

The Gospel According to Luke
Luke 13:10-17
Reading: Luke 13:6-17

Sermon #59
November 24, 2019

The Condition of the Heart

To Bear or Be Barren

At first reading this section in Luke's gospel account seems a little out of place. Luke has just shown us Jesus' words regarding the vital need for everyone to repent. Jesus has stated God's will for us by clearly saying, **“unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”** (Luke 13:3 & 5) Then, Jesus tells us a parable showing the fig tree that should be producing fruit but is not. Israel had been given such privileges and yet the people would not repent and would not bear fruit. However, Jesus in his mercy is depicted as the vinedresser and gives Israel one last opportunity to repent. Rather than turning from sin and turning to Christ and embracing him as the Messiah, they refuse. History tells us that the vast majority of this generation of Israelites perished without believing in Jesus as the Christ.

Luke shows us in this text today the difference between one who has repented and is producing or bearing fruit as opposed to the one who remains hard-hearted, barren and trapped in their sin. The theme of this morning's message is **“A believer's heart hungers for the Word of God and lives in submission to it.”**

We will begin by rereading the parable from last week because it connects with this morning's passage. ***Please open your Bible to Luke chapter 13 and stand and hear God's Word as David reads from Luke chapter 13, verses 6 to 17.***

Pray

Fruitful Heart

Luke tells us, as usual, Jesus is teaching. Verse 10 reads, “*Now Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath.*” Here is the Living Word of God teaching the written Word of God. Whenever Jesus taught there was a stark contrast between his teaching and what the people were used to. As is seen in Mark’s gospel, “*On the Sabbath Jesus entered the synagogue and was teaching. ²² And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.*” (Mark 1:21-22) Jesus’ teaching was very different from the teaching of the religious leaders or scribes for it was the truth of God and people recognized his authority. Earlier in my ministry life and experience, I consulted with and preached in many churches around the world and it shocked me that a number of these churches were not use to hearing the Word of God preached. The leadership’s hearts were cold to the Word of God and the people were not hearing God’s life-changing truth. One example is, I was asked to preach at my mother’s church to celebrate her 80th birthday. She had been an elder there for many years – which was a problem because she was not qualified and was an unbeliever. She believed in Jesus as a prophet and maybe as the Son of God, but she did not believe the Bible was the inspired Word of God, but that the Bible was merely the writing of men trying to tell people how to be good. My mom would tell me the Bible was filled with made-up stories by chauvinistic men. So, I preached a message grounded in the Word of God and after the message there was a reception to celebrate my mom’s birthday in their Fellowship Hall. The pastor sat down next to me and asked if he could give me some advice. I said, I would appreciate his advice. He told me I was to serious; I should use less scripture and more stories because it is stories people will listen to. I thanked him and he went on his way to visit with others. Awhile later he returned and sat down and told me

he was perplexed. He said, on a normal Sunday there was 2 to 3 requests for the tape of his sermons, but today there was over 40 requests. Without thinking, I replied, “It had nothing to do with me but with the power of God’s Word.” To which he also quickly replied, “No, I do not believe that is it – it has to be something else.” I sat there in disbelief. On the other hand, I have also preached in churches that have high regard for the Word of God and they preach the Word – in these churches their Bibles are open and the people listen for what God wants them to hear and live. This brings me back to the theme for this morning - **“A believer’s heart hungers for the Word of God and lives in submission to it.”**

One might ask, what happens when Jesus the Living Word of God teaches the written Word of God to those with repentant and believing hearts? Remember after Jesus’ crucifixion 2 disciples meet a stranger on the road to Emmaus, as they walked with the stranger, they revealed that they were sad because Jesus was crucified and they had hoped he was more than a prophet, they had hoped he was the Messiah, but now he was dead. When they reached their destination, they asked the stranger to stay the night – we take up the story in Luke chapter 24, *“When the stranger was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them.”*³¹ *And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him as Jesus their Lord. And he vanished from their sight.*³² *They said to each other, ‘Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?’”* (Luke 24:30-32) When Jesus taught hearts responded because he opened the Scriptures to their understanding and because of his authority. When the Word of God is taught it has power to change hearts and minds and people come to know the truth of God the Father and his Son, Jesus.

What we need to see in this section is that Jesus taught the true pure Word of God. Those folks who were believers loved it and were changed. Those who were

daily practicing biblical repentance were fixed on Jesus' words to reshape their lives. The end result was changed hearts and God was glorified. Luke continues by describing a faithful woman in the synagogue "who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself." The common practice of people then and today is when people have oblivious disabilities they are to be avoided – almost as if their disability is contagious. This poor woman could not straighten herself – so she was very good at looking down but it would have been difficult for her to look up. Even though she was faithful to go to the synagogue a demonic spirit had brought on her disability by binding her body. Because Jesus was teaching, I am sure, the synagogue was crowded and since this woman was bent over, she would have been hard to see – however, Jesus sees all and "When Jesus saw her, he called her over." I can see in my mind's eye the crowd parting to let this poor woman come to Jesus and when she arrives, by Jesus' spoken word he says, "Woman, you are freed from your disability" "And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God." Sometimes Jesus healed by his mere word, but often he healed by the authority of his word and touch.

