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Big Idea: Jesus is better than tradition.
Primary Scripture: Luke 13:10-17
Supporting Scripture: Micah 6:8

I think most people resist change. It's not that we think everything is already perfect, but we might be afraid of changing things because it might make things worse, not better. We see this play out every New Year with resolutions. Right? We want change. We know that we have to be different to get it. But it often turns out that we don't like the changes we had to make to get the results we want to see, so we slowly revert back.

This is not new, and if you think I'm coming at you, I'm not. This is nearly universal. We like to hold onto our traditions. If I had to describe the word "tradition," I'd probably say, "the way we've always done it." And because we love our traditions, we are resistant to change, even if the end result is going to be amazing.

I'll give you a great example. Did you know that over 60% of Israel's land is desert? And yet, they produce 95% of their own food in Israel, and they do it efficiently. It wasn't always that way. They used to rely heavily on other nations for food, and when growing their own, they used a lot of water. They would flood fields or use sprinklers to irrigate, and they still didn't have great results.

And yet, when Simcha Blass, an Israeli engineer, pitched a new idea, people were resistant. He developed what is called drip irrigation, which allows countries in desert climates to produce crops with great results. In his method, water is delivered straight to the roots of a plant through steady drips, allowing the plant to yield a significant crop.

When he pitched this idea, people were skeptical. How could it ever work? Which is a funny question to ask when what they and everyone else had been doing wasn't really working well. But one farm in the Negev Desert was so desperate that they decided to be the guinea pigs. If this failed, that might have been the end of farming for them. But it didn't fail. It worked, and it not only changed Israel, but it changed the world.

Israeli drip irrigation technology is now widely used in rice production, which was traditionally grown using flood irrigation, lowering the amount of water used by 70%. And Israel assists other countries across Asia and Africa, combating desert climates that lead to food insecurity.

But even with the prospect of changing Israel and the world, people initially dismissed it. They were skeptical. Despite things not working the way they had wanted, they wanted to stick with what they had always done. Tradition. It's what works best for me, even if it's not working the best.

Tradition plays a significant role in our lives. Traditions can be beautiful. They can add to our lives. We probably all have so many memories as a direct result of the traditions our families have. But traditions can also be really bad. Traditions can become a roadblock on the road to progress. They can keep us from stepping outside of our comfort zone and into what God wants us to do and who God wants us to be.

Tradition also plays a significant role in religion. We have things that we do because we've always done them, and if someone tries to change them, we lose our minds, right? The music we sing, the elements of our service, our annual calendar of significant events. We have traditions. But it's not just us. All religions have traditions, and they're obviously not all the same. Honestly, Christians and churches don't even have the same traditions. We all have traditions, but **Jesus is better than tradition.**

Tradition was a big part of the everyday life of the people Jesus ministered to when He lived on Earth. Jewish people have a rich history with more traditions than we have time to name. Some of those traditions come directly from the Word of God, from what we call the Old Testament. Others of those traditions came from what's called the Talmud. The Talmud is a collection of writings from rabbis throughout history that cover the law, ethics, traditions, oral arguments, and more. In discussions of traditions, laws, and ethics, you'll find that they were really passionate about not violating God's laws, so they kept clarifying them. Does this go against the law? What about this? Despite the pure intention, they ended up with greater restrictions than God ever intended, making the already impossible task of keeping the law somehow even more difficult.

This is the background for a lot of the conversations Jesus had with Jewish people, including the religious leaders at the time. It's the background for the story we're about to read. Let's look at Luke 13 together.

10 One Sabbath day as Jesus was teaching in a synagogue, 11 he saw a woman who had been crippled by an evil spirit. She had been bent double for eighteen years and was unable to stand up straight. 12 When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Dear woman, you are healed of your sickness!" 13 Then he touched her, and instantly she could stand straight. How she praised God!
14 But the leader in charge of the synagogue was indignant that Jesus had healed her on the Sabbath day. "There are six days of the week for working," he said to the crowd. "Come on those days to be healed, not on the Sabbath."
15 But the Lord replied, "You hypocrites! Each of you works on the Sabbath day! Don't you untie your ox or your donkey from its stall on the Sabbath and lead it out for water? 16 This dear woman, a daughter of Abraham, has been held in bondage by Satan for eighteen years. Isn't it right that she be released, even on the Sabbath?"
17 This shamed his enemies, but all the people rejoiced at the wonderful things he did. **(Luke 13:10-17, NLT)**

Every time we read the Bible, there are so many things we can focus on. This story is no exception. I want to focus on just three, but I wish I had time to cover more.

The first truth I want to highlight is:

1. Sometimes our traditions are more for ourselves than for God.

I think that, to an extent, the synagogue leader wanted to honor God and make sure everyone else did, too. He didn't just care about the Law; he cared about all the extra rules he and everyone else followed to make sure they didn't violate it. I'm sure he felt pretty good about his ability to keep the Law. With his new line regarding the Sabbath being a mile away from the line God said not to cross, he probably didn't violate that line much if at all. He kept the Sabbath.

