

## Prayers

### To God

Weekly Theme: The Wisdom of God

*Ask the Lord to reveal His wisdom for your life. Ask Him to show you enough for you to start taking new steps forward in faith, whatever your circumstances. Remember that sometimes, wisdom is not found in what is new, it is found in what is old but right, and righteous.*

### For myself

*Seek the Lord in the quietness of your spirit, asking Him for the strength to face and deal with those things you find difficult today. We often cut out many possibilities of life because we will not face certain things, certain people or certain situations. Make sure you are not standing in the way of God's will for your life.*

### For others

Lord God, be merciful to those who have no home and no security  
Lord God, be merciful to those who have no health care and need help  
Lord God, be merciful to those who suffer from unnecessary neglect  
Lord God, be merciful to those who find no hope because they know no Saviour  
Lord God, be merciful to me a sinner, who rarely reaches out to help  
Lord God, be merciful to us who are Your servants, empower us to do Your will.

**AMEN**

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## Meditation

Jesus, You are there for us in every circumstance of life:

You touch every art of our being with Your overflowing kindness;  
You enable us to forgive others by forgiving us out of Your love;  
You give us hope by assuring us of Your eternal presence;  
You enable us to endure our trials by standing close by to us ;  
You sustain our joy with a great abundance of generosity;  
You lift us up and help us onward after we have fallen;  
You care about our health and grant us Your powerful healing;  
You protect our troubled souls with the solid shield of faith;  
You comfort our feelings of rejection with your perpetual kindness;  
And You are there as we strive to do what's right, in Spirit and in power:

Jesus, You are there for us in every circumstance of life. **Thank You**

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## Bible Passage

### **Luke 13:10-21**

<sup>10</sup> Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath, <sup>11</sup> and remarkably, there was a woman there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years, she was bent double and unable to stand up straight. <sup>12</sup> When Jesus saw her, He called her forward and said to her,

***"Woman, you are released from your disability!"***

<sup>13</sup> Then he placed His hands on her, and immediately she stood up straight and praised God. <sup>14</sup> The synagogue leader was indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, so he said to everyone who was there,

*"There are six days for work, so come on those days to be healed, but not on the Sabbath."*

<sup>15</sup> The Lord replied to him like this,

***"You hypocrites! Doesn't each one of you untie his ox or donkey from the stall on the Sabbath, and lead it out to give it water? <sup>16</sup> Is it not right then that this woman, a daughter of Abraham who has been kept bound by Satan for eighteen long years, be liberated from what bound her, even on the Sabbath day?"***

<sup>17</sup> After Jesus said this, all his rivals were put to shame, but everyone there was delighted with all the wonderful things being done by Him.

<sup>18</sup> Jesus asked,

***"What is the Kingdom of God like? What can I compare it to? <sup>19</sup> It is like a mustard seed that someone took and planted in his garden, and it grew to become a tree, so that the birds made nests in its branches."***

<sup>20</sup> He spoke again,

***"What else is the Kingdom of God like? <sup>21</sup> It is like yeast used by a woman, who mixes it with three measures of flour until the dough is completely leavened."***

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## Review

Our passage today contains two fascinating elements. Firstly, the story of Jesus healing the woman with a demonic illness (13:10-17), and secondly, Jesus' famous mini-parables about the growth of the Kingdom like a mustard seed and like yeast. You will probably know both this healing story and the mini-parables very well, but before you came across them in the reading today, you may not have associated them with each other. Other Gospels have the mini-parables about the mustard seed and the yeast (Matt 13:31 and Mark 4:31), but it is only here in Luke that they are associated with the healing of the crippled woman. Is there any reason for this? Are these story elements placed side by side simply because they happened one after the other or is there another reason why Luke puts them together?

We can count out the idea that Luke is simply reporting 'what happened next', because all the Gospel writers (see Matt 13 and Mark 4), record the mini-parables at different points in Jesus' ministry. But they all use them to say something important about the Kingdom of God,

and here in Luke, they do just this; they remind us that the current theme in Luke's Gospel is the establishment of the Kingdom of God. So when Jesus healed the woman with a bent back, He did so to reveal something about God's Kingdom, and if we want to fully understand the miracle we must look at it in this light.

This does not mean to say that Jesus lacked compassion and performed the miracle solely to make theological points. The woman was healed because she had a need and Jesus responded to this, but as with so many of Jesus' healing miracles, there was more at stake. The story of this healing is a wonderful example of Jesus' compassion and healing power, but it also reveals something about the urgency of God's mission to establish His Kingdom. Jesus will cast out Satan wherever and whenever he is found, even on the Sabbath, to show God's divine zeal to establish His Kingdom and in so doing, defeat all the forces of evil. To appreciate this is to come closer to the heart of Luke's message at this point in his Gospel.

