Setting Captives Free

Luke · Luke 13:10-17; Luke 4:18-19; Deuteronomy 5:12-15

AT A GLANCE

In the Luke series, Jesus enters his fourth Sabbath synagogue scene and enacts what he announced in Luke 4: liberty for captives. A woman bent for eighteen years is seen, called forward and freed, while the synagogue ruler, more compassionate toward his ox than toward her, shows he has missed what the Sabbath was for. The pastor calls hearers to seek Jesus' freedom and carry his mission to the overlooked.

- Luke 4 announces liberty for captives and Luke 13 demonstrates it: Jesus' mission is to move people from bondage into freedom.
- Jesus sees the people the world overlooks, calls them into the middle, and says 'you are freed', a word larger than healed.
- The Sabbath was always a gift of freedom for everyone, so those who guard its rules while ignoring bound people have missed its heart.

> *"We need to pray that our hearts would break for the things that break the heart of God."*

EXPOSITION

Scripture engaged

> Luke 13:10-17 — 10Jesus taught in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath day. 11A woman was there who had an evil spirit inside her. It had made the woman crippled for 18 years. Her back was always bent; she could not stand up straight. 12When Jesus saw her, he called to her, "Woman, you have been made free from your sickness!" 13He laid his hands on her, and immediately she was able to stand up straight. She began praising God. 14The synagogue leader was angry because Jesus healed on the Sabbath day. He said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come to be healed on one of those days. Don't come for healing on the Sabbath day." 15The Lord answered, "You people are hypocrites! All of you untie your work animals and lead them to drink water every day—even on the Sabbath day. 16This woman that I healed is a true descendant of Abraham. But Satan has held her for 18 years. Surely it is not wrong for her to be made free from her sickness on a Sabbath day!" 17When Jesus said this, all those who were criticizing him felt ashamed of themselves. And all the people were happy for the wonderful things he was doing. (ERV)

> Luke 4:18-19 — [18]“The Spirit of the Lord is on me. He has chosen me to tell good news to the poor. He sent me to tell prisoners that they are free and to tell the blind that they can see again. He sent me to free those who have been treated badly [19]and to announce that the time has come for the Lord to show his kindness.” (ERV)
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> Deuteronomy 5:12-15 — [12]‘You must keep the Sabbath a special day like the Lord your God commanded. [13]Work six days a week and do your job, [14]but the seventh day is a day of rest in honor of the Lord your God. So on that day no one should work—not you, your sons and daughters, foreigners living in your cities or your men and women slaves. Not even your cattle, donkeys, and other animals should do any work! Your slaves should be able to rest just as you do. [15]Don’t forget that you were slaves in the land of Egypt. The Lord your God brought you out of Egypt with his great power and made you free. That is why the Lord your God commands you to always make the Sabbath a special day. (ERV)

The argument

Jesus' Mission Is Liberation, Announced in Luke 4 and Enacted in Luke 13 — The fourth Sabbath synagogue scene is where the stated mission becomes a demonstration

He observes that this is the fourth time Luke has placed Jesus in a synagogue on the Sabbath, so the attentive reader settles in 'with the popcorn' because a show is coming. The first was Luke 4, where Jesus took up Isaiah and framed his whole ministry around freedom: 'He sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives.' Luke 4 describes the mission; Luke 13 proves it. 'Right at the heart of the mission and ministry of Jesus is this activity of seeking out those who are in bondage and bringing them to a place of freedom.' Stories of captivity turning to freedom draw us, he says, because the gospel is one.

> **Insight —** *Jesus does not merely teach about liberation; his declared mission is demonstrated in particular lives, so any hope of freedom must start with looking to him.*

Jesus Sees the Unseen and Names Her Freed, Not Merely Healed — The word he chooses reaches past the body to oppression, isolation and shame

The text does not say what bound her for eighteen years, and he does not pretend to know: possession, demonic torment, or simply life in a fallen world under sin's weight. Whatever it was, spiritual oppression showed up in her body; she could never really look another person in the face. 'She was exactly the kind of person that the world just writes off. And yet she's exactly the kind of person that Jesus came to bring freedom to.' Jesus sees her, calls her into the middle rather than a corner, and says, 'You are freed.' The word is not healed: freed from the disability, yes, 'but more than that', from spiritual oppression, social isolation and shame. Then, 'stand up straight', and for the first time she meets eyes face to face.

