

JESUS HEALS A CRIPPLED WOMAN

Luke 13:1-17

Key Verses: 13:12-13

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.

In today’s passage, Jesus helps us how to view tragic events in life and how to overcome our fatalism. Last week, tornadoes in Georgia and neighboring states killed more than 20 people including children. Some people get cancer even though they don’t smoke and some people don’t. Some people are killed by drunk drivers. Life often seems unfair and this causes some people to become fatalistic. How can we overcome fatalism? What does Jesus say? Let us listen to Jesus!

I. UNLESS YOU REPENT (1-5)

In Chapter 12, Jesus reminded us that he is coming back. He told everyone to be dressed ready for service, as he will come when we are not expecting him. As he was finishing his preaching, someone brought him a horrible news. Look at verse 1. *Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.* Killing people while they offered sacrifices at the temple fits the reputation of Pilate we know. Galilee was a hotbed of rebellion against Rome. Galileans had strong feelings against the Roman occupation. Pilate probably tried to put down their rebellion by planting fear in their hearts. Some people came and told Jesus the shocking story with high emotions of anger and fatalism. Their countrymen were killed in their most sacred temple, and they couldn’t do anything about it. There was no one to help them. Perhaps, they hoped that Jesus would say something to comfort them.

Many Jewish people at that time were fatalistic. The disciples of Jesus were no exception. Once they were walking along the road when they saw a blind beggar. They asked Jesus, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (Jn 9:2) The disciples were not from well-to-do families. Looking at the beggar, they probably felt fatalistic about life. Fatalistic people have a habit of reflecting tragedies of the world upon themselves. Once, a beautiful 18-year-old girl was killed in a car accident. Then her family members became very fatalistic, thinking that more tragedy will strike them. The devil comes in through such fatalism and weakens our faith. Fatalism is not a light matter.

What did Jesus say to them? Look at verses 2-3. *Jesus answered, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”* Wow! This was not a politically correct answer. Jesus appeared to be insensitive to their suffering. This is not the kind of answer they expected from Jesus who was full of empathy for suffering people.

So why did Jesus answer the way he did? In summary, Jesus wanted them to see life and death with eternity in mind. Jesus is saying that everyone dies eventually. Some die by

accident and some die by sickness. Some die young and some die old. Some die rich and some die penniless. In truth, death is common to all mankind. People talk about different death rates among smokers, drinkers, and cancer patients, but I am sorry to tell you that the death rate is actually 100 percent. Therefore, we must have a right perspective of life and death. Everyone dies eventually. So the important question is what happens after death and how we live before we die. Jesus says in verse 3, *“But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”*

He continues in verses 4-5. *“Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them--do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”* Jesus brought up a construction accident that happened in Jerusalem. Eighteen workers were killed while getting a water tower installed. What a tragic accident! These eighteen laborers, who probably worked at a minimum wage, were crushed to death. Were they more guilty than the average person in Jerusalem that they suffered such deaths? Jesus said, “I tell you, no!” No one would think that the nine people killed in Charleston (SC) in 2015 by Dylann Roof during their group Bible study died because of their sins. Their deaths were tragic, as were the deaths of the construction workers. But to Jesus, their deaths were no more tragic than any other people’s deaths. The real tragedy was that some people died in their sins because they did not repent. Jesus said again, *“But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”* He was deeply concerned with those who would die eternally because they did not repent.

When the levees of New Orleans broke by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, more than 1,800 people perished. It was terrible to see the bloated corpses floating on the flood water. Given the gambling establishments and party culture of the city, some people were tempted to say that they were punished because of their sins. But we know that God’s punishment is not proportional to our sin. If it were, no one would be here today. There is no doubt some devout Christians died from the hurricane and some godless people survived. The manner in which we die is not a measurement of our righteousness. What is more important is our repentance through which our souls are saved. Jesus says, *“I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”*

Everyone dies. One hundred years from now, none of us will be here. The question is not whether or not we will die, or even when or how we will die. It is what happens after death. For those who repent and believe in Jesus, death will be like a sweet nap. We will wake up to be with Jesus in the kingdom of God. When Jesus was hung on the cross, there were two robbers on each side of him. They had done something bad, and now they were being executed. But in that sobering moment, one of them opened his heart to the Lord. He listened to what Jesus said on the cross. Jesus prayed: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk 23:34a). The man’s heart melted by these words of Jesus. How could Jesus pray for those who were crucifying him? This man made a decision right there and right then to believe in Jesus. He said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus told him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise” (Lk 23:42-43). We have the opportunity to repent as long as we are alive. But after death it will be too late. A few days ago, I read a bumper sticker that said, “Don’t wait for six strong men to take you to

church.” One should come to Christ while he or she is still alive. Again, the tragedy of mankind is not the physical death that happens to everyone. It is the eternal condemnation that comes upon those who refuse to repent. Jesus said, “Unless you repent, you too will all perish.” We can overcome fatalistic thinking when we believe that our life is in God’s hands. If we repent and believe in Jesus, we will be in paradise with him, whether we die young or old!

II. FRUIT OF REPENTANCE (6-9)

Jesus’ message, “Repent or perish,” was a serious warning. Some people were frightened. But others, perhaps the Pharisees, responded, “Hey, I already repented many times.” Jesus had something to tell them, that is, that true repentance produces fruit. Repentance is more than a lip service. To help them, he told them a parable. Look at verses 6-7. *Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’”* In this parable, Jesus compares the religious leaders to a fig tree. Like the fig tree in the parable, they were blessed with many privileges in the vineyard of Israel, but were not producing fruit that pleased God. The words “Cut it down!” refer to God’s impending judgment. They echo the message of John the Baptist who said, “The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire” (Lk 3:9).

