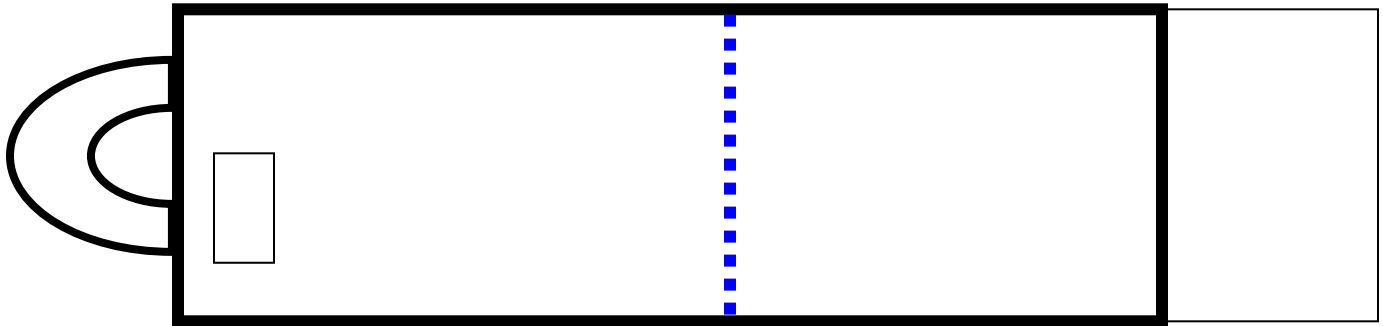


February 28, 2010  
 Matthew 12:1-14 / Luke 13:10-17  
 Using the Guise of Religious Zeal to Cover Cold Hearts

It doesn't take a very vivid imagination to picture the scene that Luke paints for us today:

It's the Sabbath (or for us, Saturday), and Jesus is teaching in a local synagogue. It's a synagogue outside Jerusalem, and thus probably a bit smaller than those inside the city walls (where the synagogues would have been a bit larger).

It's most likely a one room building, about 20-30 feet wide and 40 feet long — a little bit bigger (space wise) than this platform squared off. At the rear would have been a door, and in the front would have been a little enclave with something that resembled the Ark of the Covenant, in which the Scrolls of the Law were kept.



Near the front, and slightly to the left, would have been a raised platform, on which the person chosen by the synagogue ruler to teach that particular day would sit and teach (who in this case just happened to be Jesus).

An attendant would have brought the scroll to Jesus, and He would have read an assigned portion of Torah (one the first five books of the OT), and then read another portion from one of the prophets, before putting the scroll back into the Ark of the Covenant.

Then Jesus would have sat down on the raised platform, and shared a word of explanation and exhortation with everyone who had gathered there that day (who would have been sitting on blankets on the floor in front of Him). That gives us part of the picture.

---

The other part we need to know is this: In the synagogues of Jesus day, only the MEN would be in the front, near Jesus. The women would have been separated off in the back, as Jeremias notes, by "*barriers of lattice*" (or hanging cloth drapes) in the section that was designated specifically for them.

That helps us to understand what is meant when we are told in verse 12, that Jesus “called her forward” — from the back of the sanctuary, where the women were required to sit.

And what was He speaking about? Vv. 18-21 tell us He was instructing them on the nature of the Kingdom of God. Because after healing the woman and rebuking the synagogue ruler (with no indication whatsoever that they’ve left the synagogue) we read: ***“Then Jesus asked, ‘What is the kingdom of God like?’ ‘What shall I compare it to?’”***

It’s not a topic He just starts in on out of the blue (for no reason). It’s the topic He had already been speaking about / paused half way through His teaching time in order to heal this lady / and then returned to once again after the healing was done.

Yet don’t get the wrong idea. The healing didn’t interrupt Jesus message, it was part of the message! It confirmed and illustrated exactly what He’d been saying about the kingdom!

You see, as I’ve mentioned before, the term “kingdom of God” means “the rule of God” or “the reign of God” or “the sovereign authority of God” over evil, and the demonic, and sickness, and disease, and injustice, and lack of love, and everything that makes this world what it was never originally intended to be!

In fact, you can’t read the Gospels without seeing a notable progression in Jesus teaching about the Kingdom.

The Gospel of Luke begins with the announcement of Jesus birth, and in it the angel says, “He will rule over the house of Jacob, and His kingdom will have no end.” That is, He’s coming to establish His kingdom rule or kingdom reign! That’s was His purpose in coming!

Which helps us understand why it was that His initial message was to preach: ***“The good news of the Kingdom”*** ***In fact, when they tried to stop Him from moving on to other places, His response was: “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent!”*** (Luke 4:43 / 8:1/ etc)

Then, shortly thereafter His message changes slightly and He begins preaching ***“The Kingdom of God is near”*** (Luke 10:9-11) which is followed sequentially by the intensified declaration in Matt. 11:12 that ***“The kingdom of God is forcefully advancing!”*** (Like a fog bank moving in – it couldn’t be stopped!)

