June 23/24, 2012

# With Sinners and Outcasts

*Simply Jesus Series*

**Luke 13:10-17**

Pastor John van Dinther

Thank you for having us here. We really appreciate being in Lincoln, our second time, actually second time in this church too. A year ago, we were welcomed here as we were allowed to play in your coffee house or whatever you would call it. So that was our first time coming to Berean, as we were guests of Faith Bible Church at that time.

Anyway—*Simply Jesus*—that's the theme for this season I understand. I was asked to talk a little bit about that—*Simply Jesus: With Sinners and Outcasts*. I like that a lot—sinners and outcasts—because I have a lot of experience being a sinner. You know, that's how we do those kinds of things in Europe, "We are good sinners!" (laughter)

Sinners and outcasts—everyone would remain that, if you haven't met Jesus. You know, for me, having grown up in a non-Christian home, never actually met a Christian, until in my late teens was the first time I ever met a Christian. My girlfriend at that time, who's now my wife, she didn't come from a Christian background either. She had never met a Christian. We met a Christian out on the square and that changed our lives. I was actually, at that moment in my life, living in a tent with my second brother. I'm the oldest one of four kids, and we were living in a tent. I was hitchhiking to my girlfriend's and had to get out of the car to take a turn. I met someone who told me about Jesus. I was a needy young man. Actually that same night I accepted Jesus. I had no clue that I was a sinner, honestly. But I was in need. I had no sort of sanctified motivation in life. "I'm a sinner; I really feel bad about myself; I have to ask for forgiveness,"… I didn't know that. I just felt, "I'm an empty person; I need someone, and if this Jesus can help me, please do." That's how it all started—*Simply Jesus*.

You know I was thinking about it because it's Jesus that makes all the difference. As we talk about Jesus, you know, and I hope you realize that talking about Jesus, saying, "I'm living with Jesus," has a lot of consequences. Sometimes it has real complications because if you say, "Jesus leads me; Jesus, now take control of my life," anything can happen. I told a story yesterday; I'm not going to repeat it. I'm going to tell another story because I remembered a phone call as we were planting a church in Gothenburg not too long ago. One of our young women who's one of the leaders that, together with me—I mean I'm not a leader there anymore—but I was; I was there one week a month, together with people there. She called me and she said, "You know, John," (it was Easter actually and she said), "Some people came to our door and I wonder, on Tuesday when you come, can we meet with them because they need to talk?" I said, "Okay." So Tuesday morning, as always, we traveled to Gothenburg. It's like a five-hour trip and I was there and I met a few people, among them there was Olek, from Latvia. He has a family in Latvia but, because of the economics and everything being done, he lost his job—lost everything. He couldn't provide anymore for their family so he had to come over to Sweden to look for a job. He and two other people that he had met up with made the same trip. He had an old car, a van, and they were actually living in the van. On that particular morning as they woke up—they had just parked the van somewhere—and they looked outside of the window and they saw something that looked like a church. That was our building in Gothenburg. It doesn't really look like a church but they had a feeling like, "This looks almost like a church." They went over to look at it and they were trying to read the signs. I mean they were Russian speaking so they couldn't, but at the same moment, my friend, Tanya, who is

from the Ukraine, who is one of the leaders in the church, she looked out of the window. She was doing the dishes in her apartment; she lives on top of the church, and she saw these people standing there at the sign. So she goes down right away and she says, "Hello, can I help you?" Right then they find out that they all speak Russian. It's these people I met on Tuesday morning. Olek is one of them, living in a car, having no money. I said, "You know what? You can live in our church for a season." He was not a Christian. Through him I got to know about his wife, Lena, and their two kids back home in Latvia. To make a long story short, the family—as a family today—they live in the church. They are caretakers of the church. They are believers; they have become baptized. People that you just met, people who have no place to stay, today are helping to lead a Russian-speaking group even in Gothenburg. If you say, "Jesus, use me," just about anything can, and actually should, happen.

So today we are going to talk about a woman who maybe has given up hope for a changed life. And we find her in Luke, Chapter 13. So let's read the Scriptures. I start reading there in verse 10.

> **On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.**
>
> **Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath."**
>
> **The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"**
>
> **When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.** (*NIV, Luke 13:10-17)

It's a simple story. I like the Gospel; it's simple. Actually when I became a Christian, I got the Gospel of John in my hands. I didn't have contact with Christians; there was no church in my hometown and, for the next half year, I thought that was the Bible—until I came to a camp where they were reading from the Book of Acts. Wow! There's more to it than my little Gospel that I knew. I thought that was my Bible! I was teaching from this Bible because I was leading other people to Christ because there's no one else there to do it so I'll do it. *My* Bible didn't show up to be *the* Bible after all. (laughter) But anyway...now this woman...

