Read: Luke 13:10-17

When has someone criticized you for doing something good?[1]

Where are we in Luke

The events following Peter's confession in 9:20 form a transition into the next phase in Jesus' ministry. After Peter's confession in 9:20 Jesus makes the first declaration about his death. This is followed by the Transfiguration. Following a miracle, some sayings and Jesus again foretelling his death, 'Jesus set out resolutely to go to Jerusalem' (Luke 9:51b NET Bible).

What follows is called the travel narrative, or Jesus' journey to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51-19:27). Jesus does not travel directly to Jerusalem, but wanders from place to place. Occasionally through this section we are reminded that Jesus is travelling (9:57; 10:1, 38; 18:35; 19:1) or heading for Jerusalem (9:51-56; 13:22, 33; 17:11; 18:31;19:11, 28, 41). While not a direct route, this is '*a period of Jesus' heightened resolve* to meet his Jerusalem goal. It expresses a changed emphasis in his ministry as he "resolves" to go to Jerusalem to fulfill the role of the suffering Messiah'.[2]

This section is sometimes referred to as the Gospel of the Outcast, as it frequently highlights God's particular compassion for the poor and marginalized through its stories and parables. There are many parables with reversal themes: where 'humble "outsiders" receive blessings or commendation, while prideful "insiders" suffer rebuke or loss.'[3] Some notable examples are the good Samaritan (10:29-37), the rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31), and the pharisee and the tax collector (18:9-14). We will see this theme come through the Sunday readings as we travel through Luke with the lectionary.

Context

Previously, in Luke 11:37-54 and 12:54-13:9, Jesus has been warning his audience of the need to discern the times and has noted their failure to do so thus far. Examples of the signs of the times that the hearers are to discern are the miraculous healings, of which today's passage is one. Jesus' healings can demonstrate that "the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Luke 11:20).[4]

[1] Some questions in this study taken from *Adult Questions for LESSONmaker* (Lk 13:10–17), (Logos, 2024).
[2] Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2007),273.
[3] Strauss, 274.
[4] John Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34,* WBC 35B (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1193), 725.

The miracle is a mirror miracle in that it replays the Sabbath healings of 4:31-41 and 6:6-11 and will be reinforced by another Sabbath account in 14:1-6. Here is a new opportunity and another chance. Will the fig tree bear fruit (13:6-9)? Have Jesus' previous warnings been heeded when miracles are again displayed on the Sabbath?
This miracle examines whether the crowds and leadership have responded to Jesus' strong and explicit warnings. The rebuke of 13:15 shows that they have not. In fact, those that fail to heed Jesus' warning treat animals better than people. The Pharisees, in their concern about Sabbath law and tradition, miss God' compassion. The decision against Jesus fails to determine the time.[5]

Luke 13:10-17

Luke places special emphasis on Jesus' concern for the outcasts, the sick, the poor, and women. He often balances men and women, by pairing stories about both in ways that emphasize their equality before God. Some examples are the announcement to Zechariah and the annunciation to Mary (Luke 1), Simeon and Anna at the temple (Luke 2), and Jesus healing the Centurion's servant and raising the widow's son (Luke 7). This miracle is paired with Luke 14:1-6, Jesus healing a man with dropsy on the sabbath.

Read again: Luke 13:10-17

Does anything jump out at you from this passage?

The miracle (13:10-13)

- Jesus takes the initiative – the woman never asks for healing.

- 'His effort to help a woman is significant in a culture where men publicly shunned women. It shows the extent to which Jesus responds to those in need.'[6]

- Note her reaction to being healed – she praises God, thus linking Jesus' actions with the exercise of God's power.

- 'The passive infinitive λυθῆναι (*lythēnai*, "to be set free") suggests that someone frees the woman. Since only God can exercise such power, the healing is another evidence of God working through Jesus and a token of the struggle in which God is engaged to reclaim and restore people.'[7]

[5] Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53* BECNT (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 1996), 1212.
[6] Bock, *Luke* 1216.
[7] Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts,* Biblical Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan:Zondervan, 2012),348.

What did Jesus' proclamation in verse 12 tell us about woman's healing? Why do you think Jesus laid his hands upon her? What do you think Jesus' touch meant to the woman?

