

Part 50: Opposed and Overcoming

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If you're a parent or have ever cared for small children, perhaps you're familiar with such apt existential literature as this fine work: "Deep in the water where the fish hang out, lives a glum gloomy swimmer with an ever-present pout. 'I'm a pout-pout fish with a pout-pout face, so I spread the dreary-wearies all over the place. Blub, blub, blub.'"

"Along comes a clam with a wide winning grin, and a pearl of advice for her pal to take in: 'Hey, Mr. Fish, with your crosstown frown, don't you think it's time to turn it upside down?' Says the fish to his friend, 'Nice thought Mr. Clam. I hear what you're saying, but it's just the way I am. I'm a pout-pout fish with a pout-pout face so I spread the dreary wearies all over the place. Blub, blub, blub.'"

Maybe you heard a "pout-pout fish" in our passage just read for us--"There are six days of the week in which work out to be done. Come on those days and be healed and not the Sabbath day."

Over the next few chapters of Luke's gospel, Jesus is going to encounter a lot of "pout-pout fishes." A couple weeks ago he warned Israel, who was called the vineyard of God in the Old Testament, saying that if the vine continued to produce no fruit, then judgment would come. But for the time being, Jesus as the great vinedresser was going to do work in hopes of seeing the fruits of faith and repentance spring up.

But what we are going to see in these next few weeks are some shoots of fruit from people we wouldn't naturally expect, and continued barrenness from those who we think ought to be the most fruitful. It's not just the self-righteous "Pout-pout fishes" of scripture that need to hear Jesus, but if we are not careful we too might drift into a similar condition.

Jesus has been talking to us about the difficulty of following Jesus. This season presents a unique challenge for God's people because we have the promise of salvation in the message of the gospel, but we are also taught to pray, "Your kingdom come." Meaning—this world isn't the kingdom.

We still encounter temptation from the devil, the world, and even our own flesh. And if we aren't careful we too can find ourselves dangerously discontent. We wish things could be different. We wonder if God even cares. We think that if we were in control things would be going much smoother.

There is a wonderful place for lament in the Christian faith. This world is hard because sin and its effects are real. But for believers who understand the true reality of Jesus and his kingdom, lament is also accompanied by the assured promise of glory. In other words, **in our world the kingdom of the gospel is opposed but also overcoming.**

That's what we are going to look at this morning. We are going to see this in two parts. First we are going to see Jesus' **Mercy Opposed** in the healing of a woman on the Sabbath, but second Jesus is going to use this healing as an opportunity to preach to us the overcoming force of **Kingdom Power**.

If you've ever wrestled with doubts, discontent or despair in following Jesus, what we see in our passage today is that if we hope in Jesus—hope always wins because there's power in the gospel.

To begin, let's dive into the first part today where we see Jesus' **Mercy Opposed** in the synagogue healing.

For a number of weeks now Jesus is leaning more and more into the Jewish religious establishment so that their unbelieving hearts will be made stunningly visible. He wants us to see how bare the vineyard is. Jesus' teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath, the holy day, is part of that exposure.

And as Jesus is teaching the Old Testament we see two responses to his power, we see a healing and a hardening.

Jesus' *healing* happens as he is teaching. If you've been paying attention in the book of Luke, the way this happens is unique. Typically it is the sick and the suffering who interrupt Jesus, or come to Jesus, but here Jesus interrupts himself to heal this woman.

This in itself is very profound. We've seen times where Jesus set aside the ministry of healing in order to prioritize his preaching ministry. But here we see why Jesus does that. Jesus is showing the purpose of his preaching ministry. The end of Jesus' good news of salvation is not merely an intellectual understanding. But to understand who Jesus is, is to experience in a very real way—healing. That's what the resurrection goes to prove—every Christian is one day healed both spiritually and physically.

If you're checking out Christianity, we submit ourselves to the study of Jesus' teaching not because we want a new world view, but because we want to be made new. We need our hearts healed from sin and the hope that one day everything will be restored in heaven. If you're a Christian who loves to study theology, notice here that the end of Jesus' teaching is not just big words, but big changes in your life. To miss that transformation is to miss the purpose of Jesus' own message.

Did you notice how Jesus' heart worked here? Look back at **verses 12 and 13**, "Jesus saw her, he called her over, he 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."

I want to talk about the miracle here, but first I want to talk about the savior. Jesus saw her, called her, spoke to her, touched her and healed her. Brothers and sisters, this is what it means to be saved by Jesus. No one backs into salvation.