> **Insight —** *Jesus' freedom is wider than relief of symptoms, and his seeing is the doorway to it; we are invited to see, with the same dignity, those we routinely look past.*

The Quarrel Is Over Who Rules, Not Over What the Rules Say — Healing a daughter of Abraham asserts Jesus' lordship over the Sabbath

The ruler of the synagogue is indignant, not that the woman was healed but that it happened on the Sabbath. He notes that the Pharisees had catalogued 39 types of forbidden work, and healing is not on the list, so nothing Jesus did explicitly broke their rules. The dispute lies elsewhere. Quoting a commentator: 'The clash with authority in this situation is not over the rules, but over who rules.' By healing, Jesus declares himself rightful Lord of the Sabbath, the one entitled to say what it was always for. 'In this miracle, the purpose of the Sabbath becomes the purpose of Jesus himself.' The ruler, speaking to the crowds rather than to Jesus or the woman, is trying to take that interpretive seat.

> **Insight —** *Religious indignation at Jesus' mercy often masks a contest over authority: who gets to define what God's commands are for.*

The Sabbath Was Always a Memorial of Liberation Meant for Everyone — The ruler quoted Deuteronomy 5 selectively, and Jesus answers from the ruler's own practice

The ruler's line about six days of work comes from Deuteronomy 5, and he cherry-picked it. The same command extends rest to sons and daughters, servants, the sojourner, even ox and donkey, and grounds it in memory: 'You were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought you out.' So the Sabbath celebrates liberation and was 'always meant to be about freedom for everyone.' Jesus answers, 'You hypocrites', by pointing to their own allowance: you untie your ox or donkey on the Sabbath, out of basic compassion. 'Ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?'

> **Insight —** *Obedience that isolates one phrase of a command from the liberating purpose it serves has already stopped obeying it.*

Receiving Freedom Commits Us to Seeing and Freeing Others — Compassion must reach the people bound in front of us, not only what is easy to love

The ruler 'had more compassion on his animals than he had for this woman.' He recalls a mission trip to Bolivia fifteen years ago, where missionary friend Joe pointed out brick factories employing six-to-eight-year-olds for pennies a day, then said, visibly saddened, that some people give time and money to rescuing stray dogs. Caring for animals and creation is good, he stresses, but if it supersedes compassion for people made in God's image, 'we have completely missed the heart of our Savior.' So we look to Jesus for liberation, then take his mission as ours. 'Who in your life have you overlooked?' He closed by leading the congregation, eyes shut, through the story in the first person, inviting the Spirit to loose chains.

> **Insight —** *Having been seen and freed by Jesus, we are sent to see and free others, beginning with someone already in our sphere whom we have looked past.*

DEVOTIONAL

Eighteen years of floorboards. That is what her world was made of: the dust of the road, the grain of the synagogue floor, the hems and sandals of people who walked past without a glance. She set out early each Sabbath because the journey took her twice as long, and she had long since taught her body to flinch before anyone else could wound it. Then someone looks at her, and the look is different. It carries no snide remark and no quiet verdict, only compassion. He does not leave her in the corner or work the miracle in the shadows. He says, Come here. She hobbles into the middle of the room, exposed, and hears a word larger than healing: you are freed. Notice what is loosed. Not only a spine, but a whole life of shame and isolation, the habit of not being seen. The hand that touches her bent back carries power and grace. She stands, and for the first time in eighteen years her eyes meet another's, and they are the gentlest she has known. Behind her stands a man who would untie an ox but cannot imagine untying a daughter of Abraham. The Sabbath was always a memory of Egypt, of a God who brought slaves out with an outstretched arm. Whoever remembers that cannot guard the day against the very freedom it commemorates. What chain do you carry that you have called your fate? And whose bent back have you walked past?

Reflection

- What have you quietly accepted as your fate, a secret sin, a shame, an addiction, a burden, and what would it mean to be called into the middle and told 'you are freed'?
- Who in your ordinary orbit do you look at regularly but never really see, and what might it cost you to notice them with dignity?
- Where might you, like the ruler, be holding tightly to a rule or a phrase while losing sight of the freedom God intended it to serve?

Closing prayer

Lord, we confess and declare that freedom is found only in you. You are the great healer, the great liberator, and life is found only in you. We invite you into this space to do what only you can do: to bring healing, restoration and freedom. We speak the name of Jesus over our fears and anxieties, our sins and our shame, knowing that in his name there is power, in his face there is love, and in his hands there is healing. Spirit, come and minister to us. Break the chains, loose the bonds, and lead us into life.

FORMATION

One thing to remember

Jesus has already seen you in your bondage and called you over; look to him for freedom, then lift your eyes to someone you have overlooked.

This week

This week, read Luke 13:10-17 slowly once a day, and let Jesus' 'you are freed' land on one specific chain you carry; pray about it. Then ask the Lord who you have overlooked, and reach out to that person once.

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