

JESUS THROUGH THE EYES OF - THE CRIPPLE

Luke 6:1-11

Sermon for Peace Church

January 17, 2010

PURPOSE - To invite Jesus to break through the structure of church to heal his racially-divided crippled people.

MAIN IDEA – Jesus is a religious structure-breaker for the sake of practicing love in the needs of the day.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Although Peace Church and Kingdom Ministries worship together every 3rd Sunday of the month, there is a particular blessing we have in doing it today. This weekend our nation honors a man who called the world to judge people not by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.

(i) Another of Dr. Martin Luther King's famous statements is this:

"It is appalling that the most segregated hour of Christian America is 11:00 on Sunday morning."

A. Forty plus years later that statement still stands:

90% of white Americans attend white congregations

95% of black Americans attend black congregations.

= the divide still marks America on Sunday morning!

2. And the Church must take this to heart because her Lord prayed (Jn. 17):

Father, may they be ONE as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to COMPLETE UNITY (not partial unity – "perfected" unity) that the world may know you sent me and have loved them even as you loved me."

(i) The divide is contrary to the prayer & will of our Lord.

The divide undermines the witness of the gospel - that the Father sent the Son and loves the world.

The divide WITHERS the ministry of the Church!

3. So we are particularly glad to be together this day.

God has called Kingdom Ministries and Peace Church to explore building ministry together for the sake of Jesus' glory. Other churches too are exploring this call.

I want to show now a short video INTERVIEW of 2 pastors of such churches and incorporate their reflections into today's sermon.

SHOW VIDEO CLIP – “White Church / Black Church”

4. WHAT SHOULD WE DO IN THE MEANTIME?

That's where we're at right now! That's the question before us!
And among the many things we CAN DO, the first thing TO DO is to turn to Jesus.

(i) Jesus holds the answer – not the church. Jesus!

In this case, the church is the PROBLEM!

But Jesus can heal the church! He loves his church!

LUKE 6 – please open in your Bibles.

5. At Peace Church we've begun a sermon series from the gospel of Luke titled, “A Look At Jesus Through the Eyes of ...”

Today we're going to take a look at who He is through the eyes of a man with a SHRIVELED / CRIPPLED / WITHERED HAND.

(i) Dr. Luke who records this story makes a special point of saying that the hand that was crippled was this man's RIGHT HAND.

Matthew and Mark don't make that point, but there's a lot of meaning in it – for the right-hand in the Jewish mind is the symbol of strength.

Ron Ritchie comments: *“The right hand is the symbol of power & blessing. The right hand has authority. A father blessed his son by placing his right hand on his hand, like passing the mantle of blessing.”*

A. But this man, like a racially-divided church, did not have that strength in his right hand to do that - physically AND spiritually. He did not have the authority & power to bless his society, like the racially-divided church!

HIS RIGHT HAND WAS SHRIVELED!

(ii) In the MEANTIME ... however ... Jesus comes into his life!

A. This man's story begins at verse 6, but we're going to start at verse 1 – because we need to clearly recognize what Jesus MUST BREAK THROUGH in order to bring healing to that crippled right hand!

Read Luke 6:1-11 / PRAYER

II. JESUS BREAKS THE SABBATH!

Here's who Jesus is through the eyes of the man with the shriveled hand:

HE IS THE ONE WHO BREAKS THROUGH AN IMPORTANT RELIGIOUS STRUCTURE IN ORDER TO BRING ME HEALING LOVE AT MY PLACE OF NEED TODAY. (2X)

1. Now the religious structure that Jesus had to break through in this story was the SABBATH and its “regulations” / practices.

It is an IMPORTANT STRUCTURE in life with God.

(i) I SABBATH; Jesus SABBATHED (the word means “rest”).

Once a week God’s people are commanded to do that in the 10 commandments. In the Old Covenant that day was the last one of the week; in the New Covenant it’s the first day of the week – because that’s the day that Jesus rose from the dead – that’s the day we remember that our salvation LIVES in Him.

And, as Christians, if we’re to enter any kind of rest, it begins there – in Jesus who is our REST with God – our PEACE & SECURITY.

(ii) The Sabbath is a day to intentionally enter rest – so we gather to worship in Jesus. Because our rest begins in Him, corporate worship is a “Sabbath practice” for Christians.

