

Text: Luke 13:10-17 (CSB)

Sermon Series: “What Time is It?” a study of Luke 12:29-14:24, part of an overall survey of the Gospel of Luke

Sermon Title: “Time for Healing”

Sermon Transcript:

Introduction

Sometimes art captures the story better than our words. And sometimes it only captures part of the story. There is a painting by a French man, named James or Jacques Tissot, of this story that we just heard read in the Gospel of Luke chapter thirteen. I want to share it with you. Let's put it on the screen there. He painted this just before the turn of the century in the late 1800s. It's held at the Brooklyn Museum. It's a small little painting, only nine and a half inches tall. It is a relatively small piece. This man, Tissot, would make many paintings of biblical stories late in his career. He was famous for other things earlier on, but after becoming a Christian, he began to paint these stories from the Bible.

I came across this painting this week as I was preparing and reading Luke chapter 13, and the story of Jesus healing this woman bent over for thirteen years. The painting struck me as a way that Tissot was telling this story. I think he captures some of the key themes that show up in the gospel of Luke here. The themes of sabbath, that of a bent and bound woman, and then even the controversy that would erupt between Jesus and these leaders. I thought it would be helpful for us to look at Tissot's painting as a way to wrestle with what's happening in this story even though I know that Tissot only captures part of what's going on. Let's look at Tissot's painting and the text of the gospel of Luke and see what's happening here on this sabbath.

The First Sabbath (Genesis 2:1-3; Luke 13:10)

The setting is a sabbath again. You heard in verse 13 that He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. This is a common thing for Jesus. He begins his ministry in a synagogue on sabbath day. He begins with this announcement in Luke chapter 4. In Luke chapter 6 Jesus gets in a fight with some religious leaders similar to what happens here over the sabbath as his disciples are picking grain and eating it on the sabbath. This controversy is not a new one for us in the story of Jesus. There seems to be a recurring pattern of Jesus on the sabbath healing and exorcising demons and causing a stir. These things keep happening.

As we read the gospel of Luke, it ought to raise the question for us, “Why?” “What has Jesus got against the sabbath?”, or “why does this keep happening?” “Why is it that Jesus and healing seems to be tied to the sabbath?” These are questions that you may not see as you read through the first time, but as you dive in deeper you realize there's something going on here. We have to pay attention to this. It's not an accident that Jesus is once again at the sabbath healing and stirring up trouble. So what is the sabbath all about? Let's go all the way back to the beginning and just reorient ourselves to where this thing called “sabbath” even began?

If you have your Bible, you can flip all the way back to Genesis chapter 1. If you've been around church, you remember that “sabbath” is rooted in the story of creation. God is the first one to sabbath. That is “to cease,” that's what the word means. If you remember Genesis chapter 1, you see a clear pattern as God creates. You see it in verse 4. He said let there be light, and there was light. God sees what he creates, and he says, “this is good.” Then there's a note at the end after he's done his creative work, “there was evening and there was morning, the first day.”

Now, this continues. Day two. He creates. He speaks and creation jumps into existence, and then “there was evening and morning, the second day.” This continues on until you get to the end of the chapter. The same pattern repeats: God speaking, creation occurring, God looking at it and saying, “this is good,” and then “there was evening and there was morning.” Verse thirty-one, “Evening and then morning, the sixth day.” But then the pattern changes.

This is where we begin to see what sabbath is really all about. It's going to help us understand why Jesus keeps running into trouble on the sabbath. Look at chapter two verse 1 in Genesis. “So the heavens and earth and everything in them were completed. On the seventh day, God had completed his work that he had done, and he rested.” That is, he “sabbath-ed.” That's the Hebrew word for rested or ceased. “On the seventh day, God rested from all his work that he had done, God blessed the seventh day and he rested from all his work on creation.” Let me highlight a couple of things here to make sure you don't miss what's happening.

This is the seventh day, and the theme that marks the seventh day is completion. Did you hear it there in verses 1 and 2? “The heavens and earth and everything in them were *completed*.” Verse 2, “on the seventh day God had *completed* his work.” Sabbath has something to do with completion. Everything is in its proper order. God has created the world. He has created humanity to rule over the world under him, and he says this is good. It is complete. Sabbath is about completed work. But notice, something very different happens in the pattern here on the seventh day. You may have seen it already. Something is missing from the seventh day that shows up on every other day of creation. Do you see it? Look in your text there, verse 31 of chapter one we see the same pattern, “God saw all that he had made and it was very good. Evening came and the morning of the sixth day...” Then we get to the end of the declaration of day seven, and we find, “...evening came and then morning, the seventh day.” *Actually, we don't.* It's not there! The thing that is missing from the seventh day, this sabbath day, is the end! Every other day has evening and morning and then the next day is announced, but when we come to the sabbath day, when God has completed his work, there's no *end* to the sabbath. This sets up our understanding of what sabbath is all about.