I remember one round of Covid relief checks that had to be reprinted because the president wanted his signature to be on the check. Why? Because he wanted every American to know that this relief came from the hand of the president.

But when you got that check, you were under no illusion that the president personally cared for you. It was an act of a larger legislation, where his signature was stamped by a machine, processed in a facility, digitally printed from a database, placed in the mail, carried by a postal worker, and dropped in your mailbox without even a "hello."

That is not how Jesus gives us relief. It is through his knowledge of us, it is through his personal will, it is through his gentle touch. To be saved by Jesus is to be seen by him, called by him, spoken to by him, and touched by him through the gospel.

From everything we can gather about this woman—she believed in the gospel that Jesus preached. Jesus called her a “daughter of Abraham” which probably implies that like Abraham she believed in the promise of God by faith. We also see that as soon as she was healed by Jesus she glorified God, she saw Jesus’ work as God’s work.

But we also know that she had suffered for 18 years with something Doctor Luke called "debilitating." Something physiologically in her body prevented her from being able to straighten her spine. You can imagine the discomfort of that.

Luke also tells us in verse 11, and Jesus himself in verse 16, that part of this was the work of evil, demonic affliction. This doesn't mean that during this time everyone was ignorant and ascribed any illness to the demonic realm. Remember Luke was a doctor and he described it both as physical and spiritual here.

But it also doesn't mean that all physical disease is a sign of spiritual possession. Contrary to other examples in the book of Luke, we are not told this woman was possessed, merely that she was bound by Satan in this way. This is probably similar to what Job experienced at the hands of Satan, or what Paul spoke of in **2 Corinthians 12:7** when Paul says, "a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited."

Paul experienced something similar and said it helped him to not rely only on himself. This woman seemed to model this in a profound way. What would you do if you had a problem in your life that you prayed for, and had friends pray for, for 18 years? What would you do if you did the good and faithful thing and kept showing up to church, hoping that your obedience would be rewarded only to find you woke up in the same pain every morning?

I imagine many of us, apart from the grace of God, would be prone to say, "This isn't working." We'd become the pout-pout fish. Some listening here may have a physical ailment and you might say, "Why does she get it? I'm here, Jesus is my savior too right?"

Martin Luther often talked about spiritual growth as a three part process. The first part was prayer, realizing our need for God. The second part was meditation where we reflected on God's provision for us in Jesus. And the third part was *anfechtung*, which to Luther meant temptation through affliction.

Luther saw this as a grace because it was through the Devil's temptation to doubt Jesus' goodness that saints find Jesus truly sufficient. It was the fire that hardened the protective enamel of faith. When Satan attacks the people of God, God's people are driven to God and in so doing use what Satan intended for evil as a means of what God purposed for good.

Despite everything this woman went through, she still sought out the teaching of God's word because she needed it. She knew that here and here alone was power. She wasn't there under duress. She wasn't interrupting Jesus as he taught, probably because she had given up the hope of physical healing. But one day, the savior saw her and she was healed. A healing she didn't ask for which was a sign that

everything she hoped in as a daughter of Abraham was finally coming true, the kingdom was blooming as Jesus the King taught in her midst.

Immediately the mercy of Jesus healed her, and immediately she glorified God. She understood with clarity in that moment that hope in the promise of God is never hope misplaced. Whether it takes eighteen months, eighteen years, or only in eternity itself, the power of the gospel to make everything new is real power in Jesus Christ.

But that wasn't the only response was it? Here is where we see the ***hardening***.

Not only did Jesus' mercy stare down and defeat the forces of the devil, but here he faces the stubborn force of the flesh: the religious opposition to the mercy of Jesus.

The ruler of the synagogue stood up and Luke tells us in verse 14 that he became indignant because Jesus healed on the Sabbath. Can you imagine that? I wonder how fun it would have been to read Jesus' "Yelp" reviews if they had them: "10/10 wouldn't recommend, healed on a Saturday."

We understand a little bit more of why this man was so incensed at Jesus by looking at Jesus' response to the man: **Luke 13:14-17**.

The man was upset because Jesus healed on the Sabbath. So upset, this is wild, that he rebukes the people and says "Come be healed another day." It's almost as if this man just saw something as ordinary as Jesus hand out a cup of coffee and say, "Come back and I'll have a fresh pot for you tomorrow."

The vineyard was barren. This man and his associates were blinded to what was going on because they misunderstood two things.

