



JESUS HEALS A DEMONIZED WOMAN

Part 58 of Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Luke 13:10-21 | January 16, 2011

Luke 13:10-21

¹⁰ Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. ¹¹ And there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. ¹² When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your disability." ¹³ And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God. 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." ¹⁵ 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?" ¹⁷ As he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame, and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him.

¹⁸ He said therefore, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? ¹⁹ 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."

²⁰ And again he said, "To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? ²¹ It is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, until it was all leavened."

INTRODUCTION

Alrighty, Mars Hill, we're taking about two years to go through the Gospel of Luke on journey with Jesus. Today, we're in Luke 13:10-21, where Jesus heals a demonized woman, and what we're going to do is study the Bible together, but as you're finding your place in your Bible or on your app, I have one quick, big announcement and that is about some training opportunities that are forthcoming that we wanted to make known to you.

MARS HILL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Let me explain a little bit of how everything works here. There's Mars Hill Church, which is nine campuses. And by God's grace, every campus is growing and we've had a great last year and we're off to a good start this year. And then beyond that is the Acts 29 Church Planting Network that is actually housed here out of Mars Hill Church and we give 10 percent of all of our dollars to it, and it involves us in church planting with other churches around the U.S. and world. We're planting in thirteen nations, opening churches, and also we're right on the cusp of planting the four hundredth church in the United States of America in just a few short years. Over one hundred thousand people a Sunday in those churches collectively and we rejoice in that.

And then beyond that, there's the Resurgence, which also runs out of Mars Hill, and it is our way of serving even beyond Mars Hill Church and the Acts 29 churches to any and all Christian leaders, churches, and ministries who would avail themselves of our resources globally. At theresurgence.com, we've got the blog, which is one of the most trafficked Christian blogs on the Internet. We also publish books, lots of books. The next two that'll be forthcoming in the ensuing few weeks are by Pastor Mike Wilkerson, *Redemption*, on our redemption curriculum for those who are abused and addicted, and also by Pastor Justin Holcomb. Dr. Justin Holcomb and his wife, Lindsey, are really excited to release *Rid of My Disgrace*, which is a book for sexual abuse victims, which is a big part of what we do. In addition, there's Re:Sound, which is music. There are also conferences that we host around the country. One is forthcoming in February, for example, in Orlando. And in addition to all of that, we have Re:Train, which is a graduate-level theological education school that is accredited by a few seminaries.

And adding to that, we are now debuting the Mars Hill Leadership Program, which is our equivalent of an undergrad series of classes, where we bring in world-class professors to teach and to train you. So there's a lot going on. The Mars Hill Leadership Program debuted in Albuquerque last fall, and we're bringing it to Seattle to the campus of the Mars Hill University District, forthcoming in just a few weeks.

So let me tell you about those classes briefly. On January 22, Pastor Bill Clem, the campus pastor here at Ballard, will be lecturing on what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. His book is also coming out on that subject later this year. He's finished it and it's off to the printer. These are a succession of classes on Saturdays. They'll just go for that one day and they are very inexpensive. We encourage you all to take them, whether you're a community group leader, redemption group leader, wanting to grow in your faith, new Christian, and/or even homeschool moms, or dads who want to learn how to

teach their kids. This is available to everybody. The next three sessions, apologetics, Old Testament, and New Testament will be taught by Pastor Justin Holcomb. He is one of our senior theologians, PhD, a couple of master's degrees, is a professor at Reformed Theological Seminary, president of The Resurgence. He's also a published author and he was a professor at the University of Virginia in the sociology department, where he won a number of teaching awards. He's a fantastic teacher and if you've not heard him, you'll love him. He's also a pastor at Mars Hill. I'll be teaching a class, and Pastor Mike Wilkerson will teach on his gospel content around the redemption book. All of that's forthcoming. And if you want to get more information, you can check out the Web site right there, marshillchurch.org/training. And again, if you can't afford it, and it's cheap, ask your campus pastor and see if they can't help you out.

Lastly, there's a series of free classes, which are a few hours long, and seminars, which tend to be longer, upwards of six hours, that'll be forthcoming. We're bringing in some of the best theologians from the world to lecture for free. You're welcome, your friends are welcome, people from other churches are welcome to attend. We like to be a generous church. We like to give things away, and we believe that theology determines biography. Your view of God inextricably affects and directs your life. So here's what we've got forthcoming. On February 11 at the University District campus of Mars Hill, Dr. Bryan Chapell on "Union with Christ." He's the president of Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, and a well-noted author. On April 8, Dr. Sam Storms will be lecturing on "Spiritual Warfare" at the Shoreline campus. He was a professor at Wheaton College, PhD, a great scholar, runs his own church for the Acts 29 Church Planting Network.

