

# Luke 13:10-17

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, I want us to look at Luke 30 verses 10-17. And I suppose the question that I've been asking myself this week, What is the biggest barrier in my Christian life?

! What's the biggest barrier to my growth? What's the biggest barrier to my witness? In speaking to people that I love? Speaking to people who are my friends, some people who are in my family. What's the biggest barrier I have to kind of living the gospel out before them and speaking to them about the gospel? Many people think it's an issue of confidence. Confidence in knowing the message.

I don't think that. I expect most of you here today, not all of you, but most of you, have been Christians long enough that you can simply explain the good news of the Lord Jesus in your own words.

You can do that. You can say what he's done. You can say that he died for me. And for most of us, that is not the issue. We can explain it. I have found the biggest barrier in my Christian life is my character.

[ 1 : 01 ] It's my character. But what has happened to us as Christians? God has called us, hasn't he, to be his children. He's called us to be in Christ. He's called us to declare his praises to the world around us.

To show his unconditional, unchangeable, faithful love to the people I live amongst. And yet so often I find in my life, I don't know about yours, it is littered with examples of how I fail to do that. Sometimes it's the moment of madness, isn't it? Losing my rag. And blowing your top. And you do it in front of people. In front of family or friends or work colleagues that you've been praying for. And it's pretty embarrassing. But often it's not a moment of madness. Most of the time it's not, is it? But I don't know about you, but I look at my non-Christian friends and I often find that they are more loyal, they are more generous, and they seem more loving.

And the main problem with my Christian life, and I suppose if you want to call it my evangelism, is my self-centred life. Now I think as we look at this section in Luke's Gospel, particularly as we go through chapter 13 over the next few weeks, we're going to see the Lord Jesus, who is wonderfully loving, and wonderfully other-person-centred, longing to bring people into his kingdom.

[ 2 : 29 ] And yet we're also going to see a dark side. We're going to see the religious hypocrites. And too often, as you read Luke 13, I find myself siding with them, and not with the Lord Jesus.

Now the context of where we are, is we are in the longest section of Luke. And it started in chapter 9, verse 51. Can you see that? He sets off, resolutely, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.

And it goes right away through to chapter 19, that's the section, the journey section. He's setting off, resolutely, to the place where he knows he's going to die.

And it seems like suicidal madness. But we know, don't we, those of us who know Luke's Gospel, actually that is the heart of his mission. And the context of this journey, the context of him setting off to Jerusalem, he teaches his disciples what his kingdom, what it's going to be like to live under the reign of King Jesus.

What it's going to be like to follow him down through the ages. It's a kingdom where people are accepted, as they accept Jesus as King. As people say that Jesus Christ is Lord, they come under his lordship, they take on his yoke.

[ 3 : 44 ] As they humbly repent of living for themselves, and they accept the forgiveness that Jesus unconditionally offers, they come into the kingdom. But it's also a kingdom that we've not yet fully experienced yet.

Jesus is teaching us that there's going to be a perfection of the kingdom when he returns. The now and the not yet. We live in the now. We've just sung a bit, haven't we?

Today is the Lord's day. It is the Sabbath rest. It is a picture of the rest of God in Genesis 1. It is a picture of the freedom, the rest that the people of Israel enjoyed in Exodus.

It is a picture of the rest that we know in Christ. But we're not perfectly at rest, are we? We look forward, Hebrews 4, to the rest of God in eternity.

We're not there yet. The kingdom has come. It is here. It is among us. And yet it is still to come. When he comes, he will come to judge the world.

[ 4 : 45 ] Look at verse 49 of chapter 12. He is the fire starter. And Jesus' teaching brings him into contact, conflict with the Jewish rulers of his day, the Bible experts, which is who the Pharisees were.

They were the experts in the scriptures. The synagogue rulers, the pastors of the day, the elders. And you see with them, they don't see the need of an attitude of humble repentance.

Because they think they are already on the right side of God. And as we go through this section, this chapter in the next few weeks, we're going to see that it's very easy for you and I to be self-righteous like them.

