

# HOW CAN WE BE FREED FROM THE BONDAGE OF SATAN?

SERIES: JESUS, SAVIOR OF THE LOST

By Ron Ritchie

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On September 27, 1988 Anne Marie and I were sitting on some beautiful marble steps on the main street of the ancient city of Ephesus, Turkey. Just to our right down the street we could see the arena where the apostle Paul was the cause of a great riot in 53 AD. As we sat among the well-preserved ruins of that city, we couldn't help but review the story of the apostle Paul's first visit there as recorded in Acts 19.

When Paul arrived he found a city that was dedicated to the worship of the Greek goddess Artemis in a temple that was one of the seven wonders of the world. Behind this idolatry the people were being held in bondage by the doctrine of demons and the widespread practice of magic. And yet Paul and his disciples would remain and teach the word of God faithfully for three years, and not only did he build a church there, but all of Asia heard the word of the Lord. In 60 AD, he wrote a letter to his beloved Ephesians from his prison cell in Rome and reminded them of the terrible Satanic bondage in which they had been imprisoned before they heard the good news of Jesus Christ: "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." (Ephesians 2:1-3.)

Our present reality has separated us from the Ephesus Paul described by some 1900 years and thousands of miles. But we find ourselves living in a community filled with the same kind of living, breathing, and yet spiritually dead men and women who run the course of this world without realizing that behind all their desires of the flesh and pressures of the world system is the prince of the power of the air who is holding them in bondage. This bondage comes in a variety of forms ranging from the extreme of being a member of a satanic cult to drug addiction, alcoholism, and sexual immorality, not to mention a driving desire for power, position and possessions. Many today are being held in bondage because of their dysfunctional backgrounds and have little hope of freedom. Some are trying to find release by joining various modern groups that provide a sense of community but lack the power for a full and lasting release.

How can we help others to become free from their terrible spiritual, emotional, and physical bondage to Satan? Introduce them to Jesus, for...

## I. Only Jesus can set us free from Satan

Luke 13:10-13

And He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And behold, there was a woman who for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was bent double, and could not straighten up at all. And when Jesus saw her, He called her over and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your sickness." And He laid His hands upon her; and immediately she was made erect again, and began glorifying God.

As our Lord came closer and closer to the cross, now only a few months away, we find him spending more and more time training his disciples and also warning the Pharisees and the Jewish people that if they continued to reject him as their long-promised Messiah, then they would spiritually perish. He had just given them the parable of the fig tree that had been planted and yet bore no fruit for three years; finally the owner told the vineyard-keeper to cut it down, but he said, "Let it alone, sir, for this year too...and if it bears fruit next year, fine; but if not, cut it down." (Luke 13:8-9.) And within this parable we find the mercy of our God being

extended to the Jewish nation once more, but by 70 AD, some 37 years hence, the mighty and cruel Roman Empire would be used by God to cut down the unrepentant and barren "fig tree."

Now, after this extended time with the large crowd, our Lord moved away from them with his disciples and went into a local synagogue because it was the Sabbath. Keep in mind the theme of Luke: "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10.)

"And He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath." As soon as the sun set on Friday, the Jewish Sabbath would begin. The Jewish people from all over the Roman world gather together and worship at the temple in Jerusalem each year at the special feast times like Passover, Pentecost and the Day of Atonement. But the synagogue was like our Christian churches, designed to meet the spiritual needs of the local community on a weekly basis. The service would begin with the reading of the Shema': "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4), followed by a prayer. Then someone would read a portion of scripture from the Pentateuch followed by a prayer of thanksgiving. Then the head of the local synagogue would invite one of the men of the community or a visitor to take a scroll of the prophets, read it to the audience, and then give some spiritual commentary. This would be followed by praise, prayer and lunch.

This was Jesus' last appearance in a synagogue because of the growing hostility against him.

"And behold, there was a woman who for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was bent double, and could not straighten up at all." This Jewish woman had opened herself up to demonic activity eighteen years earlier, and at that time the demon had caused her to be doubled over. At the moment Jesus met her she was still suffering the power of the residing demon. She was not physically sick; rather, she was "demonized" by an evil spirit who was causing the bones in her spine to fuse into a rigid mass. The bottom line was that she was held in physical bondage by the evil one. But now she was in the presence of the only one who could set her free from the bondage of Satan.

Before we continue to study the case of this "demonized" woman, I want to pause a moment and review some of some biblical facts that seem to easily slip away from the Christian community, for within it today there is an obsession with Satan, demons, and deliverance ministries.

First, if you go through the four gospels you will discover that Jesus did many miracles among the masses. One of many examples is recorded in Matthew 4:23-24: "And Jesus was going about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. And the news about Him went out into all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, taken with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them."

