

The Gospel According to
Luke

“Every Which Way but Loosed”

Chapter 13:10-21

Introduction

Quality of life is a phrase we’ve heard a lot recently. Terry Schiavo was repeatedly described as having a poor quality of life – as if that by itself were somehow a sufficient diagnosis to justify removing her feeding tube.

There are a lot of people less severe than Terry Schiavo who have quality of life issues. Maybe you are handicapped, either slightly or severely; or you are battling a long-term illness. At what point, using what standards, do you or someone else determine that your quality of life is so compromised that you should be allowed or assisted to commit suicide? Or that you should be killed, for your own and society’s good? We will be confronting cases like these more and more as time passes.

There is a woman in our story who had severe quality of life issues. Regardless the source or the course of her condition, she had for eighteen years been bent over and unable to raise herself. One author describes her like this:

She lived in a posture of forced humility, her face always toward the dust of the earth, unless she wrenched sideways and peered upward like an awkward animal. She seemed to sink lower and lower as the weight of the years pressed upon her. Her gait was a lunging shuffle. She walked about as if she were searching for a grave (Kent Hughes, *Luke*).

Yet, for all her suffering, her spiritual focus was upward. As difficult as it was to get ready, and to get around, she was in the synagogue. Apparently she was a regular worshipper, because no one took any special notice of her.

Her quality of life was first and foremost spiritual. Her physical condition was secondary. True – Jesus touched her and healed her.

But she was a worshipper long before she was loosed from her infirmity, and she enjoyed a quality spiritual life.

We live in a fallen world. Illness, injury, and infirmity will affect your physical quality of life. But you can enjoy a spiritual quality of life regardless your physical condition.

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 You Are Loosed In The Ways That Bring God Glory, and #2 You Are Loose In The World To Spread God's Glory.

#1 You Are Loosed In The Ways
That Bring God Glory
(v10-17)

If you've ever had back trouble, you know how difficult simple tasks become. You don't sleep well, because every time you move you wake up. You can barely dress yourself; every movement of your body hurts. You're exhausted before you even leave the house – if you leave at all!

The woman in our story had the additional burden of being deformed. It added a psychological component to her suffering, as people stared at her and whispered in hushed tones.

There was no handicapped access; no special seating; nothing to make it more comfortable for this bent woman to attend synagogue services.

It was about as hard as it could be for her to get up and go to the synagogue. Yet there she was, mingled among the regular worshippers.

There is one more important detail, before we begin to look at the verses. Jesus is going to call her a **daughter of Abraham**. To us, that is another way of saying she was a Jew. But it meant something different to Jesus. Once, in a discussion with unbelieving Jews, they claimed to be the sons and daughters of Abraham. Jesus said they were of their father, the devil! Only believers were true sons and daughters of Abraham.

Jesus used this phrase one other time, when He called Zacchaeus a **son of Abraham**. Zacchaeus was the short tax collector who climbed a tree to get a better look at the Lord. Jesus, seeing him there, invited Himself over for dinner. At the dinner, Jesus looked at Zacchaeus and said, **this day is salvation come to this house, for as much as he also is a son of Abraham**.

One short man; and one shortened women; were called the true son and daughter of Abraham.

We are certain that this bent woman was a believer when Jesus encountered her. She lived, as a believer, with her long-term infirmity. In other words, God chose to not loose her until Jesus was in the synagogue. She had suffered, as a believer, eighteen long years.

Luke 13:10 Now He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath.

Luke 13:11 And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise *herself* up.

The consensus of modern opinion is that she was suffering from an affliction called *spondylitis deformans*, causing the bones of her spine to fuse into a rigid mass.

We've touched upon the possible physical condition; what is this **spirit of infirmity**? Part of the answer comes a little later, when Jesus says she has been **bound** by **Satan**. Her condition, then, had something to do with the devil and his demons.

One more fact: She was not possessed, or even oppressed, by the devil or demons in a direct manner. We can say that because Jesus did not cast out any demons. He did not cast out a spirit of infirmity; He simply healed her.

All disease is the result of sin entering the world when Adam and Eve disobeyed God. Like it or not, we are all affected by the fall of our parents in the Garden of Eden. Then we can factor in that God, for reasons we almost always disagree with, allows the devil to afflict us, up to a point. This woman is a kind of New Testament version of Job

– a believer whom God allowed the devil to afflict up to the point of *spondylitis deformans*. It was a physical condition, attributable indirectly to Satan, that did not dampen her spiritual condition.

Jesus took notice of her:

Luke 13:12 But when Jesus saw her, He called *her to Him* and said to her, “**Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity.**”

Luke 13:13 And He laid *His hands on her*, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.

She did not come seeking a healing. God sought her. Calling her forward, the Lord touched her, and she was immediately, completely, made whole.

She **glorified God**. We take that to mean she attributed her healing to God, and gave Him a verbal testimony; and that is undoubtedly true. But I am reminded that, before she was **made straight**, she glorified God. There she was, a regular worshipper, attending services at great personal cost, giving glory to God despite her bent condition; despite her being bound for eighteen years.

Whether bent or straight, she was a worshipper. Had she not encountered Jesus that Sabbath, you get the impression she would have returned week after week, not seeking healing, but serving the Lord, until He took her home to heaven.

God chose to loose her on that particular day because it would bring Him a new glory. She would become a picture, a type, in the written Word of God for centuries, for people to read and understand how the traditions of men keep you bound, but Jesus ‘straightens you out.’

Luke 13:14 But the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath; and he said to the crowd, “There are six days on which men ought to work; therefore come and be healed on them, and not on the Sabbath day.”