Rather than humble like the Lord Jesus. So I want to do those two things this morning. I want to draw that contrast. First of all, I want us to see Jesus the compassionate freedom giver. Jesus the compassionate freedom giver.

That's what Jesus is doing. Giving freedom. Look at verse 10. Of Luke 13. Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath day. And behold, there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for 18 years.

[ 5 : 53 ] She was bent over and could not straighten herself. The Sabbath was the day, of course, when people gathered to hear the Bible, the scriptures, taught and discussed them in the synagogue.

And this woman had been coming week by week and she was doubled up in pain. We can think of people like that, can't we? We can think of people maybe in our family or on our street.

They struggle to stand up and they struggle to sit down and their back bows, they're hunched over and their shoulders are permanently hunched.

And it's painful getting up in the morning. It's painful getting dressed. It's painful to get down the stairs. It's painful to get the breakfast. It's painful to sit down on a seat.

And that is with modern medicine, isn't it? That is with old people popping loads of pills. That's with modern medicine. I cannot imagine the agonies of this woman's life.

[ 6 : 51 ] It was John Chapman that used to say, growing old is the pits. And it is, isn't it? When you're really old and when you're struggling with health and when there's pain, here's the agony of this woman's life.

But she's at the synagogue. And Luke tells us it is a spirit, a disabling spirit that is afflicting her. It's not a normal ailment. Look at verse 12. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, woman, you are free from your disability.

It's so simple, isn't it? Jesus sees her suffering. She doesn't come to him for healing. In grace, the Lord Jesus, he takes the initiative.

In tenderness and love, he calls her over. There's no great struggle, is there? There's no all-night praying, prayer meeting. There is no prolonged appeal.

Begging the Lord, twisting the Lord's back behind his arm for healing. His arm behind his back for healing. It is just the unstoppable power of Jesus Christ, isn't it? He simply declares her free.

[ 8 : 02 ] Sat free from the daily struggle against spiritual bondage. Look at verse 13. He laid his hands on her and immediately she was made straight.

And she glorified God. You bet she did. Imagine the relief. The joy from being bent double with pain. Pain filled to standing upright, upright, pain free in a touch.

You see, Jesus is the compassionate freedom giver. He is the one who sees the brokenness and the pain. He sees the suffering of people and he acts to save them. In Luke's gospel, Jesus is most commonly called the saviour.

But it's a word that can equally be translated as the healer. So while King Jesus is on earth, he shows that his kingdom is going to be one in which all the products of sin are destroyed.

Sickness, suffering, and eventually death. King Jesus can set us free from the war. And he will one day fully and finally when he returns.

[ 9 : 08 ] Then we will enjoy fully the benefits of being his people. But at the heart of the freedom King Jesus' offering is the freedom from the punishment that our sin deserves.

Freedom from the enslavement to the devil as those who follow the devil's lies. That life lived in rebellion, that is the best life, isn't it? That's the great devil's lie.

That life lived in rebellion from God is one of true fulfilment. And that is the lie that we see time and again and again. Our non-Christian friends and family following a life where they believe that being in rebellion against God is the one of true fulfilment.

That's what I think. And that is the true slavery that this woman's physical suffering points you to. For slavery to sin. Now because some of you are thinking it, let me just say the Bible does not directly link sickness to sin, does it?

If you've got a cold this morning like I have, it's not because you gossiped about your neighbour last week. The Bible does say that sickness and suffering are in the world because of sin.

[ 10 : 16 ] We learnt that last week, didn't we? You see that in verses 1-9. That suffering is part of God's curse on a rebellious world. It is not his laser beam on certain people, but suffering is as a result of sin.

But it's a curse that Jesus deals with. A curse that will finally be removed when Jesus judges the world. And to prove that in Luke's Gospel, as Jesus strides the earth, he shows his total authority to restore people to health completely.

Jesus is the compassionate freedom giver. He says towards the end of the section, just come to Luke chapter 19 verse 10. Luke 19 verse 12.

For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost. That's what Jesus continues to do by his Spirit. as the Gospel is preached Sunday by Sunday and during the week.

