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The Hunchback of Religion

How embarrassed she must have been! Red-faced and blushing, a poor woman whose spine had been under the load of demonic pressure for more than 18 years had not asked to be brought in front of the crowd. And perhaps she was spared from seeing the reactions on the faces of the crowd gathered at the synagogue that Sabbath day. She had only known what the ground looked like. For these long years her back had been bent so that she couldn't look anyone square in the eye any more. There she was in the back of the crowd, where women would typically stand at a gathering at the synagogue, hoping to go unnoticed. Probably an outcast of the crowd.

Remember how the Jews of this time viewed suffering? Suffering was a sign of individual moral failure—and for those who were blind, lame, or lepers, they had better know their “place” in society—they were the banished ones. They were the ones who were spiritually despicable and unacceptable in common company.

¹⁰ Now He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath.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.¹² But when Jesus saw her, He called *her* to *Him* and said to her, “Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity.”¹³ And He laid *His* hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.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.”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?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?”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.

Luke 13:10-17 NKJV

revealing His healing powers both within and without, He had arranged for a display of His merciful compassion to be coupled together with combating spiritually damning heresy. It was He Who arranged to be at the synagogue on the Sabbath, and to call on this one from among many to become an illustration of the futility of men/people to dignify themselves before the Divine with anything other than sincere faith. Perhaps the bentness of this woman was a metaphor for the broken system that people use to scheme their way into Heaven. For all religion that denies the completeness of the grace of God to bring forgiveness to the sinner is broken, deviant and hopeless. All belief falls into two categories: 1.) That sinners can be saved through faith in Christ by grace alone or 2.) That sinners can depend upon their performance alone or also coupled with grace to give them a decent standing before God at His judgment bar. Religion, whether the religion of the Jews of that day or the religions that circle the globe today, are man's attempt to replace the necessity of God providing a Savior, a Messiah. **Christ arrived at this one of hundreds of teaching places of the Jews on the Sabbath, as He had done other times, to graciously dispel the conspiracy of Christ-less salvation.**

The leader of the synagogue stood to his feet and dared not face off with Jesus, but addressed the crowd, hoping to remind them that they had enough *without* Jesus. They had their “way.” The Jews had canonized hundreds of laws by this time that were designed to be a sort of checklist of righteousness. The Sabbath was to be a day when only necessary things were done, even when it came to taking care of animals. One codification of their law allowed for only 200 cubits of distance for an animal to be led from his stall to a water source. The water source was also to be limited in its measurements. Such painstaking rules were bending these Jews down just as much as the demons were bending the spine of this poor woman. **Jesus came that day to create conflict with this**

Jesus is equally un-intimidated by terminal diseases and spiritual darkness. In the wisdom of His ways of

system of man-made perfectionism—“religion.” Instead of the leader of the synagogue lifting his hands and rejoicing with this newly healed woman, he looked at her plight as less than what an animal would deserve. To them there was no need of compassion when you have rules.

Likely this miracle has struck a note of compassion in your heart. Perhaps you look at this indignant synagogue leader with disdain and contempt.

Christ’s rebuke to the leader gives us further insight into the nature of the real problem of the heart. Jesus had arrived to set straight that which was crooked (Luke 3:5). To heal not just the sick and the lame, but the lost soul (Luke 19:10). He had come to make it clear that no religion on earth could spare a person on the day of judgment before a holy God. No matter the keeping of the most insignificant rules of a religion *or* the breaking of a time-tested law of a religion; neither was included in the ultimate case of a person’s personal failure to look to God alone for His salvation.

Christ is the Sabbath—He is rest! He is *the* “rest” from the law of God that you cannot perfectly obey. No man can perfectly satisfy the judicious demands of the Holy One. Jesus alone provides pardon for the law-breaker. In this account from Luke, Jesus even dared to defy a religious system and its leader in order to demonstrate the transcendence of God’s laws of mercy and grace. Isn’t it ironic that One Who came as such Peace caused such controversy?

How do you deal with the peace that Christ offers? Does the offer of peace with God through faith in Christ alone create conflict in your mind, your heart...your soul? So it must! **You must have conflict and turmoil in your soul to come to the realization that you cannot save yourself any more than this bent over woman could stand erect!** You must then humble yourself in this conflict to acquire peace with God.

There are two ways to be humbled. The first way is to bow under the Lordship of Christ: believing that His work of pardon was enough for you to have peace with God. The second kind of humbling is really a humiliation without the reward of God. This is how the story ends in Luke. The leader and his peers were totally humiliated by

the response of the crowd who looked upon Christ with a great amount of wonder and joy because of this fantastic display of healing. No synagogue leader could do such a thing. To these people this was remarkable! But the leader(s) were humiliated because they knew what Christ had said was true...Sabbath was to be a day of mercy for those in need; there was no law in their books that prevented the helping of an animal or a person who was hurting (Luke 14:5). Christ was right, and they knew it, yet they would not bend their will before Him.

As you track the religious leaders of that day, you never find any of them denying the miracles of Christ. Even in the resurrection they did not deny it—they lied, but did not deny. **One simply cannot deny the truthfulness of Truth.** This particular day would further invoke their jealousy and rage that His way of salvation was in direct conflict with their Christ-less religion.

Is your “Christian” religion Christ-less?

LIFE APPLICATION:

1. What did Jesus start out doing at the synagogue that day?
2. What day of the week was it?
3. Did Christ purposefully create conflict?
4. How is the response of the leader like that of those who deny salvation is by faith in Christ alone and not by any works?
5. What fallacy of works-based religion is exposed in the leader’s response?
6. Why do some deny the exclusivity of believing *only* upon Christ for salvation as demonstrated in the humiliation and lack of rejoicing of these adversaries?
7. Is the believing on Christ merely defined as a “religion” or truly a relationship?
8. Are you a “member” of a certain religion rather than a follower of Christ? “Religion” cannot save—only faith alone in Christ alone can bring peace with God.