This incident is the last recorded occasion when Jesus went to a synagogue in Luke's Gospel; perhaps the response from the synagogue leader (13:13) made it difficult for Him to return. Feelings were running high. But Jesus was never one to be diverted because of people's feelings or because of human religious principle. On this day He saw before Him not merely a woman who needed help; this was obvious and the length of time over which she had suffered was intolerable (13:11). Jesus perceived in her the work of Satan to hold someone in bondage to disease and infirmity, and it was His work to establish the Kingdom of God as a place where Satan had no power (13:16).

Luke reports that as soon as Jesus saw the woman, He perceived her state and used the language of deliverance to 'release' her from the grip of Satan (13:12). Of course, Jesus explained what He had done later on when challenged by the synagogue leader (13:15f.), but this should not distract us from the significance of what actually happened. Jesus did not ask the woman to show faith or discuss her condition with her, He merely spoke to release her from Satan and then placed His hands on her for healing (13:12). All of Jesus' healing deeds were done in different ways, which helpfully teaches us that the healing ministry is infinitely. However, it is generally true that when Jesus dealt with Satan or demons, He performed the deliverance by speaking, often commanding the release. Also, He most commonly used the laying on of hands not for deliverance ministry but for healing. Here, one comes before the other (13:12,13), and the effect is the liberation and healing of the woman, which is clear for all to see as she praises not Jesus, but God Himself.

A challenge came immediately from the synagogue leader (13:13), who was unable to see past his world of legalistic Judaism and objected. He appealed not to Jesus but to others present, declaring that there was ample time to do good works in the six days of the week. But he wanted the Sabbath to remain uninterrupted according to the Commands of Moses, the very basis of their faith (Genesis 2:1-4, Exodus 20:8-11). Jesus was little short of furious. He accused the leader of religious hypocrisy, pointing out that even the most religious of Jews were sensitive to the needs of animals on the Sabbath; what law forbade compassion on the Sabbath (13:15)? And did not God Himself have the authority to establish His Kingdom on earth by defeating evil whenever he so chose (13:16)?

Now the people at the synagogue received all this with rapture (13:17). Luke reports that they were delighted to see the synagogue leader put in his place in this way. But surely Jesus wanted the people to perceive more than a healing miracle that was dramatic. This is why Luke records that Jesus immediately continued by delivering two mini-parables (13:18-19, 13:20,21). The first makes the point that God is doing His Kingdom work, though we need to be careful because mostly, we remember the other parables of the mustard seed that tell us it is like 'faith' (Matthew 17:20 and Luke 17:6).

There is perhaps a strong connection between the Kingdom of God and 'faith', but this is not the point here. Together with the next mini-parable, our passage suggests that while God's work to establish His Kingdom starts unseen, there comes a time when it becomes visible;

the seed becomes a tree, and the leavened bread is baked to become an edible, risen, loaf. This is perhaps the point of the very last phrase of the passage, '*until the dough is completely leavened*'.

Jesus has come into the world to do God's work and establish His Kingdom, and this requires the defeat of God's enemy Satan, especially when he holds people in repressive illness. Moreover, the sequence of stories and parable in Luke's Gospel reminds us that God's Kingdom is growing and will become more visible as the days go by. No one can stand in its way, neither a synagogue leader who is over zealous for the rules of Moses or Satan himself who will be defeated.

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## Going Deeper

### **Notes on the text and translation**

#### **V11 'remarkably'**

At this point in the text, we find the Greek word '*idou*', often translated '*behold*', or '*Look*'. It is a simple device in Greek to draw the attention of the reader to some noteworthy feature of a story, and I have therefore used the word '*remarkably*' because this conveys the meaning of '*idou*' here in the story line.

#### **V11 'crippled by a spirit'**

##### Other translations:

'*disabled by a spirit*' (CEB)

'*sickness caused by a spirit*' (NRSV)

The Greek word translated '*crippled*' or perhaps '*disabled*' merely means '*weakness*' or '*sickness*'. However, most translators use the word '*crippled*' simply because this is the nature of the sickness as revealed later on in the verse .

#### **V12 'You are released from your disability'**

##### Other translations:

'*you are set free from your infirmity*' (NIV)

'*you are freed from your sickness*' (NAS)

Some of the Bible versions have phrases here that we simply would not use in modern English, but there are no reasons why the phrase cannot be translated using words are dramatic and clear today. '*Infirmity*' is not a common word today, for example, but the idea of being released from a disability is powerful.

#### **V15 'The Lord replied to him like this'**

##### Other translations:

'*the Lord answered him*' (NIV)

'*the Lord replied*' (NLT)

The Greek construction of this sentence gives a literal rendering something like this; '*the Lord answered him and said*', but this seems rather long winded in English. However, there is here a certain emphasis on Jesus' reply because

the synagogue leader was certain attacking Jesus. My translation adds the words *'like this'* to convey this emphasis in an appropriate way.