The same four gospels record for us thirty-five specific miracles. Of the thirty-five specific miracles, twenty-six had to do with physical healings, from the casting out of demons, to the cleansing of lepers, to the raising of the dead. Of the twenty-six physical healings, seven happened to individuals who were "demonized," and of those seven, four of these people had a physical handicap that was caused by a demon: (1) There was a man called Legion whose mind was distorted by an unclean spirit (Luke 8:26-39). (2) There was a man who was blind and dumb because of a spirit (Matthew 12:22). (3) There was a man who was dumb because of a spirit (Luke 11:14). (4) And this woman had been crippled for eighteen years because of a spirit.

All seven recorded demonized people were affected by these demons, having somewhere in the past opened themselves up to some demonic activity so that evil spirits had free access to their lives, coming and going at will. For as our Lord taught us in Luke 11:23-26, should they try to clean up their lives without God, "then [the spirit] goes and takes along seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first." We see this reality in our own society today as thousands of New Age followers are invited to attend meetings where they can invite their "spirit guide" to enter their lives, resulting in the ability for some to do "channeling," which is nothing more than allowing the residing demon to speak through them. It's nothing new; it has been going on all along. (Keep in mind that the biblical accounts shows us that those four persons who were physically handicapped by demons were not godly Jews or followers of Jesus Christ at the time of their demonization.) Also, it appears from the accounts in the

gospels and book of Acts that demons which caused illness were present, but were not as plentiful as some today would have us believe.

Another biblical fact I want to remind you of is that not all sickness is demonic. It appears that at this time there are many within the Christian community, internationally as well as locally, who are developing a new unbiblical doctrine of demonic activity. This false doctrine would like us to believe that all sickness is caused by demons, and, furthermore, if you are a Christian you can still have within you the demons of lust, fear, and addiction, to mention but a few, from which you need to be delivered. Leon Suenens, author of *Renewal and the Powers of Darkness*, wrote:

No demon of lust was expelled from the adulterous woman (John 8) or from the woman of ill-repute mentioned by Luke (Chapter 7), or from the incestuous people of Corinth (1 Cor. 5). No demon of avarice was expelled from Zacchaeus, no demon of incredulity from Peter after his triple betrayal. No demon of rivalry was expelled from the Corinthians whom Paul had to call to order.

J. I. Packer, in his book *Keeping in Step with the Spirit*, wrote under the subheading "Demon Obsession":

In recovering a sense of the supernaturalness of God, charismatics have grown vividly aware of the reality of supernatural personal evil, and there is no doubt that their development of "deliverance" ministries and the impulse they have given to the renewal of exorcism have been salutary for man. But if all life is seen as a battle with demons in such a way that Satan and his hosts get blamed for bad health, bad thoughts, and bad behavior, with reference to physical, psychological, and relational factors in the situation, a very unhealthy demonic counterpart of super-supernaturalism is being developed. There is no doubt that this sometimes happens and that it is a major obstacle to moral and spiritual maturity when it does.

When the church is obsessed with demons and Satan instead of Jesus Christ, we need to get back to the Scriptures to find out what God has already said about this obsession. If we're going to be obsessed at all, what we need to be obsessed with is Jesus Christ! "Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world." (1 John 4:4.) We need to spend more time finding out who Christ is. As we read in Ephesians 6, we are to put on Christ and stand, not get obsessed. We are to go about our ministries with our spiritual gifts, understanding that spiritual warfare is out there, but we are not involved in the battle; we are involved in ministering to those around us. Yes, there is wrestling or temptation that goes on, but we're already victorious! Stand firm!

Now let's continue with our story of the crippled woman. "And when Jesus saw her, He called her over and said to her, 'Woman, you are freed from your sickness.' And He laid His hands upon her; and immediately she was made erect again and began glorifying God." In spite of this woman's sinful background and present demonic bondage, she was moved to attend the local synagogue to listen to the teachings of Jesus. And somehow, as the Lord was teaching, he looked out over the audience and saw, with a heart of compassion and love, this dear woman bent over listening to him. Something connected between Jesus and this woman that was not recorded, but once Jesus asked the woman to come toward him, she stepped out in faith, not really knowing what would happen. She could not help herself, and no one in the medical or religious community could help her, so she walked toward the Lord. At that moment, with great compassion, our Lord said, "Woman, based on your faith, you are freed from your sickness caused by a spirit. Stand up." And he simply touched her. Notice two things: First, she was immediately set free from the power and bondage of Satan, resulting in a total physical healing: She stood erect for the first time in eighteen years. Second, she immediately began glorifying God. She was truly delivered out of bondage to the kingdom of darkness and placed in the kingdom of light.

The apostle Paul reminded the Ephesian Christians of his day, years later, of how they were set free from the bondage of Satan: "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ...." (Ephesians 2:4-5.) He then went on to explain how God was able to set them free from that demonic bondage. "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9.)