As you think of her being in need, it addresses a lot of things in this simple story, really. You know I like Gospel stories as I said. Here we find this man, the synagogue ruler, who responds to this miracle that is happening in the life of this woman. You know, isn't he very much like us? Many of us that say, "God, you shouldn't do this kind of thing this way. It should not be possible. You can't behave like that. You can't think like that. You can't do like that."

I think about two young women that were in our church. They would come week after week. They would sit together, hold hands and be deeply in love with each other. Actually they were married, according to the law. Every week they would be there. They would come to a cell group, one of our home groups. They went through our introduction course at the church for membership. And being there, they found out that we have a specific perspective on sexual relationships because we

say we really believe in sex, believe that's a great thing that God has given us, but it is to be experienced between one man and one woman within the context of a marriage. Sitting there they realized, "That's not us!"

One of them, Sasha, I can tell her name because she has gone public for this. She actually told her story. One day, as I was preaching, she came up. She's originally from Australia and is living with her partner in Sweden, in Stockholm. They've been in our church; they realized that something drew them, something of this love of God, and yet, there was this tension between their lifestyle, the choices they have made and the commitment they have made, and this commitment that was growing toward Jesus. It took some years. Many of us prayed for them. Many of us met with them. After some years Sasha came up and she told her story in front of the whole church. Her partner was sitting right in front of her. She said, "Today I have to do something drastic." And she pointed out to her partner and she said, "This person I love most on the face of this earth, more than any other person, but today I have to say, 'Yes,' to Jesus as I will get baptized. And that means for me that I have to say, 'No,' to her whom I love so much." She knew that following Jesus has consequences for life, for choices you make, for priorities you have. At the same time, she was fighting this battle within her, but she could not resist the love of Christ and the love of His people. And it led her to that step.

Now Sasha is now back actually in Australia, together with her family. I'm still in contact with her; we call a couple of times a year. Now her family has become Christian. She just told me two months ago that her family has become saved. She said, "It's not easy. Everything is not easy but I'm so happy I really surrendered to Christ." She could have been an outcast, made an outcast by Christians actually—and many Christians do that. Jesus, if it's simply Jesus, then He will intervene—same as for this woman. We are going to go back to the Scriptures now. Sorry about all these stories but I just felt like this story, I have to tell this story at this moment.

The sickness that this woman has been tormented with, not only affected her physically and we know that. If you are suffering, that is shown in everything you are and everything you do. You know you go through that and you carry the marks and the scars of different kinds of suffering. Now this woman has this physical suffering and we know how much that influences our psyche, the way you look at yourself. And even your identity—if you are handicapped, if you are suffering, if you are tormented by something—it colors the rest of your life. Now it's really hard to read the state of people. You know, if this woman would be here, a crippled woman, every one of us would realize that she has an issue; she has a problem. But the thing is, the fact is, that many of us don't look like a crippled person, but on the inside we are—maybe more crippled than this woman was. You know what I mean.

Sin makes us cripples. As some of us carry sin with us that has been there lingering, that's rising up again and again and again and it keeps us in captivity for many years, has bound us completely. Others have scars and wounds or things that people have done against them, sin that has been committed against them. And they sit here among us today, crippled in their emotions, crippled in their souls, crippled in their minds, can't think straight.

Suppose that, just for a moment, that everything about us would become visible, even just for a moment—all of our hurts, all of our hang-ups, all of our habits, as our brother was talking about this morning in the service—that all of them would just now come up and would be visible for everyone to see, just for a moment. I'm pretty sure that you might not like to sit next to the person you are sitting next to now. I do know this—right? You know what I mean. You'd say, "I want to move to

those seats there." But yet we sit here and we do, let's be honest, we do everything to keep up appearances. This woman was very visible; it was very visible.

Summer, one of my friends, new friends here, come up here please. "A crippled woman, how would she look? What do you think?" (Summer demonstrates) "Yes, how would she walk?" "Awkwardly," "awkwardly, she says. I'm just trying to tell her. If you want to look around, what do you do if you are bent over by a sickness? Look at those people there; look at the balcony there on top. Is it easy to relate to those people?" "No." "It's not and you keep on walking like that; really your life is limited. You look down and what do you see?" "The floor." "The floor, what do you see more?" "Your feet." "My feet, beautiful feet; blessed are the feet of those that bring good news, sisters." (laughter) "Thank you, Summer."

You understand? If you go around like that for eighteen years and you only see the floor; you see the feet and you see the dust and you see the shadows of people. When all colors have disappeared; when all perspective of life has disappeared and become limited to just that, that becomes your world—as this woman comes week after week to the place of prayer, the synagogue, hidden in the crowds. Because a person like that, bent over like that, you don't see her; she becomes part of the furniture almost—because it's hard to relate. Because how do we relate? We look at each other's eyes. You shake each other's hands like, "How do you do today?" You don't do that—you know what I mean?