Every time Jesus heals physically, he also heals spiritually. The physical is mentioned because it was what was visible and enabled the crowd to recognize the power of God in Jesus. These incredible physical healings are mentioned by Luke because as a physician they were of great interest to him. He knew that there were issues of muscles, tendons, and nerves involved and they were overcome and by the greatest of Healers. He knew the amazing miracle these healings were and that their purpose was to authenticate the deity of Jesus.

Jesus took the initiative. God always takes the initiative. She did not come to Jesus and ask to be healed. She was soaking in the teaching and Jesus saw into her heart and soul and gained her attention and called to her - come.

I wonder, what would her life have been like if she had stayed home from church that day? Many find excuses to miss church. She came even though it was not convenient and she was in pain. Why people come or do not come to church reminds me of Francois Fenelon who was the court preacher for King Louis XIV of France in the 17th century. One Sunday when the king and his attendants arrived at the chapel for the regular service, no one else was there but the preacher. King Louis demanded, "What does this mean?" The preacher replied, "I had published that you would not come to church today, in order that your Majesty might see who serves God in truth and who flatters the king." This was shocking revelation to the king. Back to the bent woman in the synagogue. I am sure it was painful for her to make the journey on the Sabbath to worship every week. I'm sure she would have been more comfortable lying in a ball in bed at home. She was in pain but she was hungry for the Word of God. It is often the difficult things in our lives that God uses to show us our desperate need for him and refine us and strengthen us so that **"As believers we hunger for the Word of God and live in submission to it."**

Let me be candid and ask, what does it take for you to decide to come to church or stay home? I think we can all learn a wonderful lesson from this woman's commitment to be in attendance. Look at what she experienced by being there that day and what she would have missed out on if she had stayed home. Jesus calls Christians to be in community; a community that lives the Word of God but also a community that loves, cares for and supports each other as we live in this broken sinful world.

If we look at the original language, we discover an amazing play on words – reading verse 16, “ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?” Satan **bound** her and Jesus literally **loosed** her. She was bent over by the oppressive weight Satan had placed in her life and Jesus straightens her and lifts her. Satan bound her physically and spiritually and Jesus loosed and straightens her both physically and spiritually. Is this not how it is for people today? They are oppressed by Satan and freed by Jesus. This woman is also a wonderful example of fruit bearing. For her at that time in her life her commitment to be in worship was bearing fruit. What a wonderful example of trust and repentance Luke shows us in this passage. She was healed from her illness and from her sin. What is her response? She glorifies God.

The Barren Heart

Jesus performs a miracle in front of a crowd and how does the ruler of the synagogue respond? Reading at verse 14, “**But the ruler of the synagogue, was indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath.**” Here is the heart of the unrepentant. This man’s heart did not burn within him as he heard the Living Word of God teaching the written Word of God nor was he humbled as Jesus followed his teaching with a miraculous healing, but rather, he placed himself in authority over God’s Word and wants to limit God’s blessings – he wants to be on control. He desires authority over those he thinks are worthy and those who in truth would worship him. When there is a miraculous healing, it is not about the healer but revealing the glory of God. Can you think of any churches or leaders that desire to be in authority over God’s Word? If one does not accept the Bible as the inspired Word of God, whether it was the scribes of Jesus time taking authority over the Old Testament or people today who feel they can take authority and liberties with

the Bible, the result is to place oneself above the Word of God. What a dangerous place to be! As Peter foretold, “false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.² And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.” (2 Peter 2:1-2) And, so it is. Jesus tells us, if we are true believers, when we read or hear the Word of God, we must immediately submit to it.

The synagogue ruler’s position gets worst as we continue in verse 14, because Jesus “had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, ‘There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day.’” There were Sabbath man-made laws but nowhere in God’s Law does it say anything about not being allowed to heal or do good on the Sabbath. Here Jesus heals this woman and she gave glory to God, but her glorifying God made the ruler angry because it was the Sabbath. One would think that the Sabbath’s whole focus would be on serving others and giving glory to God.

Both Luke and Jesus are portraying the lack of spiritual fruit of Israel, as this ruler is evidence of; for this ruler and the people had placed their trust in the traditions of men rather than God. The religious leaders should have been taking the truth of the one true God to the people of Israel and the people should have been taking the Word of God out to the nations, but they did not and they were not faithful to the Word of God. So, they were to be uprooted and burned and so history tells us they perished as unbelievers.

