

Simple Events with Eternal Significance

Luke 13:10-21

Manuscript and Discussion Guide for February 19, 2023

Stephen Davey

Often, the “hinge moments” in human history aren’t noticed in real time. We use hindsight and retrospection to understand what moments in history have lasting significance, and which ones may seem important in real time, yet don’t matter in the long term. As Jesus prepares to give a final sermon in the Jewish synagogues, there is no fanfare, no high-ranking dignitaries. This particularly weekly gathering didn’t seem to have any extraordinary meaning. Yet, 2000 years later, we are still reading about this singular encounter between Jesus and an afflicted woman.

It’s interesting to look back in history and note some of the events that took place in the month of February—events that seemed small at first but grew into significance later.

For instance, 176 years ago, this month, Thomas Edison was born in Milan, Ohio. His invention of the lightbulb changed everything; today it allows us to sit here in an auditorium without windows for light.

He considered sleep a waste of time and instead mastered the art of taking naps whenever he needed; one of his most famous quotes is that “Genius is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration.”

On this month, 175 years ago, a peace treaty was signed with Mexico. For \$15 million dollars, an amount worth \$570 million today, the United States government purchased Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, Texas, and California. Not a bad deal.

194 years ago this month, an Apache Chief named Geronimo died. That became headline news.

110 years ago this month, Congress ratified the 16th amendment to the constitution, allowing them the authority to begin the process of collecting what they called “income taxes.” How many of you are thinking, *and that has made my life so happy?*

112 years ago, this month, Ronald Reagan was born in Tampico, Illinois. 112 years ago. How many of you are thinking, “that makes me feel old—I voted for him!”?

110 years ago, a black woman by the name of Rosa Parks was born in Tuskegee, Alabama. At the age of 43, she was riding in the back of a city bus, and when the white section was full, she was ordered to give up her seat; but that day she decided not to move.

Later, she would be arrested, she would be fired from her job, but her simple action that day became an inspiration that would eventually become headline news.

That same year, the Supreme Court ruled that segregation on a city bus was unconstitutional; they could sit anywhere they wanted.

When you look back through history, one small act—the birth of one little baby, the purchase of unexplored wilderness territory, one small invention, one act of courage—might have seemed small or insignificant at the time. Perhaps it was even ignored for other more exciting news.

If you had been living 2000 years ago, the front page news would have been all about the rise of Tiberius to the throne of the Roman Empire.

He would be given the title Caesar Augustus and would choose for himself his favorite title, “The savior of the world.” In fact, when he died, the empire declared him a son of the gods.

And when he died, his heir to the throne would have been front page news. Nobody would have taken any interest in the backwater village of Nazareth and a teenage boy named Jesus; nobody would have imagined that He was, in fact, the Son of God.

So, while the world was looking in the wrong direction, which it always is, Jesus delivers His first sermon in His hometown synagogue.

It’s a shocking sermon because Jesus declares Himself to be the Messianic fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophesy. The audience is so offended, they ask, “Is not this the Carpenter’s son? Who does He think He is?” In fact, they attempt to throw him off a cliff for such blasphemy.

And with that, the ministry of Jesus began, and at first it doesn’t make headlines anywhere.

From the outside looking in, He didn’t look like the Messiah. He was the son of a poor carpenter. There’s no story there, no front-page material.

Fast-forward a few years later, Jesus is about to preach His last sermon in a synagogue—according to the record of Scripture.

This is His last appearance in a synagogue, and once again, it doesn't make headline news, except for the impact in the lives of the people who have crowded in to hear Him preach.

We now arrive at that scene where Jesus enters a synagogue for His final appearance; we're now in **chapter 13 of Luke's Gospel account. Let's pick up our study where we left off at verse 10.**

Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And behold, there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself.

Luke 13:10-11

Luke is a medical doctor; he's using medical terminology that can be understood as either a severe curvature of the spine or the fusing of the spine.

Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, [A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament](#) (Regency, 1976), p. 181

He uses language that clearly indicates she's doubled over and utterly unable to bend back up.