You see, God has completed this work and he's going to, as we see the story unfold, invite humanity into *his* sabbath. It is *God* who established sabbath, and he invites humanity to enjoy it with him. This is the nature of sabbath. God is not resting because He's tired here. He's resting because it is complete, and now he's going to invite humanity to join in this completed work with him. Humans ruling over creation under God's authority in an unending sabbath. Everything complete, everything in order. But does it say that way? Let look back at Luke chapter 13. Because we have here a reminder that that sabbath rest doesn't last for humans.

Sabbath Broken (Genesis 3:1); Bent, Bound Woman (Luke 13:11)

Look again at Tissot's painting, and let's zoom in here on the woman. I think we have a picture here. We see in the story a woman bent and bound, bent by physical infirmity, bound by Satan as Jesus says in verse 16. A lot of commentators will focus on the nature of her physical ailments. Some will say it's scoliosis. Some will say it was a fusing of her spine. Others will say it was an ecstatic or mental condition that was the cause of this. But I think that's missing the point. As we see this woman bent over, I think Tissot has actually captured what we're supposed to know about her. You see, Tissot, this French artist, was famous for painting portraits of women. They are in bold and beautiful colors with incredible detail of these ladies' faces. He was famous for this. He was a brilliant painter and almost with HD quality would capture these

people. It looks like a photograph, and then you look at this one. You say, “Tissot, what are you doing here?” As he paints this lady, it's blurry, fuzzy. It's not the quality of the photo, it's actually in the painting. She's muted except for these colors that mark her out. But what strikes me about what Tissot has done in telling her story so well is that you can barely see her, right? Go back to the first painting. Zoom back out a little bit. If you look at this painting from this vantage point, you can barely tell it's a human being. She's so bent over and shrouded in these clothes it's almost as if she's invisible. Tissot is on to something here.

This lady in her culture if she has this kind of an ailment is not just physically suffering, she is ostracized in her culture. There is no social service here. She is at the mercy of gifts of family and friends, but no one wants to touch that. She is invisible in her context. That's why when Luke tells the story he says that Jesus has to see her. She didn't come in and everybody notice. This lady was invisible. And yet Jesus sees her. What's going on with this woman? Well, this woman becomes a picture, a way of telling a much bigger story here. Tissot has captured this invisibility well, but I believe he's missed the deeper context. We're dealing with sabbath here. We've learned what sabbath is about, God inviting humans into his rest, but yet when we see stories like this we realize this isn't a restful place. This world is a broken place. And there are people who are virtually invisible in our culture. There are people like you and me who may be able to stand up straight, but inside our hearts, we are bent over and slaves. We are slaves to our desires, slaves to our fears, slaves to our past. We humans don't experience sabbath the way that God created it. We experience something else. Being bent over and bound. Why?

Back in Genesis chapter 3 we see why. If you read the story again, in the midst of God's sabbath something happens. Genesis chapter 3 verse 1. “The serpent was the most cunning of all the wild animals that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman did God really say you can't eat from any tree in the garden?” And you will remember the fateful conversation that follows. But note the detail here. “The serpent was the most cunning of all the wild animals *that the Lord God had made.*” The woman will follow the leadership of the created animal. The woman will submit herself to his way of thinking. She will come *under* his authority and influence. Instead of ruling *over* this created creature, she submits herself *under* and become a slave to the created creature. What happens to her and her husband Adam? They become slaves to the very ground. The earth comes against them, and they have to toil in the dirt. Do you see the picture of Adam hunched over? In their rebellion, God comes and seeks them out, and what do they do? They hide, hunched over behind the trees. Do you see this picture? The picture of this woman bent over on a sabbath day. This is a visual depiction of what is true of every single human being in rebellion against God. We are all bent over, hiding in the trees, hoping that this God won't see. We are trying to be invisible because of our shame and our sin and our guilt. We don't want to be seen. This woman's story is our story, and every other human's story. We are the bent over and bound ones. Bent over by our ailment and bound to the creation that we were created to rule. But Jesus announces sabbath.