Along with that, there are a host of other “regulations” I have in order to enter REST. These are important practices to obey God & fulfill the purpose of the day:

(Maybe you can relate to some of them)

A. I don’t do yard-work. We don’t do house-work. I don’t “work” in the sense of reading materials related to my vocation. I may read – but its recreationally.

B. I try very hard not to buy things on Sunday. I fill up for gas on Saturdays. The idea behind that being I don’t want to make other people work.

(I bemoan the recent changes in South Holland retail, allowing for Sunday shopping. Those laws were in place because Christian thinking influenced not just individuals, but collective society. The recent changes should make clear to us that our ministry more than ever exists in a MISSION FIELD!)

C. On my Sabbath I rest by usually taking an afternoon nap.

D. I / We try to connect with people relationally – hospitality; phone call or email to mom; games with the kids

E. I try to take in some WEATHER! Outdoor walk or run = very restful to my soul!

(iii) Just as with the other 10 commandments wherein I aspire to HONESTY, CONTENTMENT, FAITHFULNESS, PURITY, RESPECT FOR AUTHORITY ... there are practices / “regulations” I establish to ENTER REST!

2. JESUS DID TOO!

We would misunderstand this passage if we thought He was seeking to DISMANTLE Sabbath regulations. They are important structures for your spiritual well-being. To practice Sabbath is one of the 10 commandments.

(We must see those regulations for your spiritual health no differently than the “structure” of brushing your teeth on a regular basis - for the sake of your physical health. Most of us are pretty “regulated” with that!)

(i) But here’s what Jesus did NOT DO.

He did not allow the Sabbath and its regulations to prevent Him from practicing HEALING LOVE to meet the needs of the day!

That’s what happened in both the stories from Luke 6 - his disciples eating the heads of grain because they were hungry AND in his healing of the man with the shriveled hand. Back then, both what the disciples did with that grain and what Jesus did with that man was considered WORK!

A. Rubbing off the chaff was reaping ... and reaping was work. So that was a forbidden Sabbath “regulation”. It was “stated”. It was actually a written regulation. The religious leaders had produced hundreds of such regulations as guidance for people to practice an important religious structure - the Sabbath.

They’re OK – we all have regulations. We should have them - otherwise we’re not living a very disciplined for God. (Discipline is important – you athletes know that!) - *“Train yourself to be godly”, Paul writes to Timothy.*

And it’s OK for religious leaders to GIVE such disciplines. I believe Kingdom Ministries is on a 21 day fast – with some structures & “regulations” involved.

3. BUT HERE'S THE KEY QUESTION:

Do those structures serve OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE – or do we serve the structure?

Do those structures serve our LIFE OF LOVE – or do we LOVE the structure?

Do those structures serve Jesus & His reign - or does Jesus serve the structure?

(i) Jesus made 2 key statements about the Sabbath – and they apply to all religious structures:

A. One's in verse 5 - HE IS LORD OF THE SABBATH.

That means He owns it – it is established for His purpose & honor, not He for it

B. Two, He said: “The Sabbath is made for man, not man for the Sabbath”.

In other words, the structures are to serve our good in God; not us serving & honoring the Sabbath's good.

4. THAT WAS THE PHARISEE'S SIN. It's made very clear in our passage.

The Pharisees served the Sabbath, not the Sabbath serving them & the Kingdom & Jesus.

- For when they saw that Jesus and this man with the shriveled hand were in the same room on a Sabbath day, what was it that they wondered?

They wondered, not whether Jesus would heal the man, hoping that He would.

They weren't interested in the man & his good They wondered, not whether Jesus would glorify His name & cause in that situation ... NO!

They wondered whether Jesus would break the Sabbath ... (they even hoped he would) ... because they served the SABBATH.

(i) It's NOT HARD TO DO!

We take a religious structure, even an important one – like Sabbath practicing – and make an IDOL of it, instead of Christ's reign & the glory of His name.

It's easy to just serve structure because it sets up a religious lifestyle that's controlled & attainable, one you can feel good about yourself in.

A. But serving any idol, even religious structures, makes one's life powerless, withered. It's just LIFESTYLE- like someone might take on a SNOWBOARDER LIFESTYLE. It is not the life of repentance & faith that reckons with the power and purpose of Jesus on earth.

It is a religious LIFESTYLE that confuses the means & the end. Our structures are the means. The END is the living, growing reign of Jesus on earth and the glory of his name.