And in addition, we'll have longer seminars. On January 29 at the Downtown campus, Dr. Gerry Breshears will be lecturing on "Models of Sanctification," how to grow in Christ-likeness. He is the co-author of many of the books that I've written. He was my theological mentor, a good friend, professor, and head of theology at Western Seminary in Portland, and also the former president of the Evangelical Theological Society of America, overseeing all Bible college and seminary professors in the U.S. On February 26, right after Valentine's Day, Dr. Ray and Jani Orlund will be here, lecturing on "Marriage and Family" at Ballard. They're great. She's published a few books. Some of those books are Grace's favorites. And they are grandparents, really cute, kiss all the time, so they have a unique skill set for that topic. We love them very much. He's also one of our church planters in Nashville. He's one of the leading Old Testament and Hebrew scholars in the world. He was previously a professor of Old Testament Hebrew. And if you have the ESV Study Bible, he did all of the notes for the book of Isaiah. So he's Yoda smart and you'll love him. Lastly, on April 2, Dr. Tom Schreiner will be lecturing on assurance of salvation, how do you know you're a Christian, and perseverance, how do you continue as a Christian, at the U-District campus as well on that Saturday. He is one of the leading professors in the world, theologians, on the New Testament and Paul. And we're bringing him in from Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Those are all the friends and guests that The Resurgence is paying for. And if you want to learn something, go ahead and join us. It's all free, first come, first serve. We're blessed, lots of friends, amen. There's the announcement.

JESUS' ROAD TRIP

Now, that being said, we're gonna study a little bit right now. We're gonna be working out of Luke 13:10–21. I'll pray and we'll get to work.

Father God, thank you, first of all, for all of our friends. This is amazing. Some of the leading Bible teachers around the world want to come and help us open the Bible and learn about Jesus. That's an amazing gift. So we want to thank you for our friends for their kindness and generosity toward us. In addition, God, as we open your Word today, we invite the Holy Spirit to teach us about the difference that truly exists between religion and rejoicing as we learn about Jesus, in whose name we pray, amen.

How many of you have had a great, fantastic, epic, fun, legendary road trip? Anyone had a good one? Road trips are fun. Road trips are great 'cause you load up a few friends, a few supplies, and you head out. You don't know exactly who you're gonna meet along the way, what might happen, but you know it's gonna be interesting, exciting. At some point, you're gonna get annoyed. Somebody's gonna do or say something they shouldn't, but you'll make a few good memories, and at the end, you'll have fantastic stories to tell.

Where we find ourselves in Luke's gospel is in the middle of Jesus' road trip. That's where we find ourselves. Up through chapter 9, he was ministering in the region of Galilee, around the Sea of Galilee, with fishermen and farmers. And ultimately, proceeding toward chapter 20, he's making his way on his road trip via foot to Jerusalem, the big city, where he's gonna die and rise as our savior. Along the way, Jesus has his disciples with him for the road trip and they pick up an interesting cast of characters and all kinds of interesting things happen. Demonic people come out, sick people get healed, stories get taught, Jesus gets in fights, and every once in a while a religious person gets a ground and pound from their Lord and Savior. So it's a very interesting story. It's a true, historical account from Luke.

JESUS HEALS A DEMONIZED WOMAN

And so today we're going to meet primarily two people. We're gonna meet a woman who is suffering and a religious man who will suffer. We'll start with a woman who is suffering. Here's her story regarding Jesus healing a demonized woman. Luke 13:10–13: "Now he," that is Jesus, "was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. 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."

Here's the story. Jesus is traveling along, he's probably near a smaller town. There was a synagogue there, which is the Old Covenant equivalent of a church. The Christian church is in many ways patterned after the synagogue. People would get together in a building on the day of Sabbath to hear the Bible read, to pray, to hear teaching, to sing songs. God's people have been doing this for thousands and thousands of years. And so Jesus is passing through town and the equivalent of the pastor of that local church, the synagogue, invites Jesus in to be the guest preacher for the day.

So Jesus is up preaching and teaching. Odds are in this area, it's probably not a big congregation, maybe dozens of people. Maybe that day the attendance has swelled, but it's probably not a large congregation. And as Jesus is teaching, he looks out and he sees a woman. And she is disabled. She's crippled. And she's been that way for eighteen years, eighteen long, painful, arduous years. And her physical ailment is caused by a spiritual attack.

We are spirit and body, and sometimes our physical suffering is exclusively physical. You get an injury, an accident, cancer, a genetic condition. Something happens and you're sick, hurting, disabled. Sometimes, however, it is a spiritual cause, which results in physical complications. Luke, who is writing this for us, is by vocation a medical doctor, so he believes in medicine, he believes in wellness, he believes in nutrition. He has no problem with medicine. Neither do we. Neither do we. If God should call you to be a doctor, a nurse, a naturopath, a dietician, whatever it might be, a physical therapist, we say, "Praise God. Help people. Love those who are suffering and hurting. Praise be to God." But in addition to caring for people's bodies, we want to care for their souls, so that we could serve the whole person.

And here what we see is no amount of medical attention could relieve her condition because it was spiritual in causation. She's being attacked by an unclean spirit, a demon, and has suffered for eighteen years. And we need to see this woman in our mind. We're told she's hunched and bent over. This likely indicates severe back problems and lots of discomfort and pain. This is a woman who has not jumped or ran or danced, stood upright, or looked anyone in the eye for eighteen years. She's suffering from chronic pain. Some of you know what this is like. Some of you have chronic pain. Some of you have, as she did, chronic back pain. My dad snapped his back hanging sheetrock for more than twenty years to feed five kids, of which I was the oldest. My dad had chronic back pain feeding his family. He'd come home and he'd lay on the floor just to stretch his back out 'cause he was in agony. He shrunk a few inches just carrying sheetrock on his back for years. He had to go through full back surgery and rehabilitation. Chronic pain. Some of you know what that feels like. That's how she felt for eighteen years, eighteen years.