He has come to seek and to save the lost. In compassion, Jesus is setting people free. He's setting people from the lies of Satan and the punishment that their sin deserves.

[ 11 : 27 ] And finally, one day, we will all be free from all the products of sin in our lives. And that is what Jesus is doing. He's doing it in London, now in this city.

He's doing it in Ealing. He's doing it in Sussex, in Surrey, in Swansea, in Brighton, in Birmingham, in Beverly. He's setting people free. Because of his compassion.

And the question is, are we on board with his mission? Do we rejoice as he does that? Because as we look at this passage, the one who should have been most overjoyed in what Jesus has done for this poor woman, is far from happy, is he?

In fact, he's angered by her freedom. So let me give you three reasons why the synagogue ruler reacts like that. So let's secondly look at the synagogue ruler. Here's the first thing we need to ask ourselves as a result of the synagogue ruler.

Do you love being right more than you love the lost? Do you love being right more than you love the lost? It's such a great picture, isn't it?

[ 12 : 34 ] Verse 13. And he laid his hands on her and immediately she was made straight. Imagine it. And she glorified God. Verse 14. But the ruler of the synagogue indignant. It's a very strong word, isn't it?

It's an angry snorting horse. That's what the word is used for. This man is angry with Jesus. He's not a little bit perturbed. This man is totally hacked off.

Not that he's got the courage to face up to Jesus. Do you see what he says? It says, it doesn't bring it out that clearly in the ESV, but the ruler of the synagogue indignant with Jesus that Jesus has healed on the Sabbath said to the people.

He said it very loudly to the people around him. Have you ever used that technique? You know what it's like when Noah and I are in the supermarket and people say, somebody says, in a very loud voice of the king, don't they?

It is dreadful the way parents let their children behave in shops like this, isn't it? In our day that never happens. They don't say it to you. They say it very loudly to other people. Well, look what this man does.

[ 13 : 39 ] He says it to the people, isn't it? He says, there are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day. But this woman, she didn't come for healing, did she?

She just came to the synagogue as usual. It was a usual Saturday thing. And Jesus seeing her need, his heart goes out to her, and he frees her from her agony.

Where is the compassion of this bloke? He's the synagogue ruler after all. He is the pastor. He is one of the elders. That's what it's like. He must have seen her suffering for the last 18 years. He must have seen her struggle to live day by day. He's seen how loyally she's come to the synagogue each week. This man must have known her well. The synagogue ruler, the synagogue is like the local Bible study centre.

This is like her house group leader. But the problem is that he's got his head so far shoved up his own Bible study, he's totally lost sight of the Bible, hasn't he? What is the purpose of the Bible?

[14:46] To bring people into a relationship with God? He's lost sight of the Sabbath. What is the Sabbath meant to represent? What is the Sabbath meant to represent? It is meant to represent a day of freedom.

It was the day that they were to remember that God rested in Genesis 1. And it was the day that was to remind them that freedom had been given to them as the people. That God had freed them from Egypt.

And God had freed them to live in the promised land. It was the day that they were to remember perfect freedom is still to come. When all those were to do on the Sabbath than to free someone from bondage to Satan and physical suffering.

It is a totally Sabbath activity. But this cynical ruler is so obsessed with his own way of doing things, so obsessed with his spin, his take on God's law, that when a woman he administered to for as long as some of you have been alive, is wonderfully released from her suffering, he's furious.

And it's actually easy to love being right more than we love the lost. Don't get me wrong, I think there is a right and I think there is a wrong way to follow the Lord Jesus.

[16:07] I believe in doctrine, I believe that for a number of years we didn't teach doctrine enough in this church. It's one of the joys of adult Sunday school. It's why I want you all to go to adult Sunday school if you possibly can on a Sunday morning because of teaching doctrine.

We need to weigh everything we do against the Bible. There are right and wrong things we need to teach and we need to avoid. We need to know when it's the wrong way to follow the Lord Jesus.

