

St. Augustine's Sermons

Calgary, Alberta

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The Three Spirits

10:00 am, Holy Communion

The Text: Luke 13:10-17

10 Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath.
11 And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. 12 When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." 13 When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. 14 But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day." 15 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 manger, and lead it away to give it water? 16 And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?" 17 When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing

Introduction

In the passage from Luke 13 we have a text that is found no where else in the Gospels. Luke includes a story that illustrates for us three spiritual dispositions that can influence how people live. Thus I have entitled this morning's sermon "The Three Spirits". These spirits are represented by the three characters in the story. There is the crippling spirit of the unnamed woman, the legalistic spirit of the synagogue leader, and the joyful spirit of Jesus.

1. The Crippling Spirit:

We are told by Luke that the woman with this crippling or disabling spirit had been marred by it for eighteen years. As a result of this spirit she was bent over and could not stand up straight. We do not know exactly what this spirit was but there is a clear indication from what Jesus says in the text that Satan had bound her for eighteen years. On this day she was freed from the evil one's stranglehold on her life.

People can be controlled by a crippling spirit that is at times due less to a physical condition and is more due to an inner sense of self degradation and condemnation. When the inner state of our heart is focused here it can lead to physical manifestations that mirror the state of our inner life. The text makes clear that in this woman's case her physical condition was closely aligned with her spiritual condition. Satan had bound her spirit and this manifested itself physically by her being crippled.

So while it need to be careful in how we make the connection between the spiritual and physical interplay when people are suffering from chronic conditions, the text presses us to see that such a relationship exists in this case.

The phrase translated: "There appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her" is in the Greek rendered more vividly. A more literal translation would go something like this: "a woman with a spirit

causing illness that had a hold on her". This is a vivid way to speak about a crippling spirit. This spirit had a hold on her and she could not free herself from it.

When someone is overcome with a sense of inner anguish and turmoil the spirit can indeed cripple them physically. The human being is an integrated creature and the state of our soul can profoundly affect the state of our body. Others often notice when a person is in such a crippled state, either because they have a physical ailment or because of their body language that portrays this inner struggle.

The Greek makes it clear that this woman was noticed. The rather tame translation "And there appeared a woman", doesn't capture our attention the way it does in the original Greek. The Greek words translated so prosaically are better captured like this: "See! Listen! Suddenly there was a woman." She appeared and as she did we know that Jesus saw her. No words were exchanged between them. But upon seeing her, Jesus calls her to himself and then Luke writes: "12 When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your disability." 13 And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God."

Notice what has happened here. Recall that the Greek text had described her condition as "a woman with a spirit causing illness that had a hold on her". This is reiterated later on when Jesus describes her condition in verse 16 as being bound by Satan. At verse 13 Luke tells us that Jesus laid his hands on her and she was freed from Satan's bondage and the spirit causing illness that had a hold on her. She was made straight she then glorified God.

With this I can imagine her gaze changed from being focused on the ground to being directed heavenwards with hands upraised as she celebrated the Lord's liberation of her.

There is something that happens in a person's life when they have been touched by Jesus. There is a liberation that frees a person to see life in a very different way. Rather than be crippled by an inner attitude and disposition that is the focus of his or her attention, there

is a freedom that allows the focus to shift to the celebrating God's work in such a life.

2. The Legalistic Spirit

The first spirit at work then has attacked a woman. She had been bent physically. The second spirit at work has attacked the synagogue leader but not physically. He has been attacked by a spirit, which had crippled his ability to glorify God and see others with compassion. Here was a man with a legalistic spirit.

Listen to the details as Luke relates them. He tells us that this was the Sabbath which is a key to understanding what really is happening here. He also tells us that this woman had her condition for eighteen years. Both these points are important. What he is saying here is that this was not an emergency case. It was the same with the man with the withered hand, whom Jesus also healed on the Sabbath. This man had probably been born with this condition. Both of these cases could have waited to the next day. These were not emergency room situations. On the other hand, if Jesus had healed, say a child, who was burning up with fever and in imminent danger of dying, it would have made perfect sense, even to the synagogue ruler. But that kind of healing would have undermined the point he was making. You see this was a test. Jesus was purposely and flagrantly breaking scribal law to make a point, and that point was: people are more important than rules. We need to be reminded of this from time to time.

Two things happen when you have a legalistic spirit. 1. Your rules rule you and 2. Your rules supersede the well being of others.

