

Spirit of Infirmary

by Alan Redpath

Alan Redpath's sermon discusses the spirit of infirmity and the transformative power of Jesus in addressing spiritual struggles within the church.

Duration: 47:43

Scripture: Luke 13:10

Topics: "Infirmity"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on a story from Luke chapter 13 in which Jesus is teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath day. The story is both a miracle and a parable, highlighting the power and teachings of Jesus. The speaker emphasizes that all of Jesus' miracles are parables, illustrating deeper spiritual truths. The sermon also touches on the need for personal surrender to Jesus and the importance of being a witness for Christ in everyday life.

Transcript

This is Dr. Alan Redpath's message entitled The Spirit of Infirmary, and his Bible reading is Luke chapter 13, verses 10 to 17. Dear Lord, if all of us here tonight really mean have Thine own way, we almost tremble to think what would happen. We ask that Thou would have Thy way with us, that we may see the fatality and stupidity of having our own way, and the joy of going the way of the Lord and doing His will.

Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth. Speak just now, some message to meet my need, which Thou only dost know. Speak now through Thy holy word, and make me see some wonderful truth Thou hast to show to me.

For Jesus' sake. We're going to turn to this passage in the word of God, Luke chapter 13. Luke chapter 13, I hope you've got your New Testament with you, and verses 10 through 17.

This story begins with telling us that the Lord Jesus is teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath day. And this story is a miracle and a parable, all Christ's miracles going the way of the Lord and doing His will. Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.

Speak just now, some message to meet my need, which Thou only dost know. Speak now through Thy holy word, and make me see some wonderful truth Thou hast to show to me. For Jesus' sake.

Amen. We're going to turn to this passage in the word of God, Luke chapter 13. Luke chapter 13, I hope you've got your New Testament with you, and verses 10 through 17.

This story begins with telling us that the Lord Jesus is teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath day. And this story is a miracle and a parable, all Christ's miracles are parables. That isn't to say that they didn't take place.

Of course they did. Actually took place, as recorded. But they are parables of what the same Lord can do today for every one of us, here and now, if we're prepared to meet Him on His terms.

And we're going to take a look at this wonderful miracle, this parable, and notice that it took place in a synagogue on the Sabbath day. For our purposes it took place within the sphere of a Christian church. Now my friend, I don't know whether you realise it or not, but that's where the biggest miracles are needed right now.

In the sphere of the Christian church. God has no problem with the world. We may imagine that the world's a pretty grim place.

Well, so it is. But God has no problem with the world. He said to a little company of men whom he chose out of it, Be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world.

And the Father said to the Son one day, Sit thou at my right hand until I make all thine enemies thy footstool. And God, who spoke in many ways to different people at many times, has spoken in these last days to us in Jesus Christ our Lord, who, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. It never gives me five seconds' worry as to what happens, may happen, in Washington, or Beijing, or any other capital in the world.

Because not one of them can lift a little finger, except by permission of our God who is on the throne. And I hope you all believe tonight that God is on the throne, and that we have a victorious Savior who has conquered in himself every foe. God has no problem with the world.

He's got no problem with the devil either, because he made a show of them openly at the cross and stripped from himself principalities and power. God has no problem with the devil. Of course, the trouble is he's persuaded most people that he doesn't exist.

That's one of Satan's cleverest counterfeits, just to persuade us that he's a figure out of a legendary story. That he doesn't really exist at all. One of my favorite authors is C.S. Lewis.

Perhaps you've read Screwtape Letters. That's a wonderful allegory, a picture story, of satanic strategy upon the Christian church. How Satan and his hosts wage a spiritual warfare against the church.

And in the course of that story, C.S. Lewis speaks of Screwtape, the devil, as sending a message to his nephew, Wormwood, who is his chief representative here on earth, and saying to him, be not deceived, Wormwood, our cause is never in greater danger than when a human being, no longer desiring but still intending to do the enemy's will, that is, the will of God, looks round him upon a universe from which every sign of the enemy, God, has been removed and goes on obeying him. That's the kind of Christian that God's wanting today. For he has no problem with the devil.

And you see, the only problem God has, let me say it to you quietly, but firmly, is not with his enemies, but with his friends. With people like you and me who take to ourselves the name Christian, and for whom God has a purpose, and through whom he conducts his spiritual warfare. And God's problem is to get people like us here tonight to live right in the center of his will.