And then, less than two chapters ago (11:21), after driving out a demonic spirit that made a man mute, He declares for all to hear: ***“If I drive out demons by the finger of God (or as Matt. 12:28 puts it “the Spirit of God” ) then the kingdom of God HAS COME UPON YOU.”***

---

Do you see the progression? He will come to rule (angel) / “Repent because its at hand” JTB / It’s near (Jesus) / It’s forcefully advancing (Jesus) / It’s here (Jesus)! ***“If I, by the finger or the Spirit of God, cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you!”*** They should have all been rejoicing and cheering!

And the PROOF that the kingdom had come upon them (as Jesus points out) is that the supernatural power and divine, sovereign authority of God is being manifested through Jesus by healing and the casting out of demons. One has to be blind not to see it!

---

And what happens next in our text? As Jesus is speaking on “the kingdom of God,” with its power over all those things being manifested through His ministry and the ministry of all His disciples, a woman, in the back of the synagogue, behind the cloth that separates the men’s section from the women’s section, somehow catches Jesus attention.

We don’t know — maybe she heard what He was saying from behind the lattice work / or peered through the opening where they were joined / or did the unacceptable and actually nudged her way into the men’s section, driven by faith in Jesus words about the kingdom to believe that there was hope for her to be healed from the crippling eighteen year infirmity that had wreaked havoc on her body.

And I stress that she was a woman of faith! After all, Jesus does call her ***“a daughter of Abraham,”*** which could simply mean she was a Jew — though I don’t think so! Rather, I believe He uses it in the NT sense where, Abraham is called “the father of all who believe.” The father of people who have a faith like he did.

It was Jesus way of saying that here was a woman who believed in the power and promises of God, just like Abraham did! Not simply a person with Jewish blood running through her veins (which does little or nothing for anyone!), but a person who had faith like that of Abraham.

If we’re interpreting His words right, apparently Jesus could tell that this lady believed His message about the kingdom, and not only yearned to be delivered from her ***“spirit of infirmity,”*** but had the faith to believe Jesus would (she had confidence in Christ)!

Most likely she was NOT an elderly lady – since Luke makes a point to tell us her condition was brought on by “a spirit of infirmity.” It was not something she was born with, and it was too severe to be anything brought on by the normal process of aging or osteoarthritis.

Which is why JESUS attributes it to Satanic origin, and LUKE (who was a medical doctor) stresses it was an abnormal or unnatural condition caused by a “spirit of infirmity.” It would be better, then, to picture this woman being in her 40’s or 50’s at most, which would have made it all the more unnatural for her to be bent over in that way at her age.

---

And Jesus, seeing this woman of faith, *“whom Satan had kept bound for eighteen long years”* (probably with a cane, since she was literally (in the Greek) *“bending double”* or *“doubled over”* and unable to stand erect ) pauses from His teaching about the inbreaking power of the Kingdom, and “calls her forward” to experience the power of that kingdom — to her great surprise, and surely to the great surprise of everyone else who was present!

---

After all, that gesture by itself would have raised some pious eye-brows, since women were not supposed to enter the men’s section of the synagogue, during the time when the Scriptures were being explained.

And He waits for her to make her way down to the front, despite the obvious difficulty she would have had in walking forward, and the time it would have taken for her to get there ( locked as she was in that doubled over position like the Hunch-back of Notre Dame / and probably peering from side to side as she made her way forward, wondering what the men were thinking of her being in their section).

And when she gets there, He says to her with a singled-minded, undoubting authority: *“Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.”* And then, after that, *“He put His hands on her,”* we are told, *“and immediately she straightened up and praised God.”*

---

And you can just picture the scene! People aghast! People amazed! People stunned and yet *“delighted with all the wonderful things He was doing”* (v. 17).

In fact, everyone ends up rejoicing with her — except (sadly enough) the pastor (synagogue ruler or the president)! He becomes indignant that Jesus had the audacity to heal someone on the Sabbath (v. 14) — a reaction made even more shocking, since as Jesus points out, they made exceptions for animals but wouldn’t for this woman!

So what do we have? **FIRST**, we have Jesus the consummate Teacher (the teacher who surpasses all other teachers) speaking on the inbreaking power and supernatural authority of the kingdom of God over evil, and Satan, and sickness and disease / stopping in the middle of His message to give everyone present a vivid display of the power and authority of the kingdom He was speaking about / and, then, after the healing is done and the synagogue ruler has been rebuked for his cold-hearted concern that Jesus has violated the Sabbath, we have Jesus returning back to His teaching on the nature of the Kingdom of God, as He asks them (in light of the miracle that has just happened): *“What is the kingdom of God like?” “What shall I compare the Kingdom of God to?”* (vv. 18-21)

And this time, I assure you, if He didn't have everyone's rapt and undivided attention before, He does now! The air in that place is electrified with the sense of God's presence.