However, in the parable, the caretaker of the vineyard spoke on behalf of the fig tree. He might be Jesus, given that John the Baptist and he preached a message of repentance to the Jewish community for three years. Look at verses 8-9. *“Sir,” the man replied, “leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.”* The point is clear. The religious leaders had a limited time to produce fruit. They must produce fruit or perish. What was the fruit God wanted? He wanted them to be shepherds of God’s flock, practicing justice and love of God (Lk 11:42). But the religious leaders failed to produce fruit. Instead, they were soaking up all the nutrients in the soil for their own pleasure. God would not allow this indefinitely. Their situation was like that of a tree before the lumberjack’s ax was already raised to cut it down. They must repent immediately and produce fruit, or perish (Lk 3:8).

This applies not only to the nation Israel and the leaders, but also to all of us. Christians must bear the fruit of repentance. St. Paul is a good example. He was once a very legalistic and ambitious Pharisee who was ready to kill Christians to advance his career ambitions. But when he met Jesus, he realized he was wrong. He admitted his sin before God. He repented. Then Jesus forgave his sin and the Holy Spirit began to work in him to sanctify his inner man. He became the most gentle and sacrificial shepherd for the early Christian church. He even embraced Onesimus, a runaway slave, with the love of God (Phm 10). We must ask ourselves, “What is the fruit of my repentance?”

III. THE MERCY OF GOD (10-17)

Look at verses 10-11. *“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.”* This woman knew firsthand what it meant to be fatalistic. Put yourself in this woman’s shoes for a minute. You are crippled. You are bent over like the hunchback of Notre Dame. You cannot straighten up at all. How would you feel about your life? About your future? Humanly, you cannot help but become fatalistic! That is, until you know that there is someone who can help you to change your life.

Jesus was teaching the word of God in the synagogue when he noticed the woman. As soon as he saw her, his heart went out to her. He knew that an evil spirit was behind her suffering. Some women are bent over because of osteoporosis caused by calcium deficiency. But Satan chained this woman to deformity for 18 years. Not knowing this, doctors blamed her for not drinking milk and not eating enough kale and broccoli. After a while, no one paid attention to this woman.

But Jesus noticed this pathetic woman. Jesus stopped his Bible teaching. Look at verses 12-13. *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.* Jesus understood her deep agony of soul and took up her burden. At the same time, Jesus saw the hope of God for her to be a fruitful woman of God. Jesus was ready to do anything to help her get well. So he called her forward. It was not easy for her to come. But when she heard Jesus’ invitation, she sensed his shepherd’s heart; she trusted him and obeyed. She came, step by awkward step. Then Jesus said, *“Woman, you are set free from your infirmity”* (12b). As Jesus spoke, the power and love of God touched her soul. She was released from Satan’s grip. But her body, which had been crippled for so long, did not respond right away. So Jesus put his hands on her and gently helped her straighten up. She felt a heavy weight lifted from her body and spirit. She could straighten up for the first time in 18 years. She could look up at God. She realized God’s love for her. She realized God’s hope for her to live a fruitful life. From deep in her soul, joy welled up and she praised God. People in the synagogue also praised God.

Jesus can also set us free from our own infirmities when we come forward to him by faith. Isaiah 53:4-5 says, *“Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”* Sin burdens our souls so heavily and cripples our spirits. The devil uses our sin to bind us as prisoners under his power. But Jesus died on the cross for our sins, shedding his holy blood to purchase our freedom. Jesus says to each of us, *“you are set free from your infirmity.”*

Jesus’ healing of the crippled woman was a joyful occasion. People were happy for the woman’s new life. But there was one man who was unhappy. Look at verse 14. *Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue leader said to the people, “There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the*

Sabbat.” This religious leader didn’t know the heart of God. He did not know God’s mercy. He failed to see the beautiful work of God in the woman. He was not a good shepherd. He was a legalist. He was like an unfruitful fig tree that drained resources from a fruitful vineyard.

What did Jesus say to him? Look at verse 15. Jesus rebuked him, saying, “You hypocrites!” Jesus did not say, “You hypocrite,” but he said, “You hypocrites!” Jesus rebuked not only the synagogue ruler, but also all the hypocritical people who were attached to the superficial religious formality and habitual practice of rituals. In order to awaken them from their hypocrisy, Jesus pointed out one of many inconsistencies in their life. Look at verses 15-16. *The Lord answered him, “You hypocrites! Doesn’t each of you on the Sabbath untie your 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?”* The religious leaders knew how to take care of their ox or donkey, but they did not care for a crippled woman. They were hypocrites. They protected their animals, even on the Sabbath. But they ignored the woman. To them, she was less than their ox or donkey. But Jesus saw her as a beautiful child of God. He called her “a daughter of Abraham.” With his eyes of compassion, Jesus saw this woman as a heavenly princess. She had been suffering for 18 years. Jesus could not wait one more day to change her life. He knew he would be persecuted for healing her on the Sabbath, but he decided to pay the cost in order to save this woman. Jesus is the good shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep.

Look at verse 17. *When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.* Even his opponents knew Jesus was right. Ordinary people were delighted. Jesus is the Messiah who sets us free from our infirmities so that we may worship and serve God.

In today’s passage, we learned that we should not give in to fatalism. Instead, we must repent and bear fruit of repentance before it is too late. We also learn that we must see women as precious daughters of God. Most importantly, we must remember that God desires mercy, not legalism. May God help us to experience the mercy of God!