVER woman? Have you known shame? Have you experienced a kind of weakness that isolated you? Are you burdened...even today... feel like you can't look up...can't look people in the eye? AND HAVE YOU known the joy of liberation from shame...started to GET the real purpose of life?

Or maybe you can relate to the pastor (I know I can!) – the synagogue official who's more interested in order and control than in untying the enslaved? Do you ever defend your own rightness instead of loving people spontaneously...more interested in winning arguments than in helping burdened people?

Or maybe it's the crowd (like the chorus in Greek dramas) and the crowd (voice of reason) the crowd here can't ignore the sanity of Jesus Christ, "Yeah! He gets it! People are more important than animals! The Sabbath celebrates FREEDOM from being bound."

And we recognize the true "Right-Side-Upness" of His Kingdom – Jesus Christ is making all things new, "and the entire crowd was rejoicing over all the glorious things being done by Jesus" (17) Maybe they repented over how they'd thought about and treated that bent woman. Can you identify with that?

Of course...it would be great if we could identify with Jesus...if we could begin to see people...to move toward people...to care for the marginalized/bent. To touch people and to ...love like Jesus Christ loved.

And the way for that to happen...is to really breathe IN the final...sort of puzzling... ominous words with which the text ends... Luke's narrative genius: "And He was passing through from one city and village to another, teaching, and proceeding on His way to Jerusalem." (22)

Think now...you bent and burdened people...think that Jesus Christ is going to Jerusalem...to be bent and broken...to stand in MY place... O How He Loves Us... The way to become LIKE HIM (in the way He loved the invisible/ignored) the way to become loving, to love the way HE LOVED...is to truly believe that He goes to Jerusalem for YOU.

Do you believe that when He was bowed down under the crushing weight of the Cross...that He was carrying YOUR guilt? When we KNOW that...when we trust Him in that way we can become unafraid/secure enough to touch bent and broken people...

Only when I believe HE identified with Me can I then begin to identify with Him.