First, they misunderstood the Sabbath itself. The Sabbath was created in Genesis 1 when God rested, and it became a law in Exodus 20. But before it became a law, it was talked about most frequently in the Passover. These two events, creation and redemption, help us understand what was meant by the Sabbath law.

The Sabbath was meant to bring on one hand rest and on the other reliance. It was a day where God's people were allowed to kick up their feet a little and remember that God himself, not their own effort or their fields, were what sustained them. But secondly, the Sabbath was tied to God's mercy. On the Sabbath of the Passover, God worked so that his people could be spared. God's people rested by faith in the blood of the lamb, and had to trust that God and God alone could accomplish the work of redemption.

If you notice the Sabbath law connects both rest and mercy: **Exodus 20:8-10**.

The Sabbath was a day of rest, but also a day to give mercy. It wasn't a day where the Israelites rested by making their neighbors or foreigners do their work. Instead, they were to invite others into the faithful rest of God's people.

The Pharisees throughout the centuries created thousands of additional laws Jews had to uphold on the Sabbath so much so that rest came at the cost of mercy. That's what Jesus draws out when he says, "You have mercy by untying your donkey? I've untied a woman bound by Satan and you're upset?"

They misunderstood the mercy of God.

But it's here we see the second misunderstanding of the synagogue ruler: he misunderstood Jesus.

Not only was Jesus giving mercy as the Sabbath would have desired, but he was the fulfillment of the Sabbath in itself. Just like on the Passover Sabbath, Jesus was going to work so that his people could rest.

The Sabbath was the perfect day, the synagogue the perfect place, and in the midst of Jesus' teaching the perfect time for him to do this healing. Jesus was working to show that the works of the law were coming to an end and the works of grace were coming from his call, his words, and his touch.

The vinedresser was working. It is no work of the flesh to come to faith in Jesus. Faith is not a human work. Faith is a work of God in the heart of those who submit themselves to the message and the man of mercy.

Now I have a confession to make. I really struggled in preaching this text. I struggled with it because it seems so obvious to us that we should not be like this ruler. You could go a street corner downtown or to a philosophy class at the University and read this text and everyone, I mean everyone, would say: "Don't be like this ruler. Be like Jesus."

We feel it's self-evident. We know we aren't this guy. We would never misunderstand Jesus. We would always see him for who he is. We would never be confused at what he is doing. We would always understand with total clarity the implications of the gospel on our time and how we can only understand them in relationship to Jesus. We would never mistake what the kingdom looks like in our time frame. We'd never say, "It's not supposed to look like this." We would never become frustrated when others seem to have greater joy in Jesus by faith than we do by our track record of works.

We don't need this passage. We would never need Jesus to straighten us out. We would never encounter someone who needs gospel grace and say, "There are six days in which you can be healed, come back on those days and not while I'm watching football." We would never seek to confine the work of Jesus to our own schedules and our own expectations.

You see we are the ones who often miss the point, because if we aren't careful, we too misunderstand the nature of Jesus and his kingdom.

Maybe you noticed the response of the crowds at the end. But did you notice how it stood in contrast to the woman who was healed? What did the crowds do in verse 17? They rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by him. What did the woman do when she was healed in verse 13? She glorified God. Did you notice the difference?

When it comes to following Jesus we often follow a savior who is at worse actively opposed, and at best ignored. If our only hope is in the spectacular works of God and not the man of God then we will constantly wrestle with our emotions when glorious things seem so far away, or when our own experience says we have been forgotten.

But this Jesus, though misunderstood and opposed, is the power of God that crushes the devil and humbles the self-righteous. Though the gospel seems opposed, it is also overcoming. This is our final point this morning: **Kingdom Power**. Read with me **Luke 13:18-21**.

Just like the miracle itself, the danger of these parables is in their simplicity. They are both clearly about something seemingly small and insignificant having the power it needs to grow in abundant and consuming ways.

Watching a tree grow is boring because growth is not observable in the immediate, but only over time. The power of leaven seems weak, until you come back later and see all that it has done.

It's easy to understand this, but really difficult to actually believe it. You see let's not forget that the synagogue ruler was totally content with Jesus' teaching until it confronted what he didn't believe.

Jesus' point here is that it so easy to miss this Kingdom. But don't miss it. The power is not in acceptance by the world. The power is not in the immediate relief of the spine. The power is in the Kingdom itself.

