



Vision and Commitment 2018
A year to focus on discipleship

Every day, in
everything
&
everywhere

Discipleship Series Sermon - Acting Out (Practising)

Bible Reading: Luke 13:10-17

Main Point: Being a disciple involves righteous action that demonstrates the new life we are living.

Intended Response: To enable people to think about how their actions and belief in the new life which Jesus gives impacts their daily contexts.

Introduction

This short passage comes amidst a few chapters (11-15) where the author of Luke's Gospel arranges some of Jesus' teachings into a long section that can be difficult when read as a whole. It is full of warnings and condemnations for Israel where Jesus is pointing out how far their conduct is from the will of God. However, there are also verses of hope that point to the Kingdom that Jesus insists is close.

Context

This pattern of condemning and pointing to hope is perfectly shown in the short sections before and after our main reading. Preceding the story of the woman is a short story about a fig tree that won't bear fruit (Luke 13:6-10). The fig tree was the symbol of Israel. For three years Jesus has searched the branches of Israel's faith for signs of genuine connection to the Father, for signs of healthy roots that draw deep from God's will, and in that three years he found nothing, so he declares it is time for a new thing. Luke then places the story of the woman almost as an illustration of the wider point he is making; as a piece of evidence to Israel of their fruitlessness and distance from God's will and as an indication that a new reality is coming.

Following the key passage, we have the famous verse where Jesus compares the coming Kingdom of God with the mustard tree (v 19). Mustard trees were considered to be non-impressive weeds and Jewish law forbade them to be planted. Yet, by its humble strength the mustard tree could overwhelm a land, spreading rapidly regardless of what was there before - a truly unexpected picture of the Kingdom.

It is within this context that Luke places the story of the woman who is oppressed with a 'spirit of weakness'.





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- In **verses 10-11**, while some translations suggest the woman had arthritis and others an evil spirit, there is a resonance that she was someone who had been worn down, whose spirit and strength had been eroded by the circumstances of her life.
- In **verse 12** we read that, like everyone else, Jesus would have seen the burden upon the woman, understanding the sort of life she must be leading. However, unlike everyone else, Jesus also was able to see what fullness and flourishing might look like in her life.
- **Verse 13** sees a 'breach of Sabbath decorum' in which Jesus had not only called the woman forward but is now touching her during worship, risking ritual violation. She is immediately healed and praises God.
- In **verse 14** the synagogue leader's instinctive reaction is to retreat to his regulations: there is a system for healing, there are regulations about the Sabbath, laws about what can and can't happen. These have been set by those with far more authority than him or, seemingly, this wandering Rabbi and his uneducated disciples, and so they must be carefully kept.
- In **verse 15** Jesus sees the larger story. This woman is a daughter of Abraham, a child of God and so there is new life for her.

Key Headings

Righteousness

- Jesus' righteousness allows him to see with new vision; it gives him the strength and courage to act, to shame his enemies and delight the witnessing crowds.
- A helpful way to think about righteousness is the unification of justice and holiness. True justice is impossible without the humility and gentleness of holiness and holiness is not fully realised without dissatisfaction and anger at injustice. It is this middle space that is righteousness.
- The accounts of Jesus' revolutionary actions (vv 12-13, for example) are there to inspire us to act, to spur us on to do similar things. As disciples we can perceive the injustices and understand the call of our holy living but we can lack the will to act. We cover this with excuses surrounding things we would need for the task; training, equipment, people, expertise, money - which each can become seemingly insurmountable hurdles but are actually defensive walls put up to protect us.
- Illustration: In the film *Batman Begins* there is a moment where Bruce Wayne is completing his training and his mentor (who - Spoiler Alert! - turns out to be the villain of the film) guides their conversation to what he is lacking: 'the will to act'. In rediscovering righteousness in its fullness we may find the will to act.

Retreat to regulation

- When we lose our depth, our connection to God and our vision of his will and his Kingdom, we naturally retreat to regulation. The process is a gradual and subtle





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one that we see in Israel's history, in the New Testament Church, in the historical church and in our own movement's past. There is a clear and profound calling of God to move in a new direction.

- Over time, that direction is formalised, systems are created to enable day-to-day functioning, beliefs and practices are codified, and all of this is right and good. However, given more time some of these formalisations, systems and codices crowd out the original vision, obstructing what God intended.
- It takes real righteousness to break out of this. It requires this righteousness because to many others it will look like a dereliction of duties or outright dissent. But we can be encouraged because that is exactly what they were saying about Jesus as he healed this woman (vv 14-16).

Resurrection

- Resurrection never occurs without disruption. Often, the Saturday between Good Friday and Easter Sunday provides just enough of a gap for us to forget. But it is through disrupting the reality that is before us that we can see the new possibility that is waiting. That takes a lot of faith as it may require the death of something we prize.
- God has made a way, he has gone before. His resurrection was not designed to create a 'fire exit to heaven for the faithful', but to create a way for all to live fully. As Tom Wright puts it, Jesus' death and resurrection was 'the beginning of God's new project not to snatch people away from Earth to heaven, but to colonise Earth with the life of heaven'.
- In the original Greek it is plain and clear. When Jesus calls his disciples and they *get up* the word used is the same root as being *resurrected* [*anastasis*]. When Jesus appears to the two on the road to Emmaus and they *get up* and return to Jerusalem they too are *resurrected*. When Jesus placed his hands on this woman and she *stood up* she too was *resurrected* into new life (v 13). At these moments of righteous disruption people enter into resurrection life; into a new way of living that is full, close to God's will and rooted in his love.

Conclusion

Conclude with three challenging simple questions:

- What righteous disruptions are we creating?
- Are there regulations, rules, habits, routines that we are hiding behind that God is calling us out from?
- How are we introducing people to new life?





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Blessing:

If there is righteousness in the heart,
There will be beauty in the character.
If there is beauty in the character,
There will be harmony in the town.
If there is harmony in the town,
There will be grace in the nation.
If there is grace in the nation,
There will be peace in the world.
So, let it be.