Jesus Announces a New Sabbath (Luke 4:18-19)

Go to the next picture. Jesus calls this woman over to him. He announces to her that her disability will no longer be. Then he places his hands on her. You see, this is what Jesus had been doing. Since Luke chapter 4 when he announces the beginning of his ministry. He quotes Isaiah chapter 61, and he says I have come to release the captives, to proclaim the Lord's favor. Do you know what he does next? As soon as night falls, he spends the night touching people and

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healing them. This is what Jesus did. On sabbath, he would teach about who God is, and then he would heal people. That's why that lady showed up that day. She heard the stories that Jesus was announcing a new sabbath. Not a sabbath bound by a particular day of the week, but a sabbath like the original one that was God's unending sabbath that was open to all who would come back under his loving rule. So Jesus says to this woman, "come, come and I will heal you."

Jesus continues to announce this unending sabbath, even now, even to you and to me...to those of us who recognize that we are bent over and bound. Jesus says, "Come. Come with your fear, come with your past, come with your pain, come with your sin. Come and I will touch you." There is healing in this time. Jesus has announced that the time for healing is now if we will just come. This is good news. It's what Jesus promised to proclaim. Good news. Jesus promised to say over people, "it is good." Do you know who else said, "it is good" over his creation? God! In genesis chapter 1, after he finishes his work, he says, "it is good." When Jesus says, "I'm here to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor," it is Jesus saying again to creation, "it is good. Come. It is good when you are with me." He's announcing sabbath time. Not sabbath time once a week, but that original sabbath time. *God's* sabbath time, and it is available to you and to me if we will just come. Today, do you need to be healed? Do you need to be unbound. Come to this Jesus. Surrender again to him. Live under his rule, and you will find that you can indeed rule over this creation. Your desires don't have to rule. Your fears don't have to rule. Your past doesn't have to rule. As you surrender to his rule, you can find "it is good" announced all over again. This is a powerful story, right? It should be ended right here. It should end with the people saying praise God and rejoicing with this woman who is healed. But it doesn't. The story goes on.

Jewish Leaders and Sabbath (Luke 13:14-16)

There's another set of characters that show up. Another group of people who are responding in a different way to Jesus' announcement of sabbath, Jesus' enactment of it. It's those religious leaders again. Tissot, in his characteristic way, can't help but to use some color. He splashes it right here, but notice he doesn't splash color on Jesus. You see, Jesus, he almost fades into the background. But he does splash color on one particular character. Do you see here in the foreground? This is the religious leader, the ruler of the synagogue, the one who was responsible for what was happening that day as the people were gathering to hear the instruction of the Lord. It was their job to evaluate the teaching, especially those traveling teachers like Jesus, to evaluate whether or not what they were saying was consistent with God's word. It was their job to make sure that the people didn't get led astray. It was their job to judge. And judge they did. But they judged poorly.

Luke records that the leader of the synagogue becomes indignant, angry because Jesus had healed on the sabbath. And then he addresses the crowd. It's his job to do this. He addresses the crowd, and then says, "there are six days when work should be done, therefore come on those days. Jesus can heal you then. But don't do this work on the sabbath day. Sabbath is not for work. It is for rest." Indignant, angry. Tissot captures this by splashing yellow on this religious leader. Do you see the hands of the other leaders with them. It is almost as if the other leader holds up that hand and is beginning to say stop, don't look at him. That's what the leaders were doing that day. They said stop, "don't look at this Jesus. Don't listen to him. He's leading you astray." Why would they say that? These guys who were supposed to know the Old Testament to know the Torah. Why is it that they would say, "Jesus is wrong about this. He can't heal on the sabbath."

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Well, Jesus points out to them that they themselves already do some work on the sabbath. They untie their animals and take them to water, so why should he not untie a woman and allow her to celebrate sabbath? One scholar points out that this dimension of the leaders is showing greater concern for the cattle as opposed to the humans is just one more depiction of the reversal of creation. These men were still operating under the “Adam and Eve” kind of paradigm. Instead of ruling over creation, they had become servants of it, so much so that they were more concerned about the cows than they were about people. Their minds were distorted on the subject. They had come to misunderstand the sabbath, and they had not even read their Bibles well.

The Jewish people were commanded to sabbath, to take one day a week to rest from their work. It happened as they were rescued from the bondage in Egypt and brought into the wilderness. God commanded them to sabbath, to make the seventh day holy. But in Deuteronomy chapter 5, verse 15 we read God tell them why, and these guys had missed it. It says this: “Remember that you were a *slave* in the land of Egypt. And the Lord God brought you out of there with a strong hand and out-stretched arm. *That is why* the Lord your God has commanded you to keep the sabbath day.” Did you catch what Deuteronomy says about sabbath? For the Jews, it was supposed to remind them that they used to be slaves bounded, bent under oppression. But God had set them free. Jesus reminds these leaders of what sabbath was supposed to be already. It was already supposed to be a reminder that they had been set free. Yet they wanted to keep their own people in bondage. These Jewish leaders misunderstood sabbath, and it caused them to mis-practice it.