It gives us a clue, perhaps, of the type of thing Paul was referring to when he would later write in Romans 14:17: *“The kingdom of God in not a matter of eating and drinking* (that is, undue concern about dietary laws or in this case, Sabbath violations) *but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”*

---

Which brings me to the **SECOND** thing I need to address this morning: The fact that I struggled with where to go next with this message. Because as I prepared, I felt very strongly (and I still do) that so often we make the faith something we talk about or discuss, rather than something we experience or do.

Which is why Jesus example here is so intriguing. Because He not only talked about it, He did what He talked about! He not only spoke about the inbreaking power of the kingdom, He gave them a visible and unforgettable display of its power!

It was instruction made real by doing the very thing He taught about! So much so that everyone there that day went home convinced the redemptive power of the kingdom of God was breaking in upon this present age — because they'd seen it, not just heard a lecture about it!

That's what I wrestled with: We tend to talk about the faith, we don't do the faith. We hear about it but hesitate to do it! And thus, as the week went by, I waffled back and forth. **WHY?** Because I felt the only appropriate way to handle a text such as this, is to pause and do what Jesus did. And the reason I waffled back and forth, is because it's just not me!

It IS like me to declare to you the good news of the kingdom, and tell you that it's power has broken in upon this present age through the person and work of Jesus the King, and the presence of His emissary, the Holy Spirit.

But it's NOT at all like me to stop in the middle of a message, and invite any of you who are here today struggling with illness or disease or physical afflictions, to come forward for prayer, so we can lay hands on you for the healing of those things — in the name of Jesus the king.

In fact, it was so unlike me to even think of doing it, that I felt it had to be from God! So I told Randy of my intentions, only to start to wondering — “But what if...” / What if no one comes forward? / What if someone does, and nothing happens?

Or what if something does happen, but we have someone in the service who's a rule enforcing traditionalist (like the synagogue ruler) and makes a scene because we deviated from the normal sermon time to actually do what the Gospels encourage us to do – believe that the kingdom of God has broken in upon this present age through Jesus, and then step out in faith to live and act as if we believe it's actually true!

---

Which brings me to the LAST thing I need to point out. Too often (and I'm as guilty of this as anyone) all we as Christians do is talk about how JESUS healed or talk about how the APOSTLES healed — as if it's all a past, done, finished and thus irrelevant to us today type of thing — except to give us reasons to believe He was the Christ.

For most Christians, Jesus miracles were simply “signs,” attesting to the fact that He was the Son of God and nothing more. And that's true — that was one of their functions. But it's not all they attested to! Because as I've tried to show you this morning (from one text after another after another) they were also evidences or proof that the eternal kingdom of Christ had broken in upon this present age – and begun to beat back the forces of sin, and evil, and injustice, and sickness, and infirmity and Satan!

Yet when I've pointed this out to people, some have said to me: *“But the KINGDOM (with its power and authority over sin, evil and sickness and Satan) can't be present if the KING is not present!”* (Adding, that since the KING ascended into heaven, that's where the KINGDOM is, and will remain until Christ returns!)

Yet such a statement reveals a misunderstanding of the New Testament teaching on the Trinity, which assures us that where the Holy Spirit is, the Spirit of Christ is, and where the Spirit of Christ is, the King is, and where the King is, His Kingdom power and authority are — power to heal / and strengthen / and restore to wholeness / and convert / and make new / and bring to repentance / and mend / and uplift / and encourage / and sanctify / and edify!

To say the **KINGDOM** is not present, because **JESUS** is not physically present, is to misunderstand Jesus purpose in sending the Holy Spirit, for he who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit is indwelt by the Spirit of Christ (Rom. 8:9-11).

**LISTEN:** *Where One of the persons of the Trinity is, all the persons of the Trinity are, because we believe in ONE GOD, comprised of THREE INDIVISIBLE persons or personalities — not three distinct and divisible deities!*

You can't divide or separate the persons of the Trinity without rejecting the Christian belief that *"The Lord our God, the LORD is One."* One indivisible God!

So, as much as it goes against everything in me, I'm going to do exactly what Jesus did: Stop my instruction on the kingdom of God / and invite anyone here, who would like to come forward for the healing of any affliction, to do so (even long-standing ones).

**WHY?** Because it's NOT about comfort or discomfort in me / or you / or anyone else! Its about JESUS! It's about having confidence in Christ! It's about believing WHAT JESUS SAID and DOING WHAT HE DID (and HAS COMMISSIONED US TO DO)!

It's about **doing** evangelism, not just talking about it! / It's about **doing** missions not just talking about it! / It's about **praying** for healing, not just talking about it! / It's about **feeding** the hungry, not just talking about it!

So come, sons and daughters of Abraham!  
 The verbal message is done.  
 Let's get on to the visible message!  
 The King is present. Let's do the work of the Kingdom!