R.C.H. Lenski, [The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel](#) (Augsburg Publishing, 1946), p. 734

Perhaps you've seen people in this condition, as I have: to walk is to shuffle along, face down all the while. Even a minor curvature of the spine will cause discomfort and pain and suffering; it's hard to imagine her suffering for 18 years.

You might have noticed that Luke attributes her condition to a disabling spirit. In fact, the Lord confirms that this is demonic influence, down in **verse 16 when He says**, notice:

"Ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?"

Luke 13:16b

Jesus refers to her here as a believer—a daughter of Abraham—that is, a true worshipper of God by faith in Him.

But this is the work of an evil spirit. She was not demon possessed, because a demon never speaks, and Jesus doesn't cast out any demon. But this terrible affliction is attributed to Satan's work in the world.

Bruce B. Barton, [Life Application Bible Commentary: Luke](#) (Tyndale, 1997), p. 341

While this wasn't demon possession, it is certainly demon oppression. Like Job, who was physically tormented by the demonic world, she has been suffering in this manner. Now be

Careful, not every illness is directly caused by demons, and we can't blame everything on the devil.

Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Compassionate: Luke 1-13* (Victor Books, 1988), p. 151

We live in a fallen world, and our bodies are fallen as well, and there are plenty of viruses and pathogens and bacteria that don't need any help from the devil.

Whether Satan is directly or indirectly behind an illness, the desire is always the same: he wants to defeat us and discourage us. But the Lord can use it to develop us and deepen us, and the good news is that one day He will deliver us.

But let's not forget that, at this moment, this woman is suffering.

If the mature and spiritually minded apostle Paul would pray three times for God to take away his thorn in the flesh—as he writes in 2 Corinthians 12:7—we can't imagine how often this woman would have asked God to heal her.

Eighteen years is a long time to try to get through life bent completely over. But don't overlook the fact that here she is in the synagogue worshipping God!

Warren Wiersbe writes transparently on this text, "If I had been crippled for eighteen years, I wonder if I would even come to the synagogue. She had prayed and God had not delivered her. The evidence indicated that God was unconcerned with her, yet she still, by faith in Him, did not grow bitter or resentful—here she comes to the synagogue."

Adapted from Wiersbe, p. 149

No doubt, when she arrives, she's the object of pity in this congregation; they feel sorry for her; they wonder why this happened to her; they wish they could do something meaningful to help her. I would imagine there were friends in this congregation who did indeed help her manage through life.

This may very well have been her favorite day of the week. And here she is, this Sabbath Day, demonstrating her *faith in God*, even though it seems that she's been *forgotten by God*.

He doesn't seem to see her; she's lost in the crowd.

Oh, she's about to be seen! **Verse 10** tells us that while He was teaching, He saw her. Let me tell you, He knew she was there all along. He even knew how long she had suffered.

Now let me slow down for a moment and let's reenter this worship service.

From what we know, Sabbath services were fairly fixed.

They began with reciting the Shema from Deuteronomy 6, declaring that God was the one true and living God. There would be various prayers, then readings from the Law and the Prophets; a paraphrase in Aramaic would be delivered for those who didn't understand Hebrew; typically, singing from the Psalms would be interspersed; finally, the sermon would be delivered and then the benediction.

Adapted from Clinton E. Arnold, General Editor; *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Volume 1* (Zondervan, 2002), p. 361

Now it was customary for the ruler, or leading elder, of the synagogue to invite a visiting rabbi to preach, and in this case, that would have been Jesus.

So, all through this service, through the reciting of prayers, listening to the reading of Scripture, the singing of psalms, this woman had been participating. Picture her, sitting bent over; her head at her knees, joining in worship to God; singing, praying, clinging to God in faith.

And from eternity past, the Lord has seen her; He has reserved her healing for this moment as a bookend to His Messianic claim, specifically in a synagogue.

So, as Jesus is teaching, He sees her in **verse 12**:

When Jesus saw her, he called her over ...

