**YOU ARE SET FREE FROM YOUR INFIRMITY**

July 19, 2015

Luke 13:1-17

Key Verse 13:12-13 “When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, ‘Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.’ Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.”

Thank God for blessing 2015 Canadian summer Bible conference abundantly. We learned faith that pleases God. Personally I learned that faith that pleases God is fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith. In today’s passage Jesus deals with the fatalism of fallen men. When problems arise, we immediately interpret them as God’s punishment. Jesus urges us not to dwell in a sense of punishment. Instead, we must repent sincerely and bear fruit to God. Jesus teaches not only through his words, but with a demonstration of his love and power by healing a crippled woman on the Sabbath. Jesus came to set us free from our infirmities so that we may worship and serve God forevermore. May God help us to repent and hear the life-giving word, “You are set free from your infirmity.”

I. Repent or perish (1-9)

Look at verse 1. “Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.” The Jews lived under an oppressive Roman governor named Pilate who was known for being ruthless and cold-hearted. He would later be known for crucifying Jesus Christ. Here, he appears to murder some innocent Galileans as they went to the temple to offer sacrifices and worship God. Later in verse 4 Jesus will tell us more about their present time when eighteen people died when the tower in Siloam unexpectedly fell on them. They too appear to be innocent victims of a terrible tragedy. Jesus’ time was marked by injustice, suffering and tragedy. It sounds a lot like our present time. Many people die unjustly under the rule of dictators like Mugabe, Kim Jong-Il, or Burma Junta. Those who came to Jesus probably shook their heads as they told Jesus of this tragedy. Maybe they shed tears as they heard the news or watched in stunned silence as they witnessed the tower falling on innocent women and children. They might have expected Jesus to feel sorrowful or to explain why God punished those Galileans.

How did Jesus respond? Look at verses 2-3. “Jesus answered, ‘Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.’” Here Jesus tells us how to see the tragic things that happen in the world. As a great theologian said, “‘In effect what Jesus was saying was this: ‘You people are asking the wrong question. You should be asking me, ‘Why didn’t that tower fall on my head?’ Jesus rebuked the people for putting their amazement in the wrong place. In two decades of teaching theology I have had countless students ask me why God doesn’t save everybody. Only once did a student come to me and say, “There is something I just can’t figure out. Why did God redeem me?” What a sinful tendency to think we all have some redeeming qualities, thus deserve to be included into heaven! We come to expect God to be merciful. From there we demand it. When it is not forthcoming, our response is anger against God “It isn’t fair.” We soon forget that with our first sin we have forfeited all rights to the gift of life. That I am drawing breath this morning is an act of divine mercy. God owes me nothing. I owe him everything. Every tragedy is a reminder that judgment day for all of us is coming closer. There is no one innocent before a holy God. One day it’ll all end, we’ll face a holy God and no excuse will matter then. Repent or you too will perish!”

When something unfortunate happens, we must not sit down in fatalism. We must repent. It may seem hard to repent when we are sorrowful or grieving because of misfortune. But it is the way to receive God’s help and to have spiritual victory. When we repent and turn to God, we can overcome self-centered thinking. God opens our hearts and minds to have his perspective on things. Most of all, he forgives our sins and gives us his love in our hearts so that we do not suffer from doubt or from gloomy speculation. He protects us from the devil and gives us the wisdom and courage to work things out.

The night before the summer Bible conference, M. Paul Chang called me and said that his father passed away that evening. His father had been healthy, and so his death was sudden. He and his family had to attend the funeral of his father. It threw everything into chaos. M. Pauline Chang could not share her life testimony. Several members of Hamilton UBF who were supposed to lead the group Bible study had to be replaced. I could have fallen into despair. But God gave me his word several weeks before, namely, Isaiah 9:6, “The government will be on his shoulders.” I became convinced that Jesus himself would carry the burden of the conference.” Everything was rearranged calmly. God also gave me wisdom to replace Pauline Chang with Grace Hong. Pauline Chang shared her memoir in place of Grace Hong last year at Canada night because Grace Hong’s mother-in-law passed away. So it seems appropriate that Grace Hong would share in place of Pauline Chang. After the conference was over, we heard the news that Kinsley’s sister was drowned in Calgary, and Calvin’s father was in jail. It seemed that Satan was so jealous of the work of God and was trying to intimidate us. But Kingsley had the glorious resurrection hope from the conference. We learned later that Calvin’s father had been released.