And Jesus looks at her, and here's what's interesting. She doesn't speak to Jesus; Jesus speaks to her. She doesn't approach Jesus; Jesus approaches her. What we've seen thus far in Luke's gospel is when people are suffering and hurting, if Jesus is nearby, they tend to press through a crowd toward him to touch him, to unleash his healing power. She doesn't do that. She doesn't say or do anything. I don't know why. Maybe she thought Jesus was busy and important and she didn't want to trouble him, or perhaps she'd given up hope altogether. I do not know.

But Jesus looks at her. Can you see it in his eye? He focuses right in on her. I think he's smiling at her and he starts walking toward her. Walks out from where he's teaching and approaches her. He's looking her in the eye. My guess is she's probably, at first, a little uncomfortable. What's he gonna say or do? Is he gonna be like one of Job's friends and rebuke her for lack of faith and say it's her fault? This seems like a godly woman, right? She's been suffering for eighteen years, she apparently still believes in God, and she's in church. Seems like a nice lady with a hard life. Some of you are like that.

And Jesus approaches her and what does he do? He lays hands on her. He touches her. Now this would be unusual in that culture for a man to touch a woman. But there's no sin here, just affection. He didn't have to touch her. Why did he touch her? Because Jesus wanted her to know that he loved her and he identified with her physical suffering and pain. It says that Jesus comes and gives her a hug, he embraces her, and looks her in the eye and he says, "You are healed." He commands the unclean spirit away from her.

By the way, this is why we also pray for the sick. And if you're sick, come forward after the service and we'll lay hands and pray over you, just like Jesus did, and just like Jesus' brother, James, commands the leaders too. We love to pray for sick people. We don't believe that God has to heal, but we believe that God can heal. And so we ask in faith.

And Jesus embraces her, essentially hugs her, and heals her. Her whole life is changed. This is wonderful. This is our Jesus. It's fantastic. What does she do? Immediately, she was made straight and she glorified God. It doesn't take this woman long to worship. "Yes, bring the band back out. I have not been able to really sing wholeheartedly in a while. And it's been eighteen years since I danced, so I will need a soundtrack. It is time for a party." She's in a good mood, ready to praise God and worship and be enthusiastic and happy.

JESUS REBUKES A RELIGIOUS MAN

And it would be fantastic if the story ended right there. The next word, however, is troublesome. "But." "But." Luke 13:14-17, "But the ruler of the synagogue," the preaching pastor, the guy with my job, "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.'" He's arguing with Jesus. Just so you know, that's never a good idea. Means you're wrong. "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?' As he said these things, all his adversaries were put to shame, and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him."

Jesus shows up, does something wonderful. The woman is really happy, and the religious people are critical. Why? Now, categorically it's a debate over the law. The Bible has laws. The first five books of the Old Testament have 613 laws, rules, commands. And God's commands are good. God's laws are good and they're all fulfilled in Christ. The New Testament has additional commands. Don't lie, don't murder, don't steal, don't commit adultery.

But let me say this. The law in and of itself will be something that troubles you unless you know who God is. Jesus tells us that God is a loving father. So when your loving father tells you to do something or not do something, you have to presume and assume he loves you, he's trying to protect you. He's not trying to rob you of joy and freedom and expression. He's trying to save you from harm and suffering and death.

I'll give you an analogy I use with the Driscoll kids. Some years ago, we didn't have the full Fab Five, we were just at a few kids at that point. We moved into a home. First home we purchased was a lease-to-own situation and it was on a very busy street. And my kids love to play outside, as kids do. And so what should a parent do when they move into a home that has no fence, but is on a busy street? What do you do first? Put a fence up. Tell the kids, "Enjoy the whole yard. Dig, run, play, hit a wiffle ball, find a worm, whatever. Please just don't hop the fence 'cause it's dangerous and I don't want you to get hurt. So I know this looks like a barrier and a restriction. Actually, it's life-giving. It's life-preserving."

God's laws are like pickets in a fence, just trying to keep God's kids from running out in the street and getting hurt by Satan and sin. And what God would tell us is, "You have the whole yard. I'm gonna fill you with my Holy Spirit. He'll direct, lead, and guide according to conscience. Hey kids, enjoy all your freedom. Explore the whole yard. Please just don't hop the fence. I don't want you to get hurt." That's a good dad.

What happens then, religious people come along and they say, "Well, God doesn't want us to hop the fence. To make sure that no one hops the fence, we should build another fence within the fence, maybe a little higher than the first fence, just to make sure that no one even has an opportunity to hop the fence." Little while later, somebody else more religious comes along and says, "That second fence is pretty nice, but I think we need to build a third fence in a little further and a little higher." Before long, you don't have a yard. You have a prison. And the kids can't run out and play. That's why the most rebellious kids tend to be those kids who were raised in the most religious home. Eventually, they just hop all the fences.