The same God who was so willing to set men and women free from the bondage of sin, guilt, and death in the ancient city of Ephesus is still offering that freedom to anyone today who is willing to come to his Son Jesus Christ and ask him to set them free from their present bondage. Paul would later write to the Colossians who had placed their faith in Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior, "For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." (Colossians 1:13-14.) That is the Christ we follow, who sets us free.

I had lunch with a young man last week who came out of a terrible background that I wouldn't give anything for; I didn't even want to hear about it. But he came to know Jesus Christ, and he comes here on Sunday mornings because he thinks this is a loving community that will help him get mature in Christ; he'll be cared for here. Christ sets men and women free from all kinds of spiritual, physical, and emotional bondage, and then they are to come and get into our community of love, care, tenderness, patience, and gentleness. There is nowhere else to go! People go to these New Age groups all over this town because they provide a sense of community. But they have no power.

How can we be freed from the bondage of Satan? (1) Only in Jesus, and...

## **II. Only Jesus can set us free from legalism**

Luke 13:14-21

And the synagogue official, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, began saying to the multitude in response, "There are six days in which work should be done; therefore come during them and get healed, and not on the Sabbath day." But the Lord answered him and said, "You hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall, and lead him away to water him? And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day?" And as He said this, all His opponents were being humiliated; and the entire multitude was rejoicing over all the glorious things being done by Him.

Therefore He was saying, "What is the kingdom of God like, and to what shall I compare it? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and threw into his own garden; and it grew and became a tree; and the birds of the air nested in its branches." And again He said, "To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of meal, until it was all leavened."

In the reaction of the Jewish official we can now see what Jesus was doing when he set this crippled woman free from the bondage of Satan. Before she stepped toward Jesus in faith, she was a living, walking, breathing symbol of the then present spiritual state of the nation of Israel: The nation of Israel was crippled by Satan and helpless to heal itself.

What was God's purpose for Israel? This is very interesting. When God, who is called "the Upright One" in Isaiah 26:7, redeemed Israel out of their 400 years of bondage in Egypt, he gave them his law in order to reveal his holy character and his purpose for them: They were called to walk uprightly before him and become a testimony of hope to the satanically crippled nations around them.

But what happened? They became slaves of the law! They got freedom in God, the law that reflected his character, and the reality that they couldn't keep it in the flesh. But they immediately tried to do so, and they became enslaved. The religious leaders had placed the Jewish people under the bondage of legalism, causing them to become permanently crippled. The key to keeping the true Law of God came in the promise of God through Jeremiah to the people of Israel who would place their faith in him to change their hearts: "I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God and they shall be My people...I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." (Jeremiah 31:33-34.) The apostle Paul would have to write to the Galatian Jewish community who had become Christians but were slipping back under the law and trying to keep it in the power of the flesh: "It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery." (Galatians 5:1.)

What our Lord was doing, with a heart filled with love, compassion and hope, was showing the nation through this healed "daughter of Abraham" how quickly they could be healed from their spiritual bondage if they would, as she did, simply come to him and place their faith in him as their long-awaited but much prophesied Messiah. If they would come to him, they could once again walk uprightly before God and bring the hope of salvation to the nations. He had come to set them free. For not only was this woman held in physical bondage by Satan, but she was living under a religious system that kept all the Jewish people in religious bondage because of the "traditions of men."

In this religious bondage of the "traditions of men," the religious leaders had taken the Law of God and added their own laws to it so that in time it became a "yoke of slavery." We can clearly see this when the spiritual leader of the synagogue became indignant instead of rejoicing in the Lord because this healing took place on the Sabbath. He took it upon himself as the spiritual leader of this community to preach a rebuke to the audience rather than address Jesus head-on. He said, "Listen, this is the Sabbath. Now, you know the fourth commandment, and you know that if you work on the Sabbath, you shall be stoned to death. We're not against healing except on the Sabbath, because healing is work. We can't accept this, and you're in real trouble! So don't be glorifying God-you've got this thing all upside-down."

Now this religious leader was thinking of Exodus 20:11: "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy." He was also thinking of Exodus 31:15: "For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall surely be put to death." And when they thought of rest, it was in terms of the definitions within the Old Testament Law, which meant that there was to be no baking of bread, no gathering of sticks for a fire, no traveling, no physical work such as one did during the six days, no carrying of loads of materials, etc. In the early history of Israel the Sabbath was designed by God so his people would experience rest, resulting in a deep inner joy. It was a foretaste of that spiritual resting from all work which the people of God would one day attain in Christ.

