



## TWO SIDES OF THE STORY

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Luke 13:10-17

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We have all been told, more than once in our lives, that there are at least two sides to every story. The first time we might have learned this lesson was probably from our parents or a teacher during a childhood disagreement, argument or fight. Perhaps during that particular stage in our lives when everything is about fairness and EVERYTHING seems to be “not fair.” You know what I’m talking about, you may have a kid in that stage right now, or perhaps you’ve recently heard a kid out on the sidewalk yelling at their parents saying, “that’s not fair!” And then the parent saying something quickly back like “life’s not fair!” because they’ve heard their child say that just about every day and they’ve given up trying to teach anything different just hoping this faze too shall pass.

But learning that there are two sides to every story, that, no, not everything is fair, that we don’t, or perhaps shouldn’t, get our way all the time, and that we need to put ourselves in someone else’s shoes, is so very important. It is one of those times in our lives when we learn a little more about grace. About not always “being right”. About not being too principled but trying to stand in the others shoes and see their side of the story, their predicament, why they might see it another way or why even if they’re wrong we need to let them be right this time, to help them, to let our ego go and let grace prevail.

And, although this is a life lesson that we are all old enough to have taught someone else at this point, it is something we all need to be reminded of today because I guarantee you there is something or someone that is affecting you or I



today, on a micro-level or macro-level. There is someone or something that needs grace but our internal laws and principals are standing in the way of us providing grace in the situation. Whether it be a friend, a colleague or co-worker, a spouse, or an entire group of people we've heard about in the news, there is something that we need to let go of, and let them be right, let them be able to stand up straight again and not be bent over by the world. To let their situation be covered, smothered and washed over in grace rather than them being stuck in an unhealthy predicament because our rules that were originally created to help the world could possibly be hurting innocent people in this particular situation.

Hebrews 13:1-3 says, "Let mutual love continue. <sup>2</sup> Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. <sup>3</sup> Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.

In today's story, my guess is that Jesus Christ was seeing this woman, I mean really seeing her, and her ailment, and therefore He helped her on the Sabbath rather than letting the presiding rule prevail. So let's take a closer look at this story. Let's look and think about the religious leader's point of view as well as Jesus' and the woman's point of view.

Let's start with the religious leader. He is right; in fact he "offers a very clear and compelling reading of the law... you are indeed not supposed to do any work on the Sabbath."

A note I found in my bible says, "The role of the synagogue ruler was to maintain the reading and faithful teaching of the Law. Since Sabbath observance was a central means for nourishing Jewish identity in the world of Luke, the way one interprets the Sabbath law (Exodus 20:9; Deuteronomy 5:13) is crucial."

Pastor David Lose wrote in defense of the religious leader that, "Once you start making exceptions, for this reason or that, pretty soon no one is really keeping the Sabbath and it has lost its point altogether. And it's not just the Sabbath. The whole



law is like that – keep making exceptions and it’s not really a law anymore; it’s more like a suggestion, with little or no power to protect and preserve us.”

“Truth be told, we regularly agree with this leader. Perhaps not about the Sabbath, but most of us have laws that we think are particularly important and we get nervous if we see people not respecting them.... Whatever it is, there are some laws we feel you should just keep. Period. And if you don’t, who knows what will unravel next?” ....

“And that’s exactly what this well-intentioned, law-abiding leader of the synagogue believes. But his isn’t the only perspective.” [*Lose, Sunday, August 18, 2013*]

Now, let’s look to the crippled woman and Jesus’ interpretation of the law. Here is this woman, whom we know nothing about, other than the fact that she has been hunched over, staring at the ground, for 18 years. If we read into that a little, we can see that she is in the synagogue on a Saturday. Which means she was probably a devout Jewish woman who obeyed the religious laws of the time, obeyed the laws and rules of the Synagogue, while also being a faithful follower and believer of God. For all we know, she may have been the most devout follower of the rules of anyone.