And what had happened, and this is what always happens, is that religious people took God's laws and made lots of additional rules and laws to the point where something as good as the Sabbath became a burden and not a blessing. And the Sabbath was a gift that God gave. The Sabbath in the Old Testament was on Saturday, not Sunday. Christians moved it to Sunday, the day of Jesus' resurrection, 'cause all things are made new and it's a whole new era in human history with the resurrection of Jesus. But the Sabbath day in the Old Covenant was patterned after Genesis 1 and 2, where God works six days and on the seventh day, he rested.

So the Sabbath is a gift that God gives us. Take a day off, rest, worship, gather with God's people, take a break. And it's an act of faith that even while you have a day off, God is still in control. And they started making rules and rules about the rules, and rules about the rules about the rules. And next thing you know, the Sabbath is not a yard to play in, it's a prison you can't escape. And they're arguing with Jesus about the law in general, but about the Sabbath law in particular. That's the issue.

And what's interesting is these kinds of debates still continue. Seventh-Day Adventists still are fighting, many, for a Saturday Sabbath. Jewish people still observe a Saturday Sabbath and the more orthodox they are, the more rigid they are. And in a moment, I'll read something from a Jewish news source and I'm not anti-Jewish, right? My favorite sixty-six books, written by Jewish people. They kind of really hit their stride around this guy named Abraham, the first Jewish guy. They're about a lot of Jewish people until this guy named God comes, who happens to be Jewish. And so I worship a Jewish guy. I'm not anti-Jewish, but I am anti-religion, rulemaking beyond the rules of God.

And here's an example, some two thousand years later, of how religious people are still debating the Sabbath. December 15, 2010, just a few weeks ago, the story begins, "Jerusalem." So you know this is gonna be a big deal. "A leading Israeli rabbi has declared the Western Wall off limits to the faithful on the holiest day of the week because of security cameras that he says desecrate the Sabbath. 'The trouble at Judaism's holiest prayer site is with the technology,' says Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, a 100-year-old rabbinical authority widely revered among ultra-orthodox Jews. Devout Jews strictly adhere to the biblical commandments to refrain from work on the Sabbath. Elyashiv says those coming into view of the closed circuit surveillance cameras activate a light inside the devices, violating the Jewish prohibition on operating electronics on the Sabbath." Goes on to say, he says, "Jews should not visit the site on the Sabbath until the technology has proper rabbinic supervision."

Here's what he's saying. You can't go to what we consider the holiest site—meaning the Jewish people. We don't. We believe that once the temple was vacated by the Holy Spirit and destroyed, that God's spirit is active everywhere and that our body's the temple, but Jewish people consider this to be their holiest site. And when you go there, and I've been there, there are motion detectors with cameras. And if you walk by, you could turn it on and that'll trigger a light and that's conducting electricity, which is a desecration, 'cause it's a violation of the Sabbath. So don't do that.

I saw this when I was in Israel. I told you this earlier in Luke. They won't conduct electricity on the Sabbath, Saturday. So they won't even hit a button on an elevator. Oh, but they'll ask a Gentile to. Me, you know, dumb, Ramones-t-shirt-wearing, ball-cap-sporting American, gets on the elevator. Next thing I know, I'm packed on the elevator. I can't even move and they're like, "Could you hit floor seven? Could you hit floor nine?" "Why?" "We can't hit it. We'll go to hell." "You want me to hit it? Thanks, thanks a lot. Thanks a lot. Thanks a ton. Hey, Jesus is alive. I'll hit whatever you want." My righteousness is in Christ and I know where my elevator's going, to the kingdom of God.

Now, let me say this. Religious people tend to have a very critical attitude and disposition and demeanor. Rather than rejoicing, criticizing. Always looking for what's wrong. And so Jesus heals on the Sabbath and the leader gets up, the guy who's basically got my job, and publicly rebukes Jesus Christ in front of everyone. And he says, "You know, we're not supposed to do stuff like this on the Sabbath. You people, don't think we're gonna start healing people on the Sabbath. Friday or Sunday, but definitely not Saturday."

Now, let me say this. Had this man any humility, he wouldn't have gotten in trouble. Had he said, "Mm, okay, Jesus is teaching something that I disagree with. Maybe perhaps I'm wrong. Instead of picking a fight publicly, maybe I go ask Jesus privately. Jesus, I disagree with you. But before I correct you publicly, before I pick a fight—" I mean, praise God they didn't have Twitter and Facebook and blogging in that day. "How about if I tell you what my concerns are and you tell me what your answers are and we open the Bible? And if I'm wrong, I want to be teachable. And if I'm right, I want you to be teachable." Do you think he would've gotten in trouble with that attitude? Not at all. Jesus would've praised him and said, "Great, you're a humble man. You want to learn the Bible. You assume that maybe you could be wrong."

‘Cause this is what religious people do. As a general rule, religious people believe, “Some people are right, some people are wrong. And I’m always right. And if you disagree with me, you’re always wrong.” And everyone’s wrong about something. So we all need to be humble and teachable. And double-check according to the Scriptures, just in case we miss something before we advertise it to the world, declare war, criticize others, fight unnecessarily. He doesn’t do that. He stands up in front of his church, “Jesus is wrong.” Wow. That’s a total fail, right? That’s a total fail.