Luke 13:12a

Get this picture: Jesus interrupts His own message and calls out to her, "Yes! You, ma'am, get up and come here to Me."

Everything goes quiet; no one breathes; the only sound is her feet shuffling along the floor as she labors to make her way to the front.

Embarrassed? No doubt. Timid and confused? Only for a moment longer—**verse 12 again**:

When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your disability." And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God.

Luke 13:12-13

"Dear Lady, you are freed from your disability." The word for freed is a medical term from these days for "being released from disease."

That means the x-rays won't show anything anymore; the labs and bloodwork come back clean. She's "**released.**" The medical community today would call this a "spontaneous remission." We call it a miracle.

An incurable case is suddenly cured!

Now she hears these words from Jesus, "**You are freed from your disability,**" but the indication here is that for a moment, she doesn't move. She no doubt feels strength surging through body; the pain has suddenly disappeared, but she's bent over by years of habit.

She's still doubled over, but then she feels his hands urging her upward, and to her amazement, her body straightened up to her full height. Here she stands, graceful, head up.

Adapted from R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: Volume 2* (Crossway, 1998), p. 88

No doubt tears are in her eyes and others throughout this congregation, she's standing **straight** for the first time in 18 years.

The word Luke uses for **straightened** is a word used for the restoration of ruins.

John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Luke* (Kregel, 2005), p. 195

Sin and Satan have brought nothing but ruins, but the King is here; this is a taste of the King's power and the glory of His coming Kingdom; what has been ruined will be restored!

Well, she starts praising God and this audience, **verse 17** says, erupt with continual **rejoicing!** It's bedlam in here, I mean, this has turned into a Pentecostal gathering!

Many of these people who've watched her suffer **now join in** with tears and cries of joy.

That is, everybody **but** the religious leaders.

The leading elder tries to get everybody to settle down, this isn't in the bulletin, it's not part of the scheduled program.

Verse 14:

*But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, 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."
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? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?"*

Luke 13:14-16

They are more concerned with animal rights than human rights.

Adapted from Dale Ralph Davis, *Luke: The Year of the Lord's Favor* (Christian Focus, 2021), p.

The law allowed for them to untie their animals to get water to drink. They had added all kinds of restrictions to taking care of their animals on the Sabbath, but they found ways around their restrictions.

For instance, they couldn't travel more than 2,000 cubits, or about ½ a mile, from their homes on the Sabbath. But if leading their animals to a well would exceed that distance, they would build a little wooden hut around a well and call it their house for the day. Since the well was now technically their home, they could water all their animals without breaking the law.

Adapted from *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, p. 35

They found a way around the restrictions they had made up in order to free their animals to get a drink; but they weren't about to find a way around the restrictions so that this woman could be freed from her disability.

You see, Satan is still in the synagogue: she's been freed, but they're still bound; she's been liberated, and they're still incarcerated.

Imagine, this miracle has just occurred right in front of them, and this woman is now free, but they are still blind.

You need to understand that this is really all about the rejection of Christ, as King of a coming kingdom.

It happened the first time He preached in a synagogue back there in Nazareth; Jesus had taken the scroll of Isaiah and read these words: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim *freedom* to the captives ... to set at *liberty* those who are oppressed (taken from Isaiah 42).

And now, in His last visit to a synagogue, what has Jesus done? He has set this woman free!

This healing was a taste of His kingdom power.

Hughes, p. 89

Which is why Jesus immediately applies what they've just seen to His kingdom. **Verse 18:**

He said therefore, “What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden, and it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.”

Luke 13:18-19

You can't get any smaller than a mustard seed.



It's one of the tiniest of garden seeds, but in one season it can grow into a tree 30 feet high.

J. Dwight Pentecost, [The Words and Works of Jesus Christ](#) (Zondervan, 1981), p. 321

The opponents of Jesus are currently sitting in powerful places, but they will not stop the King and they cannot stop Him from bringing His kingdom one day.