That's what this whole passage goes to show. It's moving from shadow to substance the whole way through. The ruler couldn't see past the Sabbath to the greater mercy of rest. The crowds rejoiced in glorious things, but the woman rejoiced in a glorious God. The seed gives way to a tree, the leaven rises the whole lump.

Everyone wants the end of the kingdom, but do you see where it starts? It starts here, in the ministry of Jesus Christ. And even when he is opposed, even when you are opposed, the power and progress is inevitable. Here is power and hope and nowhere else.

You see this woman was healed by Jesus and what was the world's response to her? They were mad at her. The ruler didn't rebuke Jesus, he was too scared to do that, but instead he rebuked the crowd on account of her, as if it were her who messed everything up.

Brothers and sisters when Jesus heals your heart through faith you will perhaps find that not all religious people wear robes. When you break the party line of drinking and sleeping around, the legalism of the world gets mad. When you walk away from the phantom king of sexual freedom and financial opulence, you will be told to step back in line.

But what the world would rather bind by its power, Jesus calls to stand in something which seems often insignificant. We can find many reasons for which to pout, because as I said, this world is hard and sin is real. But as Christians we endure suffering differently, we don't spread the dreary wearies, but instead we spread the power of the kingdom. We are the fragrance of Christ to those who are perishing, but sometimes the rose that smells the riches is the one crushed in the crucible.

But even so, we are not at want for power. For Jesus' kingdom is just like that. Powerful, but opposed. Afflicted but overcoming. Remember what the Lord said to Paul when he had that thorn in his side, **(2 Cor. 12:9)** "'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

J.C. Ryle has a wonderful quote and it's a bit long, but I hope it encourages all of us who at times find ourselves frustrated at what it seems Jesus is doing. Remember, it won't make sense to our eyes, but it makes sense when we understand the mercy and person of Jesus.

"The beginnings of the gospel were exceedingly small. It was like 'the grain of a seed cast into the garden.' It was a religion which seemed at first so feeble, and helpless, and powerless, that it could not live. Its first founder was One who was poor in this world, and ended his life by dying the death of a malefactor on the cross.--Its first adherents were a little company, whose number probably did not exceed a thousand when the Lord Jesus left the world.--Its first preachers were a few fishermen and publicans, who were, most of them, unlearned and ignorant men.--Its first starting point was a despised corner of the earth, called Judea, a petty tributary province of the vast empire of Rome.--Its first doctrine was eminently calculated to call forth the enmity of the natural heart. Christ crucified was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and the Greeks foolishness.--Its first movements brought down on its friends persecution from all quarters, Pharisees and Sadducees, Jews and Gentiles, ignorant idolaters and self-conceited philosophers, all agreed in hating and opposing Christianity. It was a sect everywhere spoken against.--These are no empty assertions. They are simply historical facts, which no one can deny. If ever there was religion which was a little grain of a seed at its beginning, that religion was the gospel."

This gospel we believe might not in this moment solve all your problems. But one day it will. The kingdom will come. This gospel might seem slow, it might seem ineffective, but one day the whole lump will be leavened. It might seem like you are the only one wrestling through the meekness of life, but remember Jesus sees you. And remember one day the birds of the air will join the tree of grace.

Many scholars think that's an allusion to **Ezekiel 17:23-24**, where the prophet says, "On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell every kind of bird; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest. And all the trees of the field will know that I am the Lord, I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish, I am the Lord; I have spoken and I will do it."

Brothers and sisters, to come to Jesus and to receive his mercy is to bind yourself to the vine that becomes a cedar. A tree filled not just with the promised Jews of Abraham, but the birds of world, from every tongue, tribe and nation.

It might look meek and misunderstood now, but for those who understand Jesus and his kingdom, we do not lose hope.

Instead, like this woman healed by the savior who sees her, we make it our business in the face of scoffers to glorify the God who saved us, and in fulfillment of the Sabbath law, we invite others into our rest.

There will be no pouting for those who believe. For the power is in the kingdom, and it will not fail.

John Chrysostom had a wonderful quote that spurs us onward even when we will be misunderstood by the world: **"Now if twelve men leavened the whole world, imagine how great our disbelief, if we being so many are not able to add the more who remain; we who ought to be enough for then thousand worlds, and to become leaven to them."**

May the Holy Spirit help us to not miss the point, to not wallow in our circumstances, but to realize that in Jesus the power of God is at work silencing the devil and throwing down the works of the flesh and that we are missionaries and ambassadors to that end.