The response (13:14)

Read: Exodus 20:9-10; 31:12-17; 35:2; Numbers 15:32-36

Why was the Sabbath important?
What is considered work that shouldn't be done of the Sabbath?

As you can see, the biblical laws and examples concerning the Sabbath do not cover every possible situation. As a result, different Jewish groups developed their own traditions and rulings to interpret how Sabbath laws should be applied. These traditions were intended to help them keep the law, obeying God by keeping the Sabbath holy.

Judaism in Jesus' day was not uniform. There were competing interpretations of the law, the Temple, and scriptural texts. Even among the Pharisees, there were different schools of thought (e.g., those of Hillel and Shammai).

Afte the destruction of the Temple is 70 CE, the Rabbis were the intellectual and spiritual heirs of the Pharisees. While it would be simplistic to say that Rabbinic Judaism is a direct continuation of Pharisaism, the Pharisees' emphasis on purity (extended beyond the priesthood), as well as their focus on scripture, law, and synagogue-based practice, made their tradition more adaptable in a world without the Temple.

The Mishnah, compiled around 200 CE, may preserve some traditions that go back to the time of Jesus, though not all do. Nevertheless, it offers valuable insight into the kinds of interpretations and debates surrounding Sabbath law in early Rabbinic Judaism.

The Mishnah allowed cattle to be moved on the Sabbath as long as they did not carry a load (*m. Šabb*. 5) and to be tied up on the Sabbath lest they wander (*m. Šabb*. 15.2). The Mishnah also describes the wells at which cattle can drink without violating the Sabbath (*m. ʿErub*. 2.1–4).

At Qumran [Essenes, not Pharisees], CD 11.5–6 allowed travel up to two thousand cubits (three thousand feet) for pasturing.[8]

[8] Bock, *Theology of Luke and Acts,* 347.

Why did Jesus' healing on the Sabbath lead to conflict?[9]

The synagogue leader quoted Exodus 20:9-10, but what do you think was behind his indignance?

We have a habit of stereotyping this leader, aggravated as it is by our not knowing that the famous Jewish source of legal rulings, the Mishnah, has this line: "And any matter of doubt as to danger to life overrides the prohibitions of the Sabbath" (m. Yoma 8:6). So, perhaps it is not because Jesus did this on the Sabbath per se but because the woman's life was not in jeopardy and still he healed on a Sabbath, and perhaps also because he did so in the service and drew attention to the kingdom's redemptive powers when he could have waited until after the service. [10]

Jesus' Rebuke (13:15-16)

… the leaders are condemned by their own practice. They show compassion to animals but not to humans. It is this issue of inconsistency and priority in creation that Jesus raises. …

Jesus explains why he acted as he did: just as some feel free to aid animals on the Sabbath, one should feel the same moral necessity (ἔδει, *edei*) to aid this ailing daughter of Abraham on the Sabbath (cf. Luke 16:22; 19:9). Most see a minor-to-major argument here: what is true of animals is even truer for people. Satan had bound the woman for eighteen years, and she should be loosed from this bondage, even more than the ox should be loosed on the Sabbath to eat. Jesus is arguing that the woman's relationship to Abraham, the man of God's promise, makes her healing on the Lord's Day not wrong but appropriate, even necessary. What better day to reflect on God's activity than the Sabbath?[11]

What can we learn about God's intentions for the Sabbath day?

The healing of the woman was not just another chore that could have been done on another day. It represented a victory over Satan. Since the Sabbath is special, sanctified by God himself, why should not such a triumph of God over Satan—one which, by the way, will give the woman relief and rest from her affliction for the first time in years—take place on this day? This is why Jesus reproaches the synagogue ruler.

[9] Scott McKnight, *Luke*, New Testament Everyday Bible Study Series (Grand Rapids, Michigan: HarperChristian Resources., 2023), 221.
[10] Scott McKnight, 217–218.
[11] Bock, *Theology of Luke and Acts,* 347–348.