We do honour to God by spirit-empowered obedience. I believe in duty in the Christian life. We can sniff a bit of heresy a mile off can't we?

But when that means that we cannot rejoice in people being set free we've got a serious problem. Especially when like the synagogue ruler it's our own little spin our own little extra law the thing we've added to God's word and we're particularly worried about that.

One of my problems is I just love being right. When I think of some of the churches in this city I really struggle with them.

[17:20] I really struggle with them. Some of the churches in Ealing actually. I don't think they're right. I think there are certain biblical things I've got massive issues with them. I profoundly disagree with them.

I have to say there's a card carrying Westminster Confession Three Forms of Unity Loving Man. But I've got to say this. Many of these churches introduce people to Jesus. And God is using them to set people free.

They're not perfect. But neither am I. And here I think there are areas where they are really seriously mistaken. But my emotional reaction sometimes is as if I'd rather that they didn't see people come to Jesus.

When that is the case, that is loving being right more than loving the lost. Christ. It happens when we get irritated by God for working outside our carefully run programme.

It happens when God uses another church to save people. When he doesn't use my ministry that I'm involved with. It happens when other things in church life that I'm not involved with are going really well.

[18:45] And the things that I'm involved with are not going really well. And if truth be told, I'm pretty angry about it. I find it hard this week.

I'm doing four weeks at the Morgate Talks. They do question and answer after it. There is a very annoying atheist who sits right in the front row. Closes his eyes during my talks. And there was question and answer.

And he asked a very, very good question that I couldn't really answer. I wanted to be right. And I wanted him to be shown to be wrong. And I think that's one of the dangers, isn't it? The danger of so wanting to be right that we're not compassionate about the lost.

And don't think we're free of it. We don't pity them like Jesus. But it's not just self-righteousness in this guy. It's self-interest as well. Here's the second question.

Do you love convenience more than you love the lost? Do you love convenience more than you love the lost? Because this man's religion was actually centred around himself. Look at verse 15. [ 19 : 46 ] Then the Lord answered, you hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath and tie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it? The word hypocrisy comes from the Greek theatre. They didn't have great actors in those days like Sandra Bullock and John Thorne or any of those kind of people.

They were terrible actors. They had a mask that they put over their face. That was what they did in the Greek theatre. It was an act. And when they were on stage they wore it. And they wore a mask to show what mood they were in.

And to be hypocrite was to have a mask in front of you. It is to behave one way outwardly but inwardly to have another set of attitudes. And do you know what the problem is?

The problem is we just can't keep up the full performance can we? All the time. So the synagogue ruler is very keen on rigid Sabbath keeping as long as it doesn't affect him.

He's very keen on rigid Sabbath keeping as long as he can keep his animal healthy. That is the way that he's rewritten the rules. His ox or his donkey was better treated on the Sabbath than the crippled woman in his congregation.

[ 20 : 59 ] His religion is just a matter of personal convenience. He's got two sets of rules one set that applies to him and another set that applies to everyone else. He cares more for the convenience of his life than for the plight of this crippled woman.

It's the opposite of compassion isn't it? It's the opposite of the Lord Jesus. Whatever is easiest for us orders our lives.

We live in that sort of culture don't we? It's a self-indulgent culture. It's one that seeks our own pleasure above all else. It starts in sixth form doesn't it? You know when sixth form is a great time of life but you begin to be released from some of the rules of school your school might start to experiment with drink and drugs and sex and then you get to student days and it really kicks in living for pleasure.

But then you go into the workplace and you're told you've got to think about yourself. You've got to keep moving up the career ladder keep earning the money so you can enjoy it and then you retire and retirement is all about a life of leisure.

And it's a huge temptation for all of us that we opt for our own comfort. And putting ourselves out for others. I've had lots of students prepared this week so I made the fitness thing I'm googling comfort and convenience.

[ 22 : 21 ] I was hoping to find some clever illustrations. What is odd when you google comfort, convenience and sacrifice the three of them together. There are a worrying number of sites for weddings and shoes for weddings particularly.