We’ve talked a great deal, in past studies, about the traditions associated with keeping the Sabbath. God never said you could not heal or help someone on the Sabbath; it was one of the hundreds and hundreds of rules that had been invented which made the

Sabbath a crushing burden rather than the blessing it was intended to be.

Jesus performed seven Sabbath miracles. Seven miracles on the seventh day. God was showing the Jews that He was Lord of the Sabbath; that the Sabbath was made for man; and that their traditions were not in synch with the heart of God.

Luke 13:15 The Lord then answered him and said, "Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead *it* away to water it?"

Luke 13:16 So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound - think of it - for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?"

Luke 13:17 And when He said these things, all His adversaries were put to shame; and all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him.

The person who was truly bound in our story was the ruler of the synagogue. He was bound by ritual religion. All ritual religion becomes ridiculous at some point. There are no religious rites that can save you. There are no special prayers that can be offered; no consecrated substances, like holy water, that can affect you spiritually. All religion is bondage. You must be loosed from it and have a personal relationship with Jesus.

The bent woman was already loosed spiritually, already a worshipper. Jesus healed her so that her physical condition could illustrate something important.

In a personal relationship with Jesus, you glorify God in whatever circumstance He allows in your life:

1. You may be bound-up by some disease; but you nevertheless worship God, and bring Him glory.
2. You may be loosed – healed – at some point; if so, it is because God has determined it would be another way for you to glorify Him.

I do not like disease and death. I don't want to experience either. I always think that health and healing bring God the most glory! But I must subordinate myself to God, and to His plan for my life. That is

what this bent woman teaches us. We are loosed in the ways that bring God glory. We worship Him in sickness and in health.

Jesus cemented this experience in their minds by telling two little parables. In them we'll see,

#2 You Are Loose In The World
To Spread God's Glory
(v18-21)

Luke 13:18 Then He said, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it?"

Luke 13:19 It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden; and it grew and became a large tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches."

Luke 13:20 And again He said, "To what shall I liken the kingdom of God?"

Luke 13:21 It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened."

Seed is used by Jesus to represent the Word of God. It is being spread like seed as believers are going through the world. Wherever it is spread, it grows.

Mustard seeds are extremely small; but they can grow fairly large. The Word of God may not seem like much; but it is living and powerful, and it can take root and grow beyond your expectation.

Birds, when spoken of in conjunction with seeds, are something bad. Birds eat the seeds, preventing them from being planted and growing. In our parable, the birds are in the flourishing tree. It is a picture of those who would seek to destroy the kingdom of God from within it.

The Jewish religious leaders were like that. God had given them His Word – in this case, a simple commandment to worship Him on the Sabbath. But they had stolen it, perverted it, to a point where what God intended as a blessing was a burden.

Have you ever heard a flock of roosting birds squawking so loud you can't even think straight? Imagine the fourth commandment, about the Sabbath, as a beautiful, spreading tree. God intended it to be a shelter for you in the world – a place of rest and refreshment, as you

would sit under it, and meditate upon His goodness and grace. But the birds had lodged in it, turning it into an uncomfortable experience – a duty rather than a devotion.

Nevertheless, there were still true sons and daughters of Abraham. No matter the efforts of the religious leaders to pervert the Word of God, true worshippers still found their way in the kingdom of God.

Leaven is yeast. Yeast is almost always seen as an evil, corrupting influence. It's mentioned four times by the apostle Paul – all negative. The unleavened lump of dough represents a congregation of believers. When yeast is hidden within, it corrupts the entire lump of dough.

Again – The Jewish religious leaders were like that. Their many additions to God's Word spread through it like yeast in dough. Their hundreds and thousands of traditions inflated the simplicity of God's Word.

Nevertheless, there were still true sons and daughters of Abraham within their congregation.

Let's bring this up to date. **We** spread the seed of God's Word; **we** form lumps of dough – we call them fellowships, or congregations, or churches.

Birds lodge in our branches. From within the shelter of the tree, they seek to steal the Word from the hearts of believers – leaving them without growth, and without fruit.

There will always be corruption within; yeast will spread its influence within our congregations. From within the lump itself, hidden away, false teachers introduce principles and practices that lead to corruption and impurity.

The kingdom of God will continue to spread – despite all efforts, *even from within it*, to destroy it. There will always be true sons and daughters of God; there will always be those who have been born-again into the family of God.

The encouragement here is that we are loose in the world to bring glory to God:

1. The woman in our story was bound by infirmity, but **on the loose** for eighteen years, worshipping God.
2. Then she was **loosed** from her infirmity – again, to bring glory to God.

She could not be stopped from worshipping God – no matter her condition. It isn't that the eighteen years of suffering was worth it, because she was eventually healed. Those eighteen years were just as precious – drawing her closer to the Lord.

It is always a powerful testimony of God's grace when those who are suffering continue to give glory to God. Your suffering may be temporary; or it may be lifelong. Don't let it stop you from worshipping. Shuffle along and show others that life is spiritual, not physical.

You may be loosed from your suffering, if it can bring even more glory to God. If not, you will one day be loosed – when you depart this planet, leaving the shell of your body behind for heaven.

Applying the Word

If a bent woman could drag herself to synagogue, to endure the burdensome, even false, teachings she heard there; how much more should we run to fellowships where the worship of God is enriched by His presence, and His Word is enabled by His power?

If you suffer from some infirmity, it is for the glory of God. I can't explain how, or why, it brings God glory – anymore than the bent woman could have explained her situation.

If you are healthy, don't fail to give God the glory. Be among His worshippers as often as possible; be in His Word, both privately and publicly.