In the days of Jesus, however, the Sabbath observance had become largely external and formal, and there was more concern for the letter of the law than for the needs of humanity. Although Jesus upheld the authority and validity of the Law of Moses, his emphasis was not on its external observance, but on the spontaneous performance of the will of God that formed the basis of the law, and sometimes that took the form of meeting human needs in freedom from the law itself, as good as it was. His clashes with the religious leadership came over some thirty-nine principle works they had added to the law that were forbidden on the Sabbath, including ordinary household chores and the healing of the sick. These thirty-nine traditions of men had an effect on the people; they thought they were the real law.

Now you know what's coming: "You hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the stall, and lead him away to water him? And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath Day?" Our Lord responded to this leader and all who agreed with him by pointing out their hypocrisy. They held that it was okay to lead their animals away from the stall on a Sabbath as long as the beast had no burden on its back. But if they were responsive to their animal's need for water on the Sabbath, didn't this crippled daughter of Abraham have a greater problem that needed to be addressed on this Sabbath or any other day of the week? This woman had been held in bondage for eighteen years, and now on this special Sabbath when the Savior was in town, should anyone stop him from freeing her from Satan then and there? Should they all wait another day and allow Satan to keep her in bondage? Get serious! The burden they didn't put on the donkey they were putting on this woman.

Jesus was saying, "You people think more of your animals than you do of human beings, and this human being is not even a Gentile that you hate, but she is one of your kin, a "daughter of Abraham," and you all know that she was bound by a spirit of Satan-you have seen her around this village for eighteen long years. And now on a day when we all gather to praise the Lord God and rest from our labor so God can be glorified, shouldn't this be a great day to ask him to release this woman from this horrible bondage?"

The leader of the synagogue and his followers realized that Jesus was right when he called them hypocrites,

because they had put on a show of righteousness within the community by appearing to be guarding the Sabbath in rebuking Jesus and the people over this wonderful healing, but if what they said was true, it meant they were breaking the true Sabbath by watering their animals. They had more respect for their animals than for this suffering woman. As they heard him speak, their feelings of indignation turned to humiliation. On the other hand, the entire multitude was rejoicing over all the glorious things being done by Jesus.

Then our Lord said in light of this healing and the reaction of the woman and the people, "What is the kingdom of God like, and to what shall I compare it? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and threw into his own garden; and it grew and became a tree; and the birds of the air nested in its branches...It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of meal, until it was all leavened." (See Matthew 13:31-33; Mark 4:30-32.) This is the third time our Lord used these two parables. In each case they should be looked at in their immediate context, for these two symbols are negative in Matthew and Mark. But in the context of a Gentile community in Luke, I believe they're positive.

He showed his disciples by using the illustration of a mustard seed how, once the kingdom of God was established by faith in the heart of this one woman, although it was small like a mustard seed, it would grow and continue to expand in the community, and become like a tree. The birds could even nest in it, and it would give shelter. This truth was demonstrated by the reaction of the crowds who were all rejoicing, and no doubt many would later come into the kingdom of God by placing their faith in Jesus as Messiah because of the presence and witness of this freed and upright woman.

He then used the illustration of the leaven as a positive symbol of those who had and would establish a relationship with him as their Lord and Savior; they would, like leaven placed in a lump of dough, by faith have a quiet but very effective godly influence on the community in which they lived. God wants to change men and women from the inside out, not the outside in. He always begins with the heart. "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation." (Romans 10:9-10.)

In summary, as Anne Marie and I sat on those marble steps in the ancient ruins of Ephesus, our minds could not help but think about the wonderful ministry the apostle Paul had in that city so long ago. For ever since he had met the risen Lord Jesus on the Damascus road, he took his new freedom and new life in Christ, and instead of being constantly harassed by his own background, he went throughout the community offering the message of redemption and reconciliation to all he met, including those held in the bondage of Satan and legalism.

As we talked to our staff a couple of years ago, just asking each person to share their lives a little bit, it became very apparent that every one of us had been held in some kind of bondage. We all came out of some kind of physical or psychological bondage. I noticed that every one of those folks including myself seemed to be ministering to those from the same background as they had come out of, which was different for each person. When you are set free by Christ and you come out of your bondage, then he gives you new life, but he doesn't take away the memories. So all you can think of is to go back in faithfulness to Christ to minister to those who were hurt in the same areas you were hurt, the things you couldn't get out of in those days, until someone came along and offered you the gospel of Jesus Christ.

How can you be freed from the bondage of Satan, from the bondage of legalism, from the flesh, the scars, the hurt, the bitterness, the alcoholism, the sexual abuse, the sexual immorality? Turn to Jesus! There is only one way. Once we place our faith in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, God the Father has "...delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." (Colossians 1:13-14.)

As Christians today, we are given by the Lord the same kind of ministry in this community: a ministry of reconciliation in which men and women can be set free from the crippling bondage of the world, the flesh, and the devil. That's the way I want you to live in this community. Our responsibility is to move out into our community with the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ and then invite all who accept him as their Lord into a caring community of Christian love.

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