

Luke 13:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering?

Analysis

The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? Jesus' response begins with a devastating label: "hypocrite" (ὁποκριτά, hypokrita, singular, directly addressing the ruler). The Greek originally meant stage actor—one wearing a mask, playing a part. Jesus exposes the ruler's pretense: claiming to honor God while violating His heart.

The rhetorical question employs kal v'chomer (light to heavy) reasoning common in Jewish argumentation: if you do X for an animal, how much more should you do X for a human? The ruler would "loose" (λύει, lyei, from lyō, ἀλύω, the same root as "loosed" in v. 12) his ox or donkey for water on the Sabbath without hesitation. Jesus uses identical vocabulary: the woman needed to be "loosed" from bondage just as animals are "loosed" for care.

The argument is irrefutable: Sabbath law permits caring for animals' needs, yet the ruler objects to liberating a woman from eighteen years of Satanic bondage. The logic demonstrates that Pharisaic Sabbath regulations were arbitrary and inconsistent—allowing what benefited them while prohibiting mercy toward others. Jesus exposes their self-serving interpretation of God's law.

Historical Context

Jewish Sabbath law recognized that animal welfare sometimes required Sabbath activity. The ox and donkey mentioned here recall the fourth commandment itself (Exodus 20:10, Deuteronomy 5:14), which includes animals in Sabbath rest. Rabbinic tradition allowed untying animals for watering on the Sabbath, recognizing that animal needs couldn't wait. Jesus uses their own accepted practices to demonstrate the absurdity of opposing human healing on the Sabbath. If animal discomfort warrants Sabbath relief, how much more does human suffering?

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. What does Jesus' use of animal care to defend human healing reveal about the value God places on people?
2. How does the charge of hypocrisy challenge those who are more concerned with religious appearance than genuine mercy?
3. In what areas might contemporary believers apply religious standards inconsistently, strict with others but lenient with themselves?

Interlinear Text

ἀπεκρίθη	οὕν	αὐτοῦ	ὁ	κύριος	καὶ	εἶπεν	ὑποκριτά	
answered	then	him	G3588	The Lord	and	said	Thou hypocrite	
G611	G3767	G846		G2962	G2532	G2036	G5273	
ἕκαστος	ὑμῶν	τῷ	σαββάτῳ	οὐ	λύει	τὸν	βοῦν	αὐτοῦ
each one	of you	G3588	on the sabbath	not	doth	G3588	ox	him
G1538	G5216		G4521	G3756	G3089		G1016	G846
ἢ	τὸν	ὄνον	ἀπὸ	τῆς	φάτνης	καὶ	ἀπαγαγὼν	ποτίζει
or	G3588	his ass	from	G3588	the stall	and	lead him away	to watering
G2228		G3688	G575		G5336	G2532	G520	G4222

Additional Cross-References

Luke 14:5 (Parallel theme): And answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day?

Matthew 23:28 (Parallel theme): Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.