This unrepentant synagogue ruler rebukes Jesus. How could he do such a thing? How could he think he had the authority to rebuke the Living God? The answer is simple; because he did not believe in the written Word of God, he placed himself above God and he had no foundation to believe in the Living Word of God, Jesus, who stood before him. He just saw a man, who threatened his position. Therefore, Jesus quickly rebukes this unrepentant rebuker and those who accepted his leadership and teaching. “Then the Lord answered him, ‘You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it? ¹⁶ And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?’” Notice, Luke at the beginning of verse 15 immediately shows Jesus’ authority is reestablished as he refers to Jesus as Lord. Even though the ruler did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah does not change the truth that he is. This is still true today; just because someone does not recognize Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, does not change the truth that he is. It just shows that they are unsaved, unrepentant and want control of their lives. It is not that hard to observe the quality that their fallen sinful mind that seeks control brings into their life.

The real issue was that the ruler of the synagogue had placed a man-made tradition over the Law of God and over the need of this disabled woman. God’s law and her well-being were insignificant compared to the hundreds of years of man-made traditions and their man-made religion. Jesus says they are “hypocrites” – what did this mean at the time of Jesus? Truly it was an insult - meaning, one who pretends to be something they are not. They are sometimes referred to as “Two-faced” or having a “double tongue” or having “two-hearts”. This ruler and others claimed to be spiritual leaders of God but the truth was they had replaced God’s truth for man-made traditions and lies. Their real aim and purpose was to

secure their social position, power and wealth in a desire to be served by the people instead of serving others as Jesus did. As Jesus taught, “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

(Mark 10:45) A major reason they resented Jesus was because his teaching was so different than their self-serving religious enterprise.

This was a clear picture of Israel during the time of Jesus. Just like in the parable, where Jesus is the Vinedresser who shows patience and cultivates - after an extended time of patience by God; Israel, because it lacked spiritual fruit would be cut down. Remember the words of Jesus, “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”²⁰ Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.” (Matthew 7:19-20) My beloved, Jesus calls us to be fruit-bearers for his kingdom.

Jesus rebukes this unrepentant arrogant leader and those who followed him, saying, “You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it?”¹⁶ And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?” Jesus shows from God’s Word by referring to both Exodus and Deuteronomy that if an ox or donkey can be cared for, which is considered work, even though the religious leaders made an exception to God’s law, then how much more should this woman, a daughter of Abraham be healed on the Sabbath as an act of kindness and grace which is not work? The result of grace is she give God glory.

The Jews had made an exception to God’s Law, which God did not authorize, reading from Deuteronomy chapter 5, “Six days you shall labor and do all your work,¹⁴ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you

shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you.” (Deuteronomy 5:13-14) According to Deuteronomy the Hebrew people were to observe a strict Sabbath. No work at all could be done. However, they watered down this law to allow for things they felt were ok. The point is, they had determined that it was ok to water their donkeys but not ok to do good deeds and heal on the Sabbath. Because Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath he could serve and heal as God ordained. For 18 years this poor woman was unable to experience a Sabbath rest because Satan had bound her body with pain. So, Jesus takes the initiative and heals and gives her rest from her pain and suffering.

Jesus was also pointing to His Kingdom now present and coming as he, the Messiah, stood in their midst, He has the authority to determine it is right to heal on the Sabbath, for he is Lord of the Sabbath. The Old Testament Scriptures made clear to those who sought God through the Word that Jesus is the fulfillment of what the Sabbath had pointed to. The Sabbath was a Jewish ceremonial law to be observed weekly with the purpose of focusing on God. God had given boundaries for the good of the people and his boundaries were founded by love, grace and mercy. Taking one day in seven to seek union with God was meant to point the people to God and his coming Messiah who would usher in a day of eternal Sabbath and Jesus is that Messiah.

In the midst of Jesus’ rebuke, we are shown a picture of a man, the ruler of the synagogue, who was going through the motions of being religious but who did not bear any fruit. Our Lord rightly calls him a hypocrite. He pretended to be representing God to the people but the reality was he was keeping the people away

from God. With this in mind, here are some valid questions we should consider. “Are we, you and me, ever guilty of simply doing Christian things or going through the motions or pretending to be a devoted Christians but at these times the truth is - we are not bearing fruit? When you hear or read the Word of God does it warm you heart and enlighten your mind? Does the Word bring peace into your life? Does the Word feed and excite your soul? Does coming together with fellow believers to feed on the Word of God bring you joy? Is your belief in Jesus as your Lord and Savior – is this what defines who and what you are?

Jesus is telling us there is a difference between true repentance and submission to the Word and a life of bearing fruit verses a life of unrepentant rebellion against the Word. It is my prayer your life glorifies God and together we submit our lives to his authority. I pray this morning we have heard God’s Word preached and it bears fruit in our lives. Daily we need to examine our lives and repent where we fall short, coming before our holy God and receive his grace. May submission to the Word of God and continual repentance be the marks of our lives.

**“A believer’s heart hungers for the Word of God
and lives in submission to it.”**

Amen!