TOUGH AND TENDER

Let me ask you this. With the woman, was Jesus tough or tender? With the woman, was he tough or tender? Tender. You can’t get a much more tender picture than Jesus in front of everyone, walking toward her, looking at her, embracing her, loving her, speaking to her, healing her. That’s as tender as it gets.

With this religious leader, will he be tender or tough? He’s gonna be tough. He’s gonna rebuke him publicly because he picked a fight publicly. You need to know that Jesus is tender and tough. And as a Christian, if you are or become one, you need to be both tender and tough. Sometimes you need to be tender toward those who are hurting, humble, those who are suffering, those who are needy. And sometimes you got to be tough toward those who are religious, haughty, proud, judging others unnecessarily, bullying people around. If you’re only tender or you’re only tough, you’re only gonna be right half the time. You can’t be nice to all the bullies and you shouldn’t be mean to all the victims. You got to have some discernment.

Jesus is both tender and tough. And what’s he say? These are tough words. What’s he say to the pastor? “You are a hypocrite.” That’s a big word. “You treat your animals better than you treat your women. You treat your animals better than you treat your people.” He says, “Let’s say it’s the Sabbath and you have an animal that you treasure and prize because it’s valuable and helpful to you and that animal is thirsty. Would you not walk it to water to get a drink?” And the rhetorical question was answered, “Yes.” He says, “Well, then treat your people as well as you treat your animals,” which for my city is a very good word because we would drop off our dog at the spa or daycare on our way to abort our child. We do things to our children we would not do to our pets.

And so Jesus says, essentially, “Yes, treat the animals well. Treat the pets well. But people who bear the image and likeness of God, treat them even better.” He says, “How dare you treat your livestock better than you would treat this woman?” She’s waited eighteen years. Why is today not a good day for abundant grace to be poured out on her? He’s tender with the woman. He’s tough with the pastor.

WHERE ARE YOU IN THE STORY?

Now, one important question to ask when we study this section is where are you in the story? Where are you? Number one, are you the hurting woman? Your life is hard. You know you’re not perfect but you do love God. You are in church. You do believe in Jesus. And for you it’s suffering and pain. Physical pain, emotional pain, spiritual pain, psychological pain, financial pain. Some of you it’s just been eighteen years of hard days. And you’re suffering and you’re hurting. Maybe you come here and you say, “I don’t even really talk to Jesus about it anymore and I don’t even really pursue him in it because I just kind of gave up a long time ago.” Remember, remember that it’s Jesus who approaches the hurting and suffering. Remember it’s Jesus who literally today has sent the Holy Spirit to lay a hand on you. Okay, I know God wants me to tell you that he is here to meet with you and that he sends the Holy Spirit to literally embrace you, to put a hand on you, to touch you, to comfort you. For some of you, yes, even to heal you. Remember this woman and God’s compassion and affection for her. Jesus has that same compassion and affection for you. And even though you’ve not been pursuing, perhaps, him in this area of suffering, he’s pursuing you. He knows, he pays attention, he cares. He is going to meet with you. He loves you.

Number two, are you the religious critic, like me? Who’s the loser in the story? The pastor. People say, “Oh, the Bible’s made up.” Well, it was written by pastors and I don’t think pastors would write it this way if it wasn’t true. The pastors wouldn’t always be the losers if the pastors were lying, right? If I were going to write the Bible, it would be, “I had Jesus come to my church and I let him preach. You’re welcome.” That’s how I would have written the story. I wouldn’t have talked about all my sin and faults and flaws and failures.

Where I find myself in the story is the religious leader. I tend to be someone who, like these people, zealous, devoted, studious, committed, serious, and sometimes unnecessarily critical. Having a hard time rejoicing in God’s grace poured out to others because maybe it wasn’t done the way that I thought it should have been done. “Really God? That church? They don’t have the right translation of the Bible. Those people? They don’t have our theology. Why are they so happy? They’re singing songs but their musicians are not good and their theological acumen in the songs is not stellar. And their pastor did not preach a good sermon. But they’re all excited, why?” And I’m that guy with the critical eye, and I’ll stand back. I’ll look at the book table. “Oh, what books do they have here? Hmmm, I don’t see any dead guys on the book table. That concerns me.” I’m the guy with the critical eye.

I want us to be a discerning people. I want us to be a biblical people. I want us to be a passionate people. But one sickness you’ve probably caught from me is a difficulty in rejoicing in God’s grace poured out in ways that you weren’t expecting in the lives of people that you find perplexing and churches and ministries that don’t do it the way we do. Okay, it’s a sin that God continually convicts me of. It doesn’t mean we don’t have convictions, but first we should have rejoicing at what God is doing.