The issue is not over what kind of work is or is not permitted on the Sabbath. The issue has to do with the spirit and true intent of the Law. Jesus may have regarded such a healing **on the Sabbath** as especially appropriate, in that God's act of power in effect consecrated the day. There may be a parallel with Deut. 5:1–18 where every Sabbath (seventh) year is proclaimed a time of "release" from debt for all fellow Israelites. The healing of the woman might then be understood as an example of an Israelite **released**.[12]

What do we learn about how we are to care for those that bear God's image from this passage?

The confrontation points to the always lurking possibility that very good religious principles may be turned into allies of the powers of evil. The leader of the synagogue was defending religious principles derived from the very law of God. Yet in that very defense he was siding with the powers of evil that held the woman bent. Similar events abound in Christian history. What most of the inquisitors were defending was true; yet their very defense was evil. Servetus was burned in Geneva because he denied what was true; yet his burning was a demonic act. All of this is a warning to us orthodox Christians, lest we too defend traditional doctrine and morality and in so doing allow ourselves to become agents of overbearing pride, of prejudice, and of oppression.[13]

What good deeds do we sometimes restrict because of traditions or rules?

What self-imposed rule or tradition do you need to modify to allow for God's work?

For further reading / thought

Augustine: The whole human race, like this woman, was bent over and bowed down to the ground. Someone already understands these enemies. He cries out against them and says to God, "They have bowed my soul down." The devil and his angels have bowed the souls of men and women down to the ground. He has bent them forward to be intent on temporary and earthly things and has stopped them from seeking the things that are above.
Since that is what the Lord says about the woman whom Satan had bound for eighteen years, it was now time for her to be released from her bondage on the sabbath day. Quite unjustly, they criticized him for straightening her up. Who were these, except people bent over themselves? Since they quite failed to understand the very things God had commanded, they regarded them with earthbound hearts. They used to celebrate

[12] C. A. Evans, The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Matthew–Luke First Edition (Colorado Springs, Colorado: David C Cook.,2003), 356.
[13] Justo L. González, J. L. *Luke* (Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 2010), 174-175.

the sacrament of the sabbath in a literal, material manner and did not notice its spiritual meaning. Sermon 162b.[14]

Extra for Experts

Some rules about the Sabbath from Rabbinic Traditions

NOTE: I put these as illustrative of the types of discussions about and rules created around the Sabbath. These were not necessarily the rules of Pharisees in Jesus' time. The Mishnah was compiled around 200 CE, and may contain some elements that date back to Jesus' day, but not all do. The Talmuds were compiled even later.

Can you water your livestock on the Sabbath?

According to the traditions below, yes, within limits.

The cattle are driven out on the Sabbath. *Mishnah Šabbat 5.1*: With what are the cattle permitted to go out (on the Sabbath)? The camel may go out with the halter, the female camel with the nose ring, the Libyan donkey with the halter, the horse with the chain; all chain-wearing animals may go out with the chain and be guided (literally: pulled) on the chain; they may also be sprinkled (the objects mentioned on the animals if they have become unclean) and immersed in their place (where they are on the animal in question). ‖ *Mishnah Šabbat 5.2:* The donkey may go out with a blanket if it is attached to it (and the attachment had already taken place before the Sabbath); the rams may go out with the leather (לבובין?) tied in front of them in the area of the heart, the ewes with their tails tied upwards or downwards (which aids in mating or prevents it) and with a sheath (for keeping the wool clean); the goats may go out with the udders bound. R. Yose (ca. 150) declared all this illegal, except for the ewes being wrapped. R. Judah (ca. 150) said, "The goats may go out with the udder bound to dry out the milk, but not if it is for the benefit of the milk (to prevent the milk from leaking out)." ‖ See further at *m. Šabb. 5.3,4.*

Watering the animals on the Sabbath. A baraita in *b. ʿErub. 20B*: Do not fill a vessel with water and place it before the beast on the Sabbath. Instead, fill it and pour it out, so that the beast drinks by itself.[15]

[14] A. A. Just, ed. *Luke*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (*Downers Grove, Illinois:* InterVarsity Press., 2005), 225–226.

[15] H. L., Strack & P. Billerbeck, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud & Midrash* (2022). J. N. Cerone, Ed.; A. Bowden & J. Longarino, Trans.(Lexham Press, 2022), Vol. 2, p. 232.