And Jesus knew the religious and social laws of the time better than anyone, and therefore He knew that there could be different interpretations of the law. He knew why the laws were originally created, what they were for, and what they had then become because of human interpretation or interruption. Therefore, He also knew that He needed to teach the world how to look faithfully at the law, and work within the law to show grace.

You see, “Law helps order our world, but grace is what holds the world together.” [*Lose, Sunday, August 18, 2013*]



This woman had been hunched over for 18 years staring at the ground. My guess is that at the moment she was healed, all laws fell away. Everything that she had ever known about religious law fell aside and freedom and grace washed over her. She was no longer concerned about the law but the mere fact that she could stand up straight, look Jesus in the eye, and rejoice thanking God for the miracle that had just restored her.

So, “what happened to all those laws and rules and concerns and regulations? Did they really fall away, as if they were no longer important? No. They were just suspended, perhaps temporarily forgotten, in those first few moments of sheer grace and gratitude.”

“Which”, David Lose wrote, “is always the way it is with law. The law matters because it helps us order our lives and keep the peace. The law matters because it sets needed boundaries that create room in which we can flourish. The law matters because it encourages us – sometimes even goads us – to look beyond ourselves so that we might love and care for our neighbor.” [*Lose, Sunday, August 18, 2013*]

This woman became the means through which God's power and grace was made evident on that day. This woman became the new means by which people could understand and interpret God's law that had been gifted to us.

So what did we discover from these two sides of the story? That, “From Jesus’ vantage point, scribal interpretation [of the law] had missed the importance of the redemptive purpose of God to be found in the Sabbath.”

In a different and yet similar Biblical story, Jesus healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. And in Luke’s and Mark’s accounts of the story Jesus said to the Pharisees and Sadducees, “I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to destroy it?” And in Matthew’s version of this account, Jesus said, “Suppose one of you has only one sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath; will you not lay hold of it and lift it out? How much more



valuable is a human being than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”

“The synagogue leader [and the Sadducees and the Pharisees] take very seriously and fairly literally the manifold laws about keeping the Sabbath contained in the Scriptures. Yet Jesus contends that beneath the surface of those laws lays a deeper intent – the welfare of those in need. You don't keep laws for the sake of keeping laws, Jesus seems to suggest, but rather for the greater intention they serve. So if keeping law impedes caring for someone in need, then the choice is easy – you break the law in order to fulfill it.” *[Lose, Sunday, August 15, 2010]*

I'm not suggesting here that Jesus says we have carte blanche to go out breaking the laws of our country and our state in order to help those we feel are in need. But I am suggesting that we suspend our principles, our internal laws, our religious and political views, the rigid lenses that we view our world with, and that we go above and beyond to help any person in need. That we come at life with grace in our hearts rather than restrictive principals in our minds.

Since I've borrowed from David Lose multiple times in today's sermon, I will also use him to help conclude it. He said that the law “must always bow to mercy, to life, to freedom. Law helps us live our lives better, but grace creates life itself. Law helps order our world, but grace is what holds the world together. Law pushes us to care for each other, but grace restores us to each other when we've failed in the law.”

Who in your life are you arguing with or disagreeing with that you need to let it go? Whose shoes do you need to stand in so you can see their story and let your principals and laws be moved by grace? What in this world are we missing because we are stuck in our old ways and need to see it not from the old strict sense of the law but in a new way where grace can fit in with the law and we can help someone, or a whole tribe of people? Who is the bent over person we need to see, and help, so we can see them, and they can see us, eye to eye again? Who is the person that we need to help get through their ailment, their pain, their burden, so that, having



gotten past it and being made whole again, we can celebrate their healing and their wholeness together? Who is it in our lives that we need to suspend our principals and manufactured social and religious laws in order to show them grace and mercy like Christ taught us to in today's story?

And once you've thought about it enough, reflected on it enough, and listened to God with your heart, your mind, and your soul, go show and offer grace and mercy to that person or those people. Go, offering grace and love knowing that that is what God wants you to do.

*In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, amen.*