But it says that Jesus saw her. Somehow, in the midst of that crowd, Jesus saw her. I just want to tell you, if you are crippled here today, if no one sees you, if no one has acknowledged you today, if no one knows you for who you really are, I think Christ Himself wants to say to you that He sees you right here today. He really does and He wants you to know that this moment through this story of this woman, He sees you. He will not bypass you.

That woman, maybe for the first time in those eighteen years, was given the full attention of a person. Not just any person, but Jesus Himself gave her His full attention. In the middle of a sermon He would see her and He would call her out. She was the object of His full love at that moment, His full compassion, and all of His time. His eyes were solely on her. Nothing else mattered. She was a woman who was seen—not seen with your and my eyes, that, "Okay, there's someone there that's bent over"—but He had seen her; He had understood her; He had read her mind. He, just in seconds, knew that she had been bound by a spirit, by Satan, for the last eighteen years—eighteen years bowed down to the dust, to the ground, eighteen years being focused on her own shadow and the shadow of others. For eighteen years all the colors disappeared from her life, and the weight of experiences, the weight of all the years pushed her down even more. And of course, there would have been people that have said, "You know, sharpen up, don't be so negative, don't look down." Don't look down? As if she had a choice? Don't look down? How do you tell a blind man to see?...a crippled man or person to walk?...a depressed person to rejoice?...a prisoner to be freed?...unless you have the remedy. It just adds more pain: "God will be with you, my brother, my sister." Well meant, but so out of place. You know what I mean? "Just keep on believing!" How many of you have heard that? "Just keep on believing!" You should keep on believing. This woman was doing that. Eighteen years later she was still coming to the place of prayer, to the synagogue. Eighteen years later, she hadn't given up. She was more committed than many other people, I guess. And today, maybe she has heard this voice, "It's no use going there. Nothing has happened before; why should anything happen today?" Do you recognize those words? "It's not going to make a difference if you go or don't go."

But today could be the day of salvation, could be the day of freedom, could be the day to meet Jesus. You didn't plan that maybe today. You just thought that I'm supposed to go to church. Did you come to meet Him? Did you come today so that He could call you out and say to you, "I've seen your crippled life? Now it's time to stand up, to rise up. Now it's time to be healed, to be affirmed your identity." You know, a man or a teacher would never speak to a woman in that culture publicly. Never! Not only that, as Jesus calls her out, He speaks against the infirmity, saying, "You are healed." And the next thing He does, He touches her. You shouldn't touch someone who is not your wife. And yet Jesus Himself, whom you cannot put in a box, He is touching this woman, affirming her deepest identity as a healed woman, as a daughter of Abraham.

Some of us have lived with so many lies that the things you are dealing with, that you cannot break those. You can't; that's true. But He can! And I'm going to ask you actually to respond today: that these people here in this room that are like this woman, who have been crippled. Maybe sin has done that to you. Maybe experiences have done that to you. Maybe the responses of people around you have done that to you. But today it's the day to receive healing, to get your freedom back in Jesus' name. I'm going to pray for a moment. I'm going to ask the Holy Spirit to show you these things. I'm going to ask you also to just close your eyes—everyone, so that no one is looking around. And I'm going to ask you in a moment to acknowledge: if this sermon is to you today, I would like to ask you to raise your hand while no one else looks around. As we are praying, if this sermon is to you, I want you to raise your hand so we know you acknowledge now, "I am the crippled one; I need healing." Don't be afraid now; just do that; keep your hand up, just for a moment.

> *Lord Jesus, I want to thank You at this moment that You are here with us and that You have seen those that are crippled maybe within their emotions, their identities, Lord, physically, the pasts, Lord, whatever has happened to them. I know, Lord, you are calling for them right now, today, to affirm, Lord, their true identity as sons and daughters of the living God, that you, Lord, today are greater than anything else, greater than our history, greater than all these years that we have carried all the burdens with us and sin with us. And we pray, Lord, at this moment that You will set these people free, in the name of Jesus we speak to you, in the Name of Jesus, that you are set free from your infirmity, that you are set free from your suffering, that you are set free from your bondage of sin and sin done against you. In the Name of Jesus...in the Name of Jesus...in the Name of Jesus. Holy Spirit, I pray that You will give faith now; I pray, Lord, that You will come and through the blood of Jesus Christ that You will come with Your restoration, that You come, Lord, with Your presence. We pray in Jesus' Name.*

THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™
Used by permission.
All rights reserved worldwide.