Misunderstanding Sabbath Today

Here is where I would like us to conclude our time today. Is it possible that we too have misunderstood Sabbath? And is it possible that we are mis-practicing it? In light of the nature of sabbath that we've talked about. God's sabbath, the unending sabbath. Is it possible that we've thought wrongly about it? Is it possible that we've thought that sabbath is a time to do the work at home that we neglected all week long doing other work? Is it possible that we think about sabbath as a time to indulge in the laziness that just gets interrupted all week long by work and other responsibilities? Is it possible that we think about sabbath as a time to catch up on the work that we didn't finish earlier in the week? Is it possible that we think about sabbath as a time to rest *if* we've successfully managed the week, if we've earned it?

It's often commented or said, particularly in Christian circles, that Christians who overwork, who are workaholics, they are trying to be like God. They are trying to work all the time, trying to do more, achieve more, help more, do right things. But the fact that we failed to rest, to sabbath; is a picture of us trying to be like God. But that's not the truth, is it? No. The truth is when we fail to sabbath, when we fail to rest, it's not that we're trying to be like God. It's that we are refusing to be like God.

You remember what sabbath was, right? This was God's plan for work. Six days he works. Six days he does enough, but leaves more for tomorrow. He could have created everything in one day, but he chose not to. The way God works is to work enough and leave more for the next day. When we humans try to cram all that we can, seven days of work into one day, we are not trying to be God, we're actually refusing to be like God. When we take seven hours of work and try to cram it into one, we're not trying to be like God. We're refusing to be like God. We do not worship a being who overworks. He does enough for the day. And then leaves more for tomorrow.

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And we don't worship a God who rests out of exhaustion, but rather who rests out of enjoyment. Every day, he finishes his work, and do you know what he does? He looks at it and says, "this is good." He comes to the seventh day, and he looks at all that he has done, and he says, "this is very good." Sabbath for this Being is enjoying what he has created. So here's the thing. When we fail to sabbath, when we fail to enjoy our work, to delight in this work that God has given us, to take joy in our work, we are not trying to be like God. We are refusing to be like God. I think it's possible that we, like these Jewish leaders, have so misunderstood sabbath that what we are doing is what we think God would do, but we have completely blinded ourselves to the truth. He's already shown us what work should look like.

So one practical way that I just came across this week by a man named John Stark, He talks about this dynamic of work and rest and sabbath. One of the things that he has done with his family is that on the night before they're going to begin their sabbath celebration -- he's a pastor, so for him it's Thursday night because Friday is his day he chooses to rest -- on the night before, he gets his family together. They cook food that everybody enjoys. Sometimes they bring friends over. It's a beginning of the sabbath celebration every week. As they sit together around the table, do you know what they do? He starts and then has everybody around the table talk about their work for the past week, talk about what was good in it. John is practicing being like God by looking at the work and saying this was good this week. And then inviting his family to do the same. John is practicing sabbath in a way that looks like God. I think it's something that we could grow in too. I tried this with my family last night, and it was really sweet. It was delightful to hear my sons' talk about how hard they had worked in school and their success there. To hear my daughter talk about her art that she had painted. It was beautiful. It was a way for us to enjoy the work God gave us to do this week. To picture what it would look like to work like God and to rest like God.

We who have been touched by Jesus, healed by him, invited into a sabbath that is not a single day, but that is everyday, we ought to sabbath like that too. Because indeed it's not just God who works like this. It was Jesus. Jesus would work for his days here on earth. But would he do everything? No. He didn't heal everybody. He didn't announce good news to everyone. Jesus did his work until it was completed. "Tetelestia," "it is finished," Jesus would say from the cross. Then do you know what Jesus would do? He would commission us to go and work. Not work like slaves, but work like the rulers of creation that God made us to be. To work as signs and foretaste reminders to our human brothers and sisters that they too were made to work like God, not like a slave. So we who have been healed by Jesus, cannot afford to look like the leaders splashed in yellow because there's a whole world watching us. Watching us work and taking their cues about the nature of God from how we do it. Brothers and sisters, those who have been healed, let's learn to sabbath rightly. Let's receive the sabbath that Jesus has announced over us, one that we don't have to be worthy of. But just like in the beginning, we are just invited to. One that we can mark by learning to enjoy, delight in, the work God has given us to do while we remain here. Let's pray.