But we see that his keeping the Law wasn't completely pure. Or perhaps his desire for others to keep the law wasn't completely pure. He wanted

them to keep the Law, plus his laws, plus the laws of his traditions, and he treated all those things as equal. He felt good about his ability to keep all those traditions “for God,” but he got mad at God Himself when He dared to do something outside of his tradition.

This reveals that what he was doing and what God wanted them to be doing weren’t the same thing after all. We run the risk of becoming self-righteous when we are not good at discerning what our tradition or our conviction is versus what God’s Law actually is. You may find you are more prone to a particular sin, so you draw a stricter boundary than your friends. But if you all keep God’s law and keep away from sin, it’s all good. We can’t assume our friends are doing wrong just because they don't do it our way. We just know that we must do something extra, maybe for ourselves, so that we can do what we’re called to do for God.

We do not need to and probably should not abandon the things that we do for ourselves so that we can do for God what He wants of us, but we cannot confuse what is for us and what is for God and hold people to standards God is not.

The second truth I want to highlight is:

2. Every day is a good day to do good for people.

They spent a lot of time discussing and arguing the Law. Does this violate the Sabbath? What about that? And in an abundance of caution, and I believe, a love for and desire to follow God, they often defaulted to being strict. But what happened is that they ended up restricting their ability to love and serve others. They inadvertently sacrificed loving others in the name of loving God.

They understood they needed to feed and water their animals, even on the Sabbath, so they made an allowance for that. But then Jesus came along and healed someone on the Sabbath, and some of them lost their minds.

When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, He told them it is to love God with all you’ve got, but then He added that the next one is to love others. He said that every law hinged on these two. These two laws are inseparably linked.

It's always a good day to do good for people. Doing good for others is showing them love, and Jesus said that you cannot love Him without loving them.

The last truth I want to highlight is:

3. People are blessed when we choose Jesus over our traditions.

Can you imagine being in that crowd on that day? That would have been something to be a part of. Which crowd would you find yourself in? I'd love to believe that I'd be in the group of people who rejoiced at the wonderful things He did. Wouldn't you? But what if what He did stepped on your traditions? Would you still be pumped about what He did?

The truth is that everyone else would. When we choose following Jesus by loving God and loving others, people will be blessed.

I want to give you two things you can do to put the truths we see in this story into action in our lives. The first thing I want to encourage us to do is:

1. Choose Jesus over tradition.

Our traditions and following Jesus won't always contradict each other, but even when they aren't in conflict, they still might not be the exact same thing. We must be able to discern between our traditions and/or personal convictions and Jesus' universal calling. There are things God has called and commanded everyone to do—or not to do—but there are other things that may be for you. God may give you stricter guardrails, because you may be more susceptible to falling, and He wants to keep you safely on His path for your life. We need to know the difference.

We need to know where God's laws end and our traditions begin. We especially need to know where God's laws and our preferences may contradict. This seems to be so difficult now. We don't have to look any further than the way Christians in our country engage with politics. Our political traditions often define our faith. We make decisions about what we believe about God and others based on what our political leaning tells us instead of bending our political leanings to conform to what God has said about loving Him and others. Now, you might have thought of someone you think that applies to. Think about it again, because it applies to all of us. To

people who believe the way you do and to people who lean in the opposite direction.

We must let go of traditions when they get in the way of loving God and others. Choose Jesus over traditions.

The second thing I want to encourage you to do is:

2. Commit to doing good for other people.

If we want to be like Jesus, we have to love people, and love requires action. The word "Christian" literally means "follower of Christ" or "little Christ." Being like Him is in the name. Do you want to be like Jesus? That's not rhetorical. Do you want to be like Jesus?

If so, you have to love people. And if you want to love people, you have to do good for them. That's not always convenient, though. Is it? Sometimes, doing good for people requires us to inconvenience ourselves. Sometimes, it will require us to step outside of our comfort zones. It may even require us to give up something, from plans we're excited about to traditions we hold dear, to everything in between. That's why we have to make a commitment to do good for others before the opportunity arises. We must know that we're going to do it even if it costs us something.

Sometimes we think that we're doing everything for God that He wants from us by keeping our traditions. We show up to church, we volunteer, maybe you stand at the front and engage during worship. You keep the traditions you do because you love God, and that blesses Him. But choosing Jesus requires more than that. God wants more than that. Micah said this:

8 *No, O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.* **(Micah 6:8 NLT)**

Of all the traditions God's people have had, and all the things we want to do for Him, God said these are what He desires most. Do what is right by people. Do good for people! Love mercy for others, not just for yourselves. And walk humbly with God.

Thank God we have an example to follow in Jesus who chose to give it all up to do good for all of us. Who left Heaven, experienced pain, experienced illness, experienced loss, experienced betrayal, experienced death. He was more than inconvenienced. He did it for us! And if we're going to be little Christs, we're going to do it for other people.

Jesus is better than tradition. Following Jesus is better than keeping my traditions. May we give up anything that keeps us from following Him and being a blessing to others.