There's even a site about buying a bed for your dog. It's no help at all on the illustration and there it is isn't it? Those are the things we worry about. So what really matters is not having the right shoes for the wedding.

Or we're more interested that our dog has got back pain than our neighbours have salvation. We get more excited about our favourite TV programme than we do about the Lord's Day. Or I'm more worried that what I'm having for my tea than I am with my sister as a Christian.

I mostly engage with my own convenience. I order my day for my own convenience. Or do I order it for the lost people around me? That God in his sovereignty has brought around you.

The people who you might be the only Christian that they know. You see if you love them you'll spend time loving them. Putting emotional energy into them. The synagogue ruler is more interested in his livestock than he is by this crippled woman.

[ 23 : 37 ] It's all about his convenience. And the reason we need to spend our lives for the sake of others is that they desperately need to be set free. Here's the last thing. Do we see lost people as they are?

Do we see how lost people are? Look at verse 16. And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, who was Satan bound for 18 years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day? In other ways Jesus says, listen if you're willing to feed your dog on a Sunday shouldn't this woman be given her freedom on a Sunday? Freedom from Satan? Because that is the state of all people

without the Lord Jesus isn't it?

They are followers of the devil. He is the prince of the air. He has them in his power. They live life for his lies. They don't even know it.

They don't even know that God cares. they live lives for that lie that God doesn't care even if he exists. They live life for that lie that Jesus doesn't matter and the world is a much better place if we run it for ourselves.

[ 24 : 47 ] And those are the lives that the world lives for and it's slavery. The problem is, isn't it, is that bondage to Satan is not always so clearly distressing.

we can clearly see this woman's needs, can't we, even reading about it. If this woman walked in here this morning we would all look over, sigh, and think, oh poor dad.

If we were near her we'd get up, we'd help her into her seat. We'd have leapt up and we'd have helped her because her physical needs were visible on the outside but you cannot see most people's spiritual needs.

Your friends, family, neighbours, work colleagues, they don't come in, together with creaking chains. It would be easy if our non-Christian friends came swathed in chains. The devil is far, far more subtle, isn't he?

He enslaves people very often in the things that they want. And often they seem to have better lives than us. They seem more successful, more popular, more happy, more secure.

[ 25 : 51 ] They seemingly seem to enjoy more freedom but they're enslaved to see. The devil often uses very good things to grab people into his grip.

With Eve it was fruit. Fruit is good for you, so I'm told. And Eve saw that the fruit was good for food and it was pleasing for the eye and it was desirable for gaining wisdom and she took some and she ate it.

you see we will never truly rejoice in the freedom of Jesus until we see the lostness of the lost.

And Luke emphasizes that you see Jesus says bound, bound for 18 long years. Life in the world without Jesus can never be what God wanted it to be.

Life in eternity without Christ is a punishment more awful than words can describe. Philip Jensen says you can photograph terrible suffering but you cannot photograph a person in hell.

[ 27 : 01 ] I wonder whether we could. Or if we could see the anguish in our friends eyes on the day of judgment. If only we could accept the warnings of the Bible that slavery to sin and Satan is worse than being bent double in agony every day of your life.

You see to have true compassion is to see how lost people are. How bound they are without Christ. I don't want to guilt trip you this morning. I really don't. Preaching Revelation on Sunday nights has done me the world of good in seeing the final judgment and how it must motivate us.

But as I come to this passage my prayer for myself and for us as a church family is that by God's spirit I might love people more than I love my own convenience. that I might long for their freedom more than I long to be right.

And I might be a little bit more like the Lord Jesus because Jesus didn't put his righteousness first did he. Jesus actually suffered silently the injustice and he took my unrighteousness upon himself and he didn't live for his convenience and he didn't live for his comfort and he gave up the perfection of heaven to walk on this squalid earth.

And he then experienced what it was to be lost for us. And maybe as I spend a bit more time thinking on the compassion and the love of the Lord Jesus I would find myself a little bit more like him and a little bit less like those nitpicking religious leaders.

[ 28 : 37 ] And I'd probably be rejoicing at all the glorious things that God is doing. Let's pray.