Adapted from Darrell L. Bock, [Luke: Volume 2](#) (Baker Academic, 1996), p. 1229

It's just a little seed now; but when it arrives, in no time it will cover the earth!

I love the way my son, Seth, wrote on this text in his daily devotional in our Wisdom magazine; he wrote:

“This is no mere description of the coming Kingdom; this is a depiction of the King Himself. This is His incarnate life in a nutshell. The Sower sows *Himself* as a seed—unnoticed, ignored, rejected, trampled underfoot, then dying alone in the dark. But He will endure. He rises again through earth's dirt and depravity, against cold winds and cold fists—and in the end, He will tower across time and space, from lowest earth to highest Heaven.”

Adapted from Seth Davey, “The Giving Tree” (Heart to Heart, August 2022), p. 22

It doesn't look like much now, but just wait.

Now notice verse 20:

And again he said, "To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? It is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, until it was all leavened."

Luke 13:20-21

In other words, the kingdom of God might be silent, and unseen, but it's working from the inside out, and one day it will affect everything.

Hughes, p. 93

And by the way, this woman is making a lot of bread. That can be missed here—she's taken a little sourdough, a little leaven, but look what a little bit can do.

We're told her she's working with three measures of flour. That's a bushel of flour. That's 16 five-pound bags of flour. And by the time you add all the water, 128 cups would be the standard, you've got over 100 pounds of dough on your hands.

Davis, p. 242

Something small and insignificant is at work, on the inside.

So what do you have happening here in the synagogue? Well, this woman was healed; she was bent over but now she can stand up straight, but she's going to be easy to ignore.

This little synagogue service in the backwater of the Roman Empire, nobody will give a rip about it.

Ibid

This'll never make the 9-o'clock news.

Just remember, Jesus says **therefore**. This is to be expected.

The King is at work, but it's behind the scenes; it's at work in the hearts of those who believe Him and trust Him.

We don't amount to much; we're probably not going to be featured in the news unless we buck the politically correct nonsense of our generation. But for the most part, the world at large will easily ignore us and ignore our message.

But for the believer, just keep trusting Him as you find reason to rejoice in Him, because He—the King—has set you free as well.

What He's doing in the world doesn't look like much now, but just wait: He will one day return and establish His kingdom and it will reach around the world.

What's happening here in this synagogue might be a small event, but it has eternal significance.

If you had been alive some 2000 years ago, what would have been headline news?

What seemed significant and earth shaking at the time was, now in retrospect, not nearly as important as something else that was occurring out of sight and in some quiet corner of the world.

For instance, the conquering exploits of Napoleon would have been headlining news in 1809. Had there been television or the internet back then, the world would have been captivated by watching scenes from the battlefields of Austria as Napoleon moved to try and conquer Europe.

Nothing here in America would be deemed worthy of such attention. Yet that same year, in 1809, in the back woods of Kentucky, a poor farmer and his wife delivered a baby boy they named Abraham Lincoln.

Adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, *Growing Strong in the Seasons of Life* (Multnomah Press, 1983), p. 34

Who cares? How could that even matter!

But Napoleon would go on to become a footnote in the pages of history; but this little boy would one day liberate four million slaves with his declaration of freedom.

Such simple beginnings—with great significance.

What Jesus is doing here in this little synagogue is revealing that His kingdom seems small and insignificant now—and I must add—except to those who have been set free.

Do you think it mattered to this woman when Jesus looked at her and said, **“You are free.”?**

And you might have noticed that Jesus does not give us her name. To this day she remains anonymous, perhaps that's because the Lord wants you to write your name into this narrative.

Have you come to trust Jesus as your Savior and your King? If you have, these words are for you, for He has set you eternally free

Jesus said on one occasion, **“If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36).**

And not only set free but given a reserved place in the coming kingdom of our risen King.

And let me tell you, one day, **that** will be front page news!

© Copyright 2020 Stephen Davey
All rights reserved.

Access the complete archive of Stephen Davey's teaching ministry at
wisdomonline.org or on the **Wisdom for the Heart app**.