

The Bible is the recorded history of God with us. The arrival of Christ was the beginning of the final chapter, of God reclaiming **us** back into His kingdom. Recall from last Sunday, Peter's description of the moments before and after Christ's return, and read it alongside Revelation Chapter 20-22, and you discover, everything we relate to around us will be destroyed **EXCEPT US!** The plan of God is to make sure we survive the transition from this time-limited earth, into God's eternal Kingdom, and Jesus the Christ, who has transitioned through death into eternal life, will take us through it.

Luke starts his gospel account stating, most authors used *eyewitness reports circulating among us from the early disciples*, but Luke *carefully investigated everything from the beginning, ... so you can be certain of the Truth of everything you were taught.*¹

The four chapters in the middle of Luke's Gospel (13-16), captures the essence of the struggle Jesus faced: the leaders of organised "religion" had distorted the image and reputation of God. God created us to have a direct relationship with Him. There is a real temptation for people to position themselves as a priestly intermediates, to connect us with God, but God wants was to have an individual relationship with Him. There is no such thing as *group membership*, like in a labour union where the Union Leader represents the members to the Boss, to force the boss to do the right thing for the members. There is real need for a personal relationship with God. **WHY?** In the beginning, God created each one of us individually; we were not mass-produced in a factory!

Psalm 139 starts with, *God! You have searched me and know me*, and ends pleading, *[continue to] search me, O God, and know my heart*. In the middle of

¹ 1:1-3

the Psalm are four verses (13-16) which describe this intimate relationship: *You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvellous—how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.*²

If this is the intimate detail with which we were created and given life, surely our Creator wants an equally intimate and detailed relationship with Him!

Last Sunday, we saw Jesus teaching, "*suffering*" does not imply "*sinfulness*" (13:1-5), then narrating a parable about mercy (cf. 13:6-7).

Our passage last Sunday ended with a landlord searching for fruit in his orchard and a gardener pleading with Him to give the fruitless fig-tree, one more chance.

The next verse opens our text today, we find Jesus teaching in a synagogue, which He has done frequently³. What Jesus teaches in the Synagogue is not as important as what happens when Jesus is in the Synagogue!

Continuing the previous parable of the Orchard Owner looking for a fruit-bearing tree, Jesus enters the Synagogue looking, and *He saw...*

Luke offers us a fundamental truth: *unless you look at someone the way God seem them, you will not see what God sees!* So much of human conflict

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³ Luke 4:15, 16; 6:6-11

arises when people do not use God's binoculars to see, and miss seeing what God has seen!

Let's not delude ourselves: we should not presume to have the intimate insight and foresight God has, but God has given us the Holy Spirit through whom He dispenses His wisdom. God is happy to share His binoculars with us to see what He sees, only when He **trust us** to see what He sees, and that comes out of a trusted relationship.

So Jesus enters the Synagogue looking for a non-fruit bearing tree and guess what He sees? *A woman who had been crippled by an evil spirit!* We should learn to give credit to those to whom God has trusted with the gift of words and language.

Jesus **sees** a woman crippled, double-bent over, unable to stand upright for 18 years, caused by an evil spirit.

Crippled is one thing (what I feel some mornings and late some evenings), but this lady is not just bent over (90 degrees from the waist) but double bent from the waist, which is 180 degrees bent over. She can only see the ground on which she walks. She cannot see the sky above, nor the ground in front, to the side nor behind her.

Those who have studied counselling, recognise this is an image of severe depression, when the patient cannot see anything else except the misery of their present moment. Everyday for 18 years (6,408 days) is long enough for anyone to seriously question the purpose of life and of living.

This double-bent woman is either taken, or takes herself to the synagogue every day, where she hears the word of God being read, being taught and being discussed. She may not be able to see the face of

people, she might be able to tell who is present by the smell of their feet, but she is being sustained by the sound of God's word.

The fig-tree is barren, unable to bear fruit, coming to the Synagogue one more day, everyday for 18 years, because *an evil spirit* has kept her double bent for 18 years.

But Jesus sees what we cannot see and Luke captures that: Jesus **saw** a woman who **had been** crippled... Jesus saw beyond her crippling disease into a future when she is no longer crippled!

If you want to pray about a situation and want God to answer your prayer, then pray asking God to show you what it would look like, when your prayer is answered! This is how God motivates us when we pray - *Lord show me what the situation, the person would look like when you have done your work of restoration and healing!*

Luke identifies *an evil spirit* as the cause of **this** woman's crippling disease, not all diseases. Some diseases and sicknesses are caused by ignorance, some by accident, some by deliberate behaviour, **and** some are caused by an evil spirit. Let's accept this statement at face value for now, and deal with it more fully at a later time.

Jesus **saw** her (v.11), then Jesus **called** her (v. 12). In our heightened emotional state, we may call or shout out to God, *Look! Can You not see what I (other...) is going though? What kind of God are you who is blind and cannot see my pain, my affliction, the crippling nature of my life! LOOK!*

Because we are so consumed with blaming God for what He has done or not done, we become deaf to hear Him call, *Come over here, where I am. Come close to me. I want to speak to you alone... I don't want everyone to hear what I*

am saying you - YOU may not want others to hear what I am saying to you. Come close to me and I WILL take care of you.

The problem back then, as now, is that the leaders of organised religion focus on **having faith**. I would be a very rich man if I owned all the “zeros” to count the number of times I have heard people say, **have faith**. The Christian life is not about **having faith, possessing faith**.

The life as a follower of Christ is to about having faith **in** Him, to be faithful **to** Him!

God invites us into a relationship of **being faithful** to Him, who is always faithful, that we may develop **faithfulness** as a character trait!

Having heard the Word of God for 18 years, it is not surprising to read, when Jesus called the double-bent woman, she recognised the voice of God when she heard it. She just presented herself in the direction of the voice that called her. She was **being faithful, acting faithfully** to the One who sustained her all these years, and who now calls her **Dear Woman!** and says those words she has been longing to hear, **You are healed of your sickness! You are free of the evil spirit that kept you looking down on yourself**. She did not ask, she did not explain her pain, she did not grovel or beg, she did not blame - *where have you been for 18 years!?* *You could've done something sooner! Why didn't you?*

Jesus **saw**, Jesus **called**, then Jesus **touched**.

The woman stood up straight. Imagine, her shock, and the shock waves that rippled through the crowd faster than the shock waves of the Beirut port blast.

Her response? It wasn't *Look at me! I can walk, I can see, Look at me! I need new clothes, I want to eat all I could not for 18 years! ...*

Luke records her response, ***How she thanked and praised God!***

Let's leave this here for today and continue next Sunday on the fallout of this incident!

We should be careful not to let our prejudiced view of this world, and our relationships in this world, dictate how we relate with people.

God has made each of us, and taught us He says, *I offer you My Wisdom to live*. Many of us choose to live by our own human wisdom, and blame God when things don't go right.

God will guide us if we genuinely seek his direction, but He won't make our decisions for us. As adults we are totally responsible for every decision and choice we make. As long as we play the blame-game, we can never get on with our life. We stay stuck where we are and can do so for years.

We are all caught and bound by our own prejudice, our own preconceived ideas, our biases, and guess what? **ALL** these are the result of harm, damage, injury, hurt, loss in our past which weigh us down like unwanted baggage until we are double-bent, and our view of life, our relationships and our view of the future of life, are all compromised!

We come back to the "why" question Jesus asked last Sunday, ***Why won't you be still for a moment and acknowledge me as God? If you do, you will know, I have seen, I am calling, I want to touch and set you free. Why won't you let me?***

AMEN.