

Christ healing a Woman's Infirmities

Explaining the Gospel Reading

Luke 13:10-17 (Tenth Sunday of Luke)



The Lord had been teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath and He used the occasion to give an important teaching about the Sabbath. There was a woman who had a severe hunchback or spinal injury such that she couldn't straighten herself. Jesus remarked that Satan had bound her for 18 years. Knowing that He would get a reaction, Jesus called the woman over to Him, laid His hands on her and said, *Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity*. The synagogue ruler rebuked Jesus publicly for doing work on the Sabbath. He undoubtedly had the backing of the other attendants since Jesus' reply addressed a number of people.

The Mosaic Law concerning the Sabbath was very clear, specific and strict. For example:

- Complete rest was required.
- One could not even kindle a fire (to cook a meal).
- All cooking had to be done the day before.
- The death penalty was prescribed for anyone breaking the Sabbath
- One could not carry heavy loads or use pack animals to do so either.
- One could not travel on the Sabbath. Later this traveling restriction was limited to *a Sabbath's day journey*, about half a mile.
- No buying or selling was allowed on the Sabbath.

The Lord commanded the Sabbath observation in remembrance of how He created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. But also tied into the Sabbath observation was a recalling of the time Israel was being *worked to death* in Egypt. Thus the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. The Sabbath was more than just a day of rest, however. It was a holy day, and a day of gladness.

Jesus is accused of breaking this important and sacred day by healing the woman. His reply compared the practice of the synagogue ruler and the others in caring for their animals on the Sabbath. If the animals needed to be unbound from their stalls and led to water on the Sabbath, then why couldn't a daughter of Abraham also be unbound? Jesus' reply was very confrontational, calling the synagogue ruler a hypocrite.

St. Cyril of Alexandria makes three points in commenting on this: a) God had commanded men to rest on the Sabbath. When, therefore, Jesus gave rest to the crippled woman in freeing her from diseases, it was the ruler and not Jesus who was breaking the Law of the Sabbath. b) Jesus did no manual labor in healing the woman. If the ruler wished to forbid the labor of the mouth, does this mean that one cannot sing Psalms or pray on the Sabbath either? c) The synagogue ruler was not really angry on account of the Sabbath Law being broken, but because he saw Christ honored and worshipped as God. This was concealed in his heart and the Sabbath Law ruse was just a pretext. For this reason he was most excellently convicted by the Lord and called a hypocrite.

The Law can be taken to an unmerciful, legalistic extreme. St. John Chrysostom comments as follows: "For indeed, the Sabbath did at first confer many and great benefits; for instance, it made them gentle towards those of their household, and humane; it taught them God's providence and the creation; it trained them by degrees to abstain from wickedness, and disposed them to regard the things of the spirit. Did Christ then repeal a thing so profitable? No, far from it! He greatly enhanced it. For it was time for them to be trained in all things by the higher rules."