

Bethel

Prayer Meeting Addresses

Number 16 The Crooked Made Straight

Reading: Luke 13. 11-17

11 And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself.

12 And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity.

13 And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.

14 And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them

therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day.

15 The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering?

16 And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?

17 And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him.

Address

These miracles of the Lord Jesus are exceedingly precious. Really, there are three things in them. First of all, they are a very wonderful display of divine, almighty power, that Jesus is none other than the Son of God. And then second, they are very gracious displays of divine compassion, divine sympathy. But then third, they are all sweetly typical of gospel mercies, gospel miracles, things that go on today.

Of course, this was a real woman and it was a real case; it was a real miracle. But we think what a representative she was of the Jewish church in its darkness and bondage, and how typical of the professing church of God today. But especially personally. Now I will tell you the right way to read the miracles and hear about them: not just something that happened a long time ago, *but you are in them*. You are that leper coming to Jesus: "If Thou wilt, Thou canst make

me clean.” You are that poor, blind man saying, “Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.” You are that distracted woman, “Lord, help me.” And here you are this woman with a spirit of infirmity. Now what was it? Well, it was a deep-seated thing. She had had it eighteen years. She was completely helpless. She could not set herself free. She could not do anything. She had not grown any better over all those years. It seems she had some crippling disease. We would say she was completely bent double. So what was it? She could not look up. Perhaps you feel like that. You are bent double. You cannot look up. She could not walk properly. She certainly could not walk straight. Her back was completely crooked. It was a desperate case.

A lot of the old godly divines comment on this point, that she was found in the house of God. How ever did she get there? But she was there, and not in vain. I suppose she was something like that old, lame woman who walked such a long way to chapel. “Well,” she said, “my heart is there already, so my poor legs will have to get there somehow.”

“And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. And when Jesus saw her.” Now that is a precious word, in love, in compassion. “When Jesus saw her, He called her to Him.” I have thought of our beautiful hymn: “Thou callest burdened souls to Thee, and such, O Lord, am I.” Well, she was a burdened soul, but the Lord called her, and He still calls these burdened, down-cast, bent-double, cannot-look-up souls to Himself. “When Jesus saw her, He called her to Him ... and He laid His hands on her.” Which means this: that somehow or other she got to Him. It must have been a stumbling walk, a clumsy walk, but she got there, and there must have been something secret that pulled her. Our old hymnwriter, Daniel Herbert, says, “‘How can I come?’ some soul may say, ‘I’m lame, and cannot walk.’” “Come boldly to a throne of grace.”

Well, Jesus called her and she came. How she came, we can hardly say, but she came. Something drew her. “And He laid His hands on her.” That is what we need, that gracious touch. It still has its ancient power. And with the touch there was a word: “Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity.” “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” “And immediately she was made straight.” She did not have a long period of convalescence, or have to keep going back to hospital. It was an immediate cure; it was a perfect cure. The Lord says, “I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight.” Well, you might say this was a crooked woman, but the Lord made her straight.

You may feel your soul is crooked. The Lord can make it straight. You may feel your circumstances are crooked. The Lord can make them straight.

Of course, there was all this moaning and complaining. Whenever God works, Satan opposes. These were religious people, self-righteous people, legal people. It is solemn when the legalists look on a new convert and find fault. But how beautifully the Lord answered: “Doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering?” You do not even keep a donkey shut up for the whole weekend without letting it go free. Now this is it: “Ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?” If they were to loose an ox or an ass, how much more important a Jewess, a daughter of Abraham!

But it seems more than that, that she had an interest in the covenant of grace and the appointed time for her body’s release and her soul’s release had now come, and Satan must be driven out, so there is this gracious *ought*. “*Ought not this woman*” – divine necessity. No doubt you have noticed so often in the life of the Lord Jesus these *musts*. “He *must* needs go through Samaria.” “The Son of man *must* be lifted up.” And this gracious *ought*. “*Ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?*” There was a miracle of love and mercy. There was healing of body and soul. The crooked was made straight. She can now look up, now look up to heaven, look up to Jesus. She can now walk properly. She can now walk straight. And her liberty was complete. “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”

Well, the power of the gospel, the power of the Holy Spirit’s work in applying the truth. Now may we know it as a congregation. May we know it personally. May we be helped to pray for it.

This address was given at Bethel Chapel, Luton, by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom, on Monday, 4th August, 2003