**V17** *'but everyone there was delighted with all the wonderful things being done by Him.'*

Other translations:

*'but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing'*  
(NIV)

*'the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful thing the He was doing'*  
(NRSV)

The main difficulty with any translation of this sentence is the fact that here (and in the previous clause), the word 'all' occurs repeatedly; *'all His rivals ... all the people ... all the wonderful things ...'*. If every one of these is translated, then the sentence reads awkwardly in English. I have therefore changed *'all the people'* to *'everyone there'* because this avoids one of the instances of 'all' while giving the same sense of comprehensive coverage. It also matches with verse 14, which also speaks of *'everyone'* present at the synagogue.

## **Further Comments**

### **The Sabbath**

The Sabbath day was instituted by God after six day's work at the beginning of Creation (Gen 2:1-4). While the 10 Commandments add a little to this command, it was basically a command to honour God by resting from work, and the Old Testament contains no further elaboration on the command. In the centuries before Christ Jewish leaders and learned rabbis added a system of laws interpreting the 10 Commandments to everyday life, and it is those laws that produced the hypocritical religiosity that so offended Jesus.

As far as Jesus was concerned, He never spoke against the 'Law' as found in the Old Testament, He only ever spoke against the later developed 'law' of rabbinical interpretation. It may seem a fine point, but it is crucial, because we cannot say that because Jesus 'broke' Sabbath law we can do the same. Jesus did not break the principles of God's revelation of the Sabbath in the Old Testament, and never condoned it; He did however seek to explain something of the higher purposes of God as He established His Kingdom and evicted Satan.

### **The woman's condition**

Some have sought to identify the woman's condition, and at least one commentator say that she suffered from 'spondylitis deformans'. Medical terminology does not help us interpret the passage however, even if it raises our interest. In truth we can no more know the exact condition of the woman than name the demon cast out of her. This was a miracle of God's grace which Jesus performed both to help the woman and make a point about God's Kingdom.

### **Confirmation of a picture found in Ezekiel**

The rare picture of God's Kingdom as being like a tree is found in the prophecy of Ezekiel, and this is what Ezekiel says:

<sup>22</sup> "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar and plant it; I will break off a tender sprig from its topmost shoots and plant it on a high and lofty mountain. <sup>23</sup> On the mountain heights of Israel I

*will plant it; it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar.  
Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches.*

This prophecy has the important story elements of Israel likened to a tree, planted by God. But here, it is a shoot taken as a cutting from a great cedar, and replanted 'on a high and lofty mountain', that is, Jerusalem. This tree is to do two things; it is to bear fruit and also to grow branches so that 'birds of every kind will nest in it'.

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## Discipleship

### ***Application***

#### ***Being released from disability***

There are a number of incidents within the New Testament where Jesus heals people who have suffered for many years, and sometimes the length of time is given, for example, the woman who had bled for twelve years (Matthew 9:20f.). One might think that demonic activity would somehow be associated with such bondage, but this is not clear. The discernment of what is demonic activity is something Jesus is able to do without such 'simple' rules, and we should avoid making any such presumptions today.

Disability in its many forms is a complex subject, and this is nowhere more obvious than at the Paralympic games. There is a great need for God's people to engage with those who are disabled, in order to understand this wide ranging subject and also what it means for individuals who are suffering. It must be treated just like any other illness, and any connection with sin or with demonic activity is something that can only come with care and godly discernment. Though it is fair to say that whenever God works in power to release someone from bondage, He usually has a greater purpose in mind, as we find here in this passage.

#### ***The growth of the Kingdom of God***

Surely one of the most potent of Jesus' messages is that God is establishing His Kingdom in our midst and we must spot what He is doing and join in. I reckon that Jesus deliberately uses the mini-parable of the mustard seed to speak of both faith and the Kingdom of God, because it is only by faith that we can indeed identify God's Kingdom work and engage with it. Elsewhere in the Gospels, Jesus describes faith as being like a mustard seed that grows until it can 'move mountains' (Matt 17:20), and this is what is required for the Kingdom of God to be effective.

The Kingdom of God is growing in our day, though you might not know this from the evidence of what you see in your own church. This is itself something we perceive by faith and live by, and then discover the truth of what God is doing in our midst.

### ***Ideas for what to do***

- When Jesus describes the synagogue leader as a hypocrite, the accusation might be made to those of later years who have allowed rules and regulations to dominate the life of God's people. Consider carefully whether you have yourself fallen into the trap of hypocrisy.

- To what extent are you involved in Christ's healing ministry? Or do you think of this as something others do? Ask yourself whether you have a role to play in God's work to demonstrate His Kingdom to those who are bound by illness.

### **Questions (for use in groups)**

1. What can we learn from Jesus' healing of the woman who had a bent back?
2. Why does Jesus call the synagogue leader a 'hypocrite'? What is a hypocrite?
3. What does this passage teach us about the Kingdom of God? What contribution to this is made by the two mini-parables at the end of the passage?

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## **Final Prayer**

Lord God, please come into my life to heal my illnesses and deliver me from the powers of evil. I do not fully understand how Satan finds his way into my life, but I am determined to be victorious over him in Your strength. Bless me with Your zeal and courage, to follow You and be Your servant I pray. **AMEN**

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