Jesus helps to explain how to really repent by telling us a parable. Look at verses 6-9. “Then he told this parable: ‘A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil? ‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’”

Through this parable we can see that repentance is responding to the love and care of Jesus and the mercy of God on our lives. In this parable, we are the fig tree who fails to bear fruit in keeping with the will of the owner God himself. Jesus is the caretaker who intercedes on our behalf and gets us a break from the punishment we deserve. Notice how he nurtures the fig tree, digs around it and fertilizes it. All the fig tree has to do is to respond and bear the fruits of repentance. As Andy Stumpf said at the conference, repentance means to go up to Penthouse. “Re” means “Back” and “Pent” means “To the top like penthouse.” Instead of remaining in the gutter in despair, and complaining about the smell, it is to respond to God’s call to go up to the penthouse where God dwells.

When we come to Jesus, he becomes our advocate, our lawyer who stands beside us and pleads our case before the Almighty God. Notice he begs the owner to give this unfruitful tree another chance. By doing this he is in effect linking his future, his salary, his livelihood with the fruitfulness of this tree. He was taking a risk on this tree. He could have cut it down and planted something guaranteed to bear fruit. If you looked at this tree’s past, there was nothing but failure. But he cares for this tree so much that he is willing to risk his future for it. In effect he is saying to the owner, don’t look at this tree’s past; Don’t look at the three unfruitful years; Don’t look at the many failings and fallings; Don’t look at those three years but look at its future. Give it one more year. God is willing to look beyond my past mistakes, look beyond those times I rejected Him and neglected Him, look past those times when I was fruitless and faithless. Verse 9 says, “If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.” One day everyone will be called to give an answer for his or her deeds. God is going to call us to give account. One day God will have to say enough is enough for some people. May we respond to Jesus’ love and hope for each of us by bearing the fruit of repentance.

II. Jesus sets us free (10-17)

Look at verses 10-11. “On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all.” Luke says that this woman had been crippled by a spirit. Her body was crippled so that she could not straighten up at all. But worse, her inner person was crippled, bound by the power of the devil. She could not look up at God. She could not praise God or worship God. She had no hope or vision to be useful and productive. She could only look at the ground in resignation and groan in deep fatalism. She must have asked, “Why did this happen to me?” She had been in this condition for a long 18 years. No one had paid attention to this woman.

But Jesus noticed this woman. Look at verse 12a. “When Jesus saw her, he called her forward…” The moment Jesus saw her, he stopped teaching and paid full attention to her. He understood her deep agony of soul and took up her burden. So he called her forward. It was not easy for her to come forward to show others her ugly condition. But when she heard Jesus’ invitation, instead of remaining in her miserable situation and despair, she responded to Jesus’ call. She came, step by awkward step. Then Jesus gave life-giving word, “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.” As Jesus spoke, the power and love of God touched her soul. She was released from Satan’s grip. But her body, which had been crippled for so long, did not respond right away. So Jesus put his hands on her and gently helped her straighten up. She felt a heavy weight lifted from her body and spirit. She could straighten up for the first time in 18 years. She could look up at God. She realized God’s love for her. She realized God’s hope for her to live a fruitful life. From deep in her soul, joy welled up and she praised God. People in the synagogue also praised God. Heaven rejoiced and angels sang.

Here we learn that Jesus is the Messiah who sets us free from our infirmities. Isaiah 53:4-5 says, “Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.” Sin burdens our souls so heavily and cripples our spirits. The devil uses our sin to bind us as prisoners under his power. But Jesus died on the cross for our sins, shedding his holy blood to purchase our freedom. Jesus says to each of us, “You are set free from your infirmity.” Praise Jesus!

However, someone was not happy. It was the synagogue ruler. He felt that Jesus ignored his synagogue rules. So he tried to assert his authority by saying, “There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.’” This synagogue ruler who probably knew this woman for most or all of her eighteen years does not say one word of praise or thanksgiving for her healing. Instead, his cold heart, lack of compassion and hypocritical life are revealed. If he himself was crippled for 18 years, he would not have minded on which day he was healed. Furthermore, he was ignorant of the Bible. As we studied in the book of Joshua, the Israelites conquered Jericho on the Sabbath. They marched around Jericho by carrying their swords and destroyed everything in Jericho except Rahab’s family and burned Jericho. This shows that the Sabbath is the day to rest from our own work and do God’s work.

Look at verse 16. “Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for 18 long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?” Jesus was not breaking the Sabbath by healing this woman. He was fulfilling the true meaning of the Sabbath by doing God’s work. Jesus had great love and respect for this woman. He calls her “a daughter of Abraham.” It was because she had faith in the Messiah, like the faith of Abraham. Out of his shepherd’s love, Jesus would not allow her to be bound even one more minute. Jesus set her free from bondage and enabled her to praise God and serve God. Jesus knew he would be persecuted for healing her on the Sabbath, but he decided to pay the cost in order to save this woman. Jesus is the good shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep.

In this passage Jesus teaches us not to give in to fatalism. Instead of remaining in the gutter and despair, we should hear Jesus’ life-giving word, “You are set free from your infirmity.” Then Jesus sets us free from our infirmities to worship and serve God now and forevermore.