I.e. – So not buying gas on a Sunday is a good discipline for me. But if Darryl & Carmen in South Bend have a sudden, desperate need for a guest-preacher one Sunday at a local street mission (because James / Terrence are unavailable), and I don't have enough gas in my tank to make it there ... it would be STUPID for me to have a religious life with God such that I say in this day:

“Sorry ... Can't help – no gas-buying on Sunday ... and then pat myself on the back because I'm such a good Sabbath-keeper ... and all the while there's people there in Granger who desperately need to know the good news of salvation in Jesus' name.”

NO! – The Sabbath is made for man, not man for the Sabbath ... and JESUS IS LORD OF THE SABBATH!

5. That's why He breaks the valuable Sabbath-regulations of his day in order to heal this man with his crippled hand.

- He does it not only to practice healing love at this man's place of need (just as David did in the Old Testament to meet his men's needs by eating the consecrated show-bread of the tabernacle.) ...

He did it not only to glorify the salvation that is in His name ...

- Jesus also did this healing to EXPOSE the IDOLATRY of those Pharisees. They were serving the structure. Jesus PUBLICLY KNOCKED that idol down to declare: I AM LORD ... OF THE SABBATH!

(i) He's not trying to get rid of the structure – it's important - so much as to put it in its place - Under HIS HONOR and CAUSE – which is what the Sabbath is designed to do!

III. APPLICATION TO TODAY

OK– now let me bring this back to today and why we're here together in this place!

1. In the video we watched the question was raised, “Why is the church in America still largely racially divided?”

There are A LOT OF LEVELS you can answer that question on.

(i) The pastors in the video touched on some of them – styles, tastes, cultures, lack of innovative approaches.

OUR PASSAGE HERE, HOWEVER, CUTS TO THE DEEPEST REASON.

2. The Church, like the Sabbath, is an important religious structure.

In fact, the church is an even MORE IMPORTANT religious structure.

I.e. – If I were to counsel a new believer whether it's more important in their life with God to begin to practice a Sabbath or to engage in the fellowship of the church, I'd answer the latter – the Church.

(i) But what we cannot fail to recognize is that BOTH the Sabbath and the Church are religious structures. They are not ends in themselves; they are MEANS to the end of loving people in truth; to extend the reign and honor of Jesus today!

Both the Sabbath and the Church are religious structures. The Sabbath is His. The Church is His. He is LORD OF THE CHURCH! This is NOT YOUR CHURCH!

But just as the Pharisees made an IDOL of the Sabbath in our passage – serving it, wondering if “IT” would be violated; we take an event more important religious structure, like the Church, and make an IDOL OF IT – we serve it, not its Lord and His purposes.

... THAT, much more than anything else, IS WHAT CREATES THE SUNDAY MORNING DIVIDE! ... Let me explain:

3. Not too long ago Pastor James and I were given an article by his LDN instructor, Pedro Aviles, titled, "This Side of Heaven". I've liberally given it to others. It's about a black & white church attempting a merger and trying it on a 6-month basis. The article makes observations on this attempt. You should read it – I'll be glad to get you a copy.

Among many observations of difference, they discovered that African-Americans & Euro-Americans DO CHURCH according to a different essential "PULSE". The pulse of life & worship in a black church is to be LIFTED UP in the presence of the Lord ... and in the WHITE CHURCH it's to be HUMBLLED.

- So this even effects the general flow of a worship service – one starts a little more quietly and BUILDS UP ... the other starts with MORE OF A BANG to get everyone's attention & then moves toward STILLNESS.

(i) WHY THESE DIFFERENT PULSES?

They're both Biblical: : *"Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord ... and He will lift you up."* (James 4:10) Well, it has to do with the HISTORICAL CONTEXTS from which the church developed.

A. But the Black Church historically, tragically was already "humbled" in society. They were nobodies in their early days of slavery. They had no status. They were unimportant. They were sold like animals. So as the gospel and its meaning took root in that culture, the CHURCH RIGHTLY became the place where they were LIFTED UP in the presence of the Lord. In church they had status; in church they mattered; in worship they were affirmed as human beings for whom the eternal Son died! So that's how they DID CHURCH – that's how their religious structure and its practices developed. = FULLY BIBLICAL!

I.e. – That’s why, from our white church perspective, we think, “What’s going on with all the titles in the black church? ... apostles / bishops / ministers of greeting / ministers of sound ... We can even get a little, “Is that Biblical?” – But please, do you understand the gospel? Do you understand the historical context from which the church developed?!