Which means if there’s another church, another ministry, another denomination, another theological team, another organization, or other people that disagree with us on some things but they’re part of the family of God, they believe the Bible, they love Jesus too—if good happens for them, if they are blessed, we should rejoice and celebrate. And if we disagree, rather than doing it publicly and starting with a declaration of war, like this man did, like in times past I have, we should go talk to them privately and say, “Okay did I miss something? Let’s see if we can figure this out.” And if in fact there is real error or there is sin, then we do need to protect God’s people by being honest, but we don’t start with an attitude of criticism, self-righteousness,

haughtiness, or pride. We need to seek and celebrate the evidences of God's grace wherever we find them. Love people, give them the benefit of the doubt, and if we disagree go talk to them to see if we can't work towards some resolution. And last resort is we have to have a little bit of disagreement and conflict, last resort.

I'm like the guy in the story who's leading his people and Jesus rebukes. So Jesus today has a rebuke for me because he loves me. And he loves you, just like he loves the pastor and he loves the hurting woman. He heals her and rebukes him. And he does it publicly so that the congregation witnessing it will know. "Hey, don't believe everything this guy's ever said because there are a few things he's off on." One of them was his attitude. He had this assumption that he was always right and it was his job to always voice his disagreement. And that religious spirit and attitude of criticism and control caused him to rebuke Jesus Christ. And so Jesus corrects him lovingly. Number two, if you're a religious critic, repent. And some of you right now, you hear this, you say, "But I have criticisms of the way you're criticizing me." I know. Thank you for the illustration, repent.

Number three, are you the onlooker? Are you the crowd? Now the people are sitting there going, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Our pastor's having a fight with Jesus!" Right? "Who's right in this one?" They've got to make a decision. Either we're going to side with the pastor and argue against Jesus, or we're going to side with Jesus and say, "Pastor, we love you, but it seems like you've got to make a few corrections. Especially in your attitude." And what do they do? They rejoice! This woman rejoices and then this fight ensues between Jesus and the pastor and then the people rejoice for two reasons. The woman was healed and the pastor was rebuked! They were so excited about these two simultaneous, fantastic, God-ordained events. Yes! The pastor's not always right and she got healed, yay! And so they celebrate. The band comes out. Everybody's passionate, enthusiastic, rejoicing, celebrating. They're happy!

WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD LIKE?

The question then is how do you get religious? If religion is such a bad thing, manmade works and traditions and pride and arrogance and haughtiness and unhelpful judgmentalism, how do you avoid that kind of religiosity? To answer that question Jesus is going to tell two parables. They're cousins, not twins. They have resemblances, though they're not identical. I told you last week, when Jesus tells a parable usually it's an answering of a question. The question he's going to answer is, "What is the kingdom of God like?"

So we'll read Jesus' parable. "He said therefore, 'What is the kingdom of God like?'" There's the question. And again, a parable is a little story that teaches a big truth. "'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.'" 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.'"

Some of you say, "What is Jesus talking about? What the—what happened? He healed a woman, rebuked a guy, and then started reading fortune cookies. Like, he lost me. What? Where did Jesus go?" Here's the point: you will become religious if you don't remember the kingdom of God, that one of the underlying causes of religiosity is not understanding and remembering the kingdom of God.

So let me unpack this. We tend to have a troublesome time with the kingdom of God because we're a democracy. And in a democracy, in theory—it doesn't really work this way. I don't know if you know that. But in theory everybody gets to vote. Everybody gets to vote and majority wins. And the way we have our government structured is necessary because we're in a fallen, sinful world. We don't like the idea of a king. I don't know if you guys have studied a lot of history. One of the reasons we're here is we sort of had king issues, right? Really didn't like having a king, or queen, or anybody with a crown. Just—it's sort of a thing for us. Because we're all sinners and if someone has absolute power and is a sinner, injustice, tyranny, oppression and abuse can and will ensue. If someone is an absolutely authoritarian king and they hold all the power and they're a sinner, we're all in danger. So we have checks and balances in our governmental system to deal with sin and sinners.

But the best form of government is a benevolent dictatorship with a humble, generous, sacrificial, loving, altogether good king. And Jesus is a king. We see this before he's even born of Mary and enters into human history, though he's existed eternally. Isaiah 6, some seven hundred years before Jesus was even born of Mary, Isaiah says in Isaiah 6, "I saw the heavens open and I saw the Lord high and exalted and seated on a throne," that's a king. "And the angels surrounded him, crying out, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty.'" And the train of his robe filled the temple." He's a king. John 12:40–41 says Isaiah saw Jesus in all his glory and spoke of him. And our great king got off his throne and he humbled himself and he took upon himself human flesh. And he entered into human history, not on a throne but in a manger, not in glory but in humility. Not in wealth, but in poverty. Not to be worshiped, but to be murdered. And when he came, people were scandalized because this didn't look like a king. They had no concept of a humble, loving, generous, servant king. And that's how Jesus came.

And the kingdom of God is wherever the king rules. The kingdom of God is all about the king. The early Christians would refer to this by saying simply, "Christ is lord." You see, in Rome you would say, "Caesar is lord." They'd say, "No. Something is bigger than Rome and someone is bigger than Caesar. His name is Jesus and his kingdom is a kingdom that never ends and it rules over all nations." Jesus lived without sin. He died for our sin. He rose as our savior. He ascended back into heaven. He's preparing a kingdom that will never end. Right now, Revelation says repeatedly, he's seated on a what? A throne as the King of kings and Lord of lords. There will be a day that he returns, not in humility but in glory, not to suffer but to put an end to suffering. We believe that. There will be a resurrection of the dead and there will be eternal life for those who belong to him and do not. Some in heaven, his glorious kingdom, others in hell, final justice. He's a king. He's a king.