A legalistic spirit has a way of dehumanizing people. When we allow this to happen, the person with a legalistic spirit often fails to see people's worth before God. Once you dehumanize someone, and label them, you can easily dismiss them. The hunchback was, in the synagogue ruler's opinion, only a woman and of little value. The Mosaic Law was more important than a woman let alone a disfigured one. Listen to this now: This woman's back was bent, that much is true. But, a legalistic spirit bent this man's soul all the more.

Nothing can choke the heart and soul of our walk with God like legalism. I am the first person to say that a Christian ought to be disciplined. But, when we become rigid in our beliefs it is a definite sign that the Disciplines of the Christian life have crippled us.

Does this mean that we do not have to have rules? Of course not. But it does suggest that we must be careful and not let our rules rule us. Jesus said: The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Jesus comes to us as the restorer of humanity. God sees each of us as a unique individual precious to him. When we are governed by a legalistic Spirit we lose sight of the preciousness of others. Just as when we are governed by a crippled spirit with can lose sight of the preciousness of ourselves.

The Joyful Spirit

As we turn now to look at Jesus' joyful spirit we will observe that it is neither self depredating nor depredating of others. The root of the word joy is the word grace.

Therefore a joyful spirit is a graceful spirit and relates to oneself and others in such a way so as to reflect this. Look now at how Jesus embodies a joyful spirit in our text.

Daughter of Abraham

Notice how Jesus addresses this woman. He calls her a "daughter of Abraham" Those words, "daughter of Abraham" are intended to carry a message to the synagogue leader. The message goes something like this: On top of all the other reasons why you should care more about a suffering person than a thirsty ox is the fact that this woman is a fellow heir of the blessing promised to Abraham. You pride yourselves in saying, "We are the children of Abraham." Well, she too is a child of Abraham.

And so the message of Jesus to the synagogue leader was a message, not only Sabbath keeping, and not only about hypocrisy and judgementalism. It was also about how people ought to relate to each other as fellow heirs of God's promises. He was saying that this

believing woman in your midst is an heir of the promises of God. She too is one of the righteous who will shine like the sun in the kingdom of her Father (Matthew 13:43)."

Looking at Each Other Through the Lens of the Word

Jesus did not see this woman as a cripple. Rather he saw her as a Daughter of Abraham. When we live with a joyful Spirit we will do the same. How does this happen? We can see others with a joyful spirit when we learn to look at each other through the lens of God's Word. Here's what I mean.

This woman in the synagogue has been bent over for 18 years. What's that like? It's horrible. That's what it's like. People stare. People think you've committed some terrible sin. Kids laugh and make jokes. You can't look anyone in the eye. People don't know how to make conversation. You can't have normal sexual relations with your husband. You feel like you're an embarrassment to everyone you're with.

So what do you see when you look at this woman? If you were her husband, what would you see? Husbands, wives, friends (let's just bring it right up to date), what do you see when you look at your wife, your husband, your friends. The answer to that, of course, depends on what lens you're using. If you use the lens of legalism you will often be highly critical of them, finding it much easier to concentrate on the ways they do not measure up. If you look through the lens of God's Word, you will see a daughter or son of Abraham. If we learn to see each other the way Jesus saw this woman in the synagogue, we will see them as heirs of the King of glory. And that will have a deep effect on our relationships.

We will, I think, in the age to come be dumbfounded as we look back at how poorly we were able to treat each other on the way to glory. There is an honor and respect and even reverence that we should show to each other as men and women. How much happier would be our homes if they were filled with expressions of this honor! And they WILL be filled with these expressions to the degree that we learn to look at each other through the lens of God's Word—as daughters and sons of Abraham; heirs of all God's promises; destined together for unspeakable glory.

Conclusion

When we cultivate an attitude like this we will echo in our own lives what is said of Jesus at the end of the psalm passage read today: The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Those who are cultivating a joyful spirit are also learning to live this way themselves.

And so here is a test for each of us to help us to consider the question Am I cultivating a joyful spirit or am I more often ruled by a crippling or legalistic spirit.

Take that psalm verse and put your name where the Lord is referred to. Then take time in your prayers this week to talk with the Lord about the inner state of your heart. Ask him to help you to see where you are self condemning and condemning of others. Also give thanks for those ways where you manifest a joyful spirit.

If you are anything like me, you realize that all three of these spirits can be at work within my life. The call of the disciple is to ask Jesus to work in us so that the crippling and legalistic spirits are decreasing so that like Jesus we may ever more have a joyful spirit that sees ourselves and others through the lens of God's word.

Amen