B. Here’s the CONTRAST from how the white church culture develops from its socially-dominant position. Pastor James studies 2-3 years with LDN and the title he MIGHT get – if he passes a whack of exams in the CRC - is “Ministry Associate”.

That’s a DOMINANT church mentality – the church is not looked to for “titles”. The church & its worship is looked to as a place to “humble ourselves” before the Lord.

4. Now as Rev. France Davis said in the video-clip, in the cause of Christian unity, we do need to understand & appreciate our differences. (Notice he was Rev. Davis; the other pastor was just, “Dave Rowe”)

But as Jesus reveals from our Scripture lesson today, it’s MUCH DEEPER than that. We need to recognize THE CHURCH for what it is and REPENT for ways that we idolize it.

(i) Like the Sabbath, it is an important religious structure but we do not serve it. We can’t idolize it at the expense of loving others in their needs, serving Jesus & His kingdom– where His reign must grow. The Pharisees made an IDOL of the Sabbath. We make an IDOL of the Church.

But both are only a religious structures. Both are means, not the end. The Church is a MEANS to be humbled before God and LIFTED by Him.

A. But if we insist that our church MUST BE a place where “we are humbled” and we “better sing songs that way” ... or if it MUST BE A PLACE where I GET STATUS, we are NO DIFFERENT than the Pharisees saying, “You must not break the Sabbath – you must not rub the chaff of the grain ... you better not heal”

... and all the while there are hungers around us / AMONG us & the church is withered by the racial divide! The divide continues because we love our songs more than Jesus; because we want the church to meet our needs more than His reign!

WE DON'T WORSHIP THE CHURCH. We worship Jesus and what He is doing today in light of the needs of people & His Kingdom!

... and when we do that, then the church's gifts, experiences, traditions all find their rightful place under his Lordship ... He knows your hungers. He promises to meet your needs to both be humbled & lifted!

IV. CONCLUSION

Jesus is the One who breaks through important religious structures (because they become idolatrous) in order to bring healing love at our place of need today.

SO HOW DO WE RESPOND TO THIS JESUS?

1. First of all, REPENT!

The church is not yours, it's Jesus'

We don't serve it, we serve Jesus and His kingdom.

(i) Repent of loving the church more than Jesus (like the Pharisees did their Sabbath).

Repent of the control and pride, “patting ourselves on the back” behind that religiosity.

Repent of the powerlessness of mere religious lifestyle.

(ii) Repent of loving our songs more than His kingdom

(iii) Repent of insisting that the church be the way I want it to be – it better give me status; it better humble me!

(iv) Repent of insisting that we maintain power. It's not your church. It's His!

IDOLS ARE DISMANTLED BY REPENTANCE!

2. First, repent ... SECOND, FAITH.

Faith takes 2 expressions in the context of the Sunday morning divide:

(i) Will we BE Jesus?

Will His Spirit live in us so that we have the courage to break through even important religious structures like the church to PRACTICE LOVE for each other, meeting the needs of the day, healing the crippled right hand of the church?

Will we, as Pastor Dave Rowe said, have Jesus' spirit of SERVANTHOOD – to understand one another, appreciate one another, give up ourselves and our needs for one another – to love in His name & for His honor?

WILL WE BE JESUS?

2. The other question faith asks is, "WILL WE TRUST JESUS?"

(i) Earlier I said: The church can't heal the racial divide. JESUS is the answer. The church is the problem. The church becomes the problem because we make a good thing an idol.

JESUS IS THE ANSWER, not the Church. HE IS THE HEALER. WILL WE TRUST HIM, even as we repent of ways we idolize the church?

... WILL WE TRUST HIM MOVING INTO OUR FUTURE?

(ii) He is here today through His Word – and He says to His church with its shriveled right hand:

STAND UP IN FRONT OF EVERYONE ... (v. 8)

What's lawful on the Sabbath?

= What's according to God's ways for DOING CHURCH?

To DO GOOD - or evil? ... to SAVE LIFE - or destroy it?

STRETCH OUT YOUR HAND, CHURCH

STRETCH OUT YOUR HAND, KINGDOM MINISTRIES

STRETCH OUT YOUR HAND, PEACE CHURCH

(iii) Stretch out your hand ... and it will be healed

= strengthened with authority to bless!

STRETCH OUT YOUR HAND FOR THE GLORY OF MY NAME & KINGDOM!

Father, may they be one as we are one ... brought to complete unity ... that the world may know that you sent me ... and love them, even as you love me.

AMEN!