And his question is, "What is the kingdom of God like?" And the big idea from the two parables is this: it starts small and it grows big. That's the big idea. This is Jesus' life. He started off small, humble, simple, his life on the earth. A small town, a virgin teenage mother, a country boy. And now he's worshiped by a few billion people on the earth as Lord, God, and Savior. That's how Christianity started. In Acts, it's 120 people in a room. It starts

small and it grows big. This is how our spiritual life works. You turn from sin, trust in Jesus. It starts small and your faith and your fruit grows big. And they missed this with Jesus. They looked at him and said, "If you were God, if you were Christ, if you were king, we'd expect more." And the answer is, "Wait. Haven't gotten to Jerusalem yet. Haven't been crucified, haven't risen from death. Haven't poured out the Spirit. We're not yet done."

This is the month that fifteen years ago Mars Hill Church had its initial meeting as a core group. Initially, Mars Hill fit on two couches at my house and a few chairs. That was Mars Hill. There were weeks we could have had church in a Suburban, okay? And everybody could have had a buckle, all right. It was not a big deal. And if you were to look at that, you would say, "That's so small. They're all unemployed, chain-smoking indie rockers committed to anarchy. Perhaps the band will be good but this won't go anywhere." Give it some time. And it goes, by the grace of God, from ten to ten thousand. This is how the kingdom of God works. God likes to start small and go big. He likes to start small and go big.

This is why we do community groups. You say, "What good is it going to be to send a few people out to a condo, a dorm, a home, or an apartment?" Well, they belong to the king, they represent the kingdom, give it some time. See if that seed doesn't grow up into a tree, become a group of people who outgrow that place that they're meeting, start other groups, those groups start other groups. Next thing you know, we got hundreds of people. We call that a core group. We launch a new campus or a new church. Jesus uses the language of branches and nests. See, for us campuses are branches, community groups are nests. You never know what God's going to do, so don't despise simple, humble beginnings. That's how the kingdom of God works.

And this pastor's looking at Jesus saying, "I'm not impressed." Really? Well, you've missed it and wait until he rises from death. Wait until he returns in glory. It's a good time to listen, not to argue.

RELIGIOUS PEOPLE REPLACE CHRIST WITH CAUSE

Now let me say this: the way you become religious is when you're about your small-*k* kingdom instead of God's capital-*K* Kingdom. That's why Jesus brings it back to a theology of the kingdom. He looks and says, "Here's how you get in trouble and become religious. Your kingdom, not mine. Your name, not mine. Your fame, not mine. Your glory, not mine." It's not about us, it's all about Jesus. And what happens for those who are into their own kingdom, they replace Christ with cause. Okay, for the religious people here, they were into their kingdom, not Jesus' kingdom. They were into their cause, not Christ. That's the problem.

What's your cause? What's your thing? Some of you are single-issue voters. You really only care deeply about one thing. Some of you have causes that are more "Christian" in orientation. Children, midwives, homeschooling, Christian schooling, public schooling, school choice, conservative politics, pro-life. Certain kind of student ministry, youth ministry, family ministry. Certain kind of musical style. Certain theological system. Certain author. What's your cause? What's your cause? What's your cause? Others of you, your cause is not necessarily Christian. And you could be religious and an atheist, but you can have a religious devotion and zeal for a cause. Recycling, small carbon footprint, biking to work, feeding hungry people, giving clean water to those who are poor and sick and needy and diseased. Healthcare for those who are in need, affordable housing for those who are poor, liberation for those who are in the sex trade.

See, everyone's religious. Martin Luther's right, religion is the default mode of the human heart. Some of you have more Christian causes. Others of you have just moral causes, but we all have causes. And some of you would say, "Don't attack my cause. I have a good cause." And I would say, "You probably do. But what about Christ?" What about Christ?

For this religious pastor and religious people in general, their cause is tradition. Their cause is rules. Their cause is law. Their cause is morality. Their cause is our culture. Their cause is our way of life. Their cause is we're honoring the past. And Christ comes along and says, "I don't think that's the most important thing." And they say then, "You must die because our cause is more important than our Christ, because our kingdom is more important than his kingdom." And what happens in churches is that they become cause oriented, not Christ oriented.

Many of you are young, zealous, all right? Seattle, Albuquerque, we're moving into Portland and Orange County, by God's grace. Filled with self-righteous, religiously devoted, even if not religiously committed, cause-oriented, activist, motivated young people. But what about Jesus? And churches will prey on this and say, "Well, now we're into this cause and it's a good cause!" And everybody gets fired up. And then the cause wanes. Then they get another cause. And then that cause kind of wanes. And then they get another cause and that cause kind of wanes.

We're about Christ. We need to remain continually about Christ. And some of you would walk in and look at Mars Hill and say, "There's a lot of people. This is a good opportunity for my cause." Put your cause down. We have one cause: Christ. Christ is our cause. And if Christ is continually our cause we'll get lots of other causes. You'll go out and feed hungry people. You know why? Jesus was poor and Jesus cares about the poor. But you'll do it for Christ, not your cause. You'll do it for his kingdom, not your own. You'll take care of those who are abused and oppressed, those who have been violated and raped and destroyed. Why? Because that's your cause and it's your kingdom? No, because your Christ cares. Your Christ suffered, your Christ comes to set captives free and to really help them takes more than a cause. It takes the cause of Christ. Churches and Christians who remain Christ centered, they're the most active, fruitful, cause-oriented people and when everyone asks, "Why are you doing this?" the answer is always the same. "You need to get to know my king. You need to get to see his kingdom. His name is Christ. He loves you and he sent me here to embrace you on his behalf."

REJOICE WITH THOSE WHO REJOICE

Now, in saying this, how do the people respond? We can't leave this all religious. How do the people respond? Rejoicing! They're really excited! They're not like us! Right? They're not like us. There can be a religious spirit that comes into Mars Hill to where it's like, "Where's my sin? I'm so

horrible. I'm so terrible." True! But you got to deal with your sin and you got to deal with your depravity and you got to deal with your faults and failures and flaws, but if you just stop there, even taking that critical religious gaze that you would point toward others and even if you point it to yourself, you still won't end up in rejoicing.

So you got to turn your gaze out and say, "You know what? Jesus comes to embrace me. Jesus comes to approach me." This is what we believe. God pursues us. God initiates with us. God loves us. God comes for us. God puts his hands on us. God speaks to us. God touches us. We believe that. You remember Jesus, "Oh, I've got a king and I'm a citizen of a kingdom! My king loves me! My king will never leave me nor forsake me! My king only does good for me. My king is the King of kings." It leads to rejoicing.

What's happened in the history of Mars Hill, our services are a little more like funerals than weddings, amen? It's Good Friday every day at Mars Hill. And there are some Sundays where the text requires it to feel like a funeral, right? Just sin and judgment and conviction. But if it's only, always funerals, we've lost sight of the King and his kingdom. And so there is rejoicing here and celebrating and it feels more like a wedding!

And here's what's fantastic, some of you would come and you'd say, "But why should I sing? Jesus did not hug me this week. I don't feel hugged. My life is still not fixed. Where's my miracle?" And I would say this: the people who are rejoicing, they didn't get healed. But someone they love did and that was the source of their joy. I'm a dad. You know what makes me happier than God blessing me? God blessing my kids. Way happier. I don't mind getting blessed, I'm not saying that. I love my wife Gracie with all my heart. What matters to me is to see her be blessed because I find my joy in her blessing.

You know what, Mars Hill? We're a family. We're a family. We need to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep, but rejoice with those who rejoice. Which means sometimes we come together, it's not, "I can't really sing and raise my hands today because I didn't get my miracle." "Oh, my brother did, my sister did. Yes! That is exciting, praise be to God, and I'll rejoice because of God's grace in their life without standing back being critical of how he showed up or that he's not yet showed up for me."

So here's what we're going to do. We're going to sing. We're going to have some fun whether you like it or not. We're going to raise our hands. We're going to raise our voices. We're going to celebrate the goodness of God and Christ. We'll do that in Communion, remembering his broken body and shed blood. And we'll do that in song. But let me say this. Some of you are going to help us. God has showed up in your life recently and something cool's happened. Something great has happened. Something interesting, curious, grace-filled, God has dropped a grace bomb in your life. Something fantastic, but what we want you to do, come to the front row, there'll be some pastors here, as we're taking Communion and singing, and tell us your story. If we think it's meritorious, we'll bring you up, briefly interview you, let you tell what God did, and then we can all rejoice just like they rejoiced. We can cheer and celebrate with you.

I'll give you one story from today. A woman who was repeatedly sexually assaulted, raped, and abused, since she was a little girl, her body was so destroyed that they told her she could never have children. She married a man who loves Jesus and they're at Mars Hill. They tried and tried and tried to have a child. Seven painful miscarriages. And today they came up front and introduced us to the cutest, chubbiest little girl with a flower on her head that I've ever seen in my whole life. And I'm going to be happy all month. *[Applauding]* So if you've got good news, let us know and we'd love to share it in between the songs.

Father God, I thank you. I thank you for sending Jesus. Jesus, I thank you for coming, living, dying, rising. Holy Spirit, we thank you for filling us, that we might live by the Spirit, not by the rules. We may live by the Spirit, not the traditions of men. Father, for those who identify with the woman, right now we ask, would you send the Holy Spirit to be the hands of Jesus, to embrace and comfort them. Lord God, for those who are like the religious critic, those who are like me, and that's our proclivity, please show us that in rebuking us Jesus is loving us and inviting us to learn from him rather than argue with him and to be like him, to be Christ centered and kingdom oriented, not cause centered for our own kingdom. And may we all respond like the congregation of onlookers did, really glad and filled with joy that Jesus is our king, amen.

[End of Audio]

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.