Here then is a miracle and a parable of how Jesus Christ got hold of a woman one day in a synagogue and revolutionized her life. And that same Lord Jesus can do exactly the same thing for every one of us here this evening, as I have said, if we're prepared to meet him on his terms. We're going to look at what those terms really are.

But I want you to be impressed with the fact that the issue, the spiritual issue, the spiritual battlefield today is not the need of unconverted people. It's the need, the desperate need that exists in the church itself. I'm glad that these meetings are being linked with a Billy Graham crusade, which will be held shortly.

In 1962, when he was in Chicago, I was right in the thick of a fight with him. I was chairman of the committee in that city. And when I left Moody Church in Chicago, I left 48 people in the discipleship class, all of whom who had received Christ as their savior during that Billy Graham crusade.

And if I was in this continent during his coming visit, I would want to be in the thick of a battle again. But I remember Billy Graham saying to me personally one day in Chicago, if the church was really doing its job, I would be out of work. And he's dead right.

Perhaps the need of Australia is not Billy Graham, but you. Maybe the answer to the need of this continent is not bringing in an evangelist, paying a tremendous amount of money for a campaign, and buying off our responsibility for witness to Christ that way. Whereas all the time God wants to take hold of a nobody, fill them with the Holy Ghost, and use them seven days a week where they live to be a testimony to what Jesus can do.

One of the great staggering tragedies in Britain today is that nobody thinks they can do any evangelism unless we can have Billy Graham around. Thank the Lord for men like that. But God wants you.

And his problem is to get the church moving in New Testament fashion, with New Testament power, and a New Testament authority. But the testimony of so many Christians is silent, and their witness ineffective, because in their lives there's something tragic gone wrong. And we find it here in these few verses.

A certain woman was in the synagogue which had a spirit of infirmity 18 years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. She was bowed together. The word really means she was bent double.

I'm not quite sure about it, but when I was young, long, long ago, ladies used to use hairpins, and they were bent double. You know? I don't know if you use them now. But this woman was bent double just like that.

Absolutely earthbound. She could in no wise lift up herself, I imagine, but when she was a young teenager, or possibly younger, round the family table, her father and mother would begin to notice that she was stooping, and would say to her, sit up, dearie. And she would straighten herself.

But as time went on, it became more and more difficult for her to do so. This disease, which had got her in its grip, and because of which she was bent double, was in her in childhood, latent, developing, growing in power, until eventually she could do nothing at all about it, and she could in no wise lift up herself. Now,

you know, I don't like spiritualizing Scripture too much, but I can't escape the dramatic illustration that this is of humanity today.

Absolutely earthbound, bent double, unable to lift up themselves. Man, created in God's image, made like God, created to worship Him and have fellowship with Him, has lost all his relationship because of rebellion, and now finds himself absolutely earthbound. If the history of 1967 is ever written, I wonder what word would sum up the year that has just gone into history.

What a year it was. I think the word that I would choose for it is the word achievement. A year of achievement.

For the first time in the history of the world, two spaceships are linked together in outer space. Achievement. For the first time in history, a soft landing is made on the moon.

Tremendous. For the first time in history, heart transplants take place with varying degrees of success. Tremendous achievement immensely.

For the first time in history, a dog is beheaded and its head placed on another dog, and the dog lives with two heads. What a year of achievement, 1967 was. But listen, with all the authority of Scripture and the force of the language of the New Testament, in spite of all that achievement, comes ringing down the ages this truth.

Except a man be born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God. He cannot see it. He can't understand it.

Except he be born again, he cannot enter into it, and he cannot inherit it, for flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. In spite of all his achievements, he is literally bent double. But most of you here profess to be conversive.

And I am here in the name of the Lord Jesus to ask you if the Lord Jesus has straightened you out yet. Or are you still earthbound? Many, many Christians know Christ as the Saviour from sin, but they have no experience at all of Christ as Deliverer from the power of sin. They're on the right side of Calvary, but the wrong side of Pentecost.

The right side of pardon, but the wrong side of power. The right side of forgiveness, but the wrong side of fellowship. And here's a woman in the synagogue, eighteen years, bowed together, bent double, and absolutely unable to lift up herself.

She's come to the end of her rope. The thing's impossible. What's the matter with her? She had a spirit of infirmity.

Eighteen years. Now Luke, as you know, is a doctor. And therefore he often uses medical terms, and he uses one here.

And the word means neurasthenia. It would be worth paying a specialist in this town five hundred dollars to be told that you had neurasthenia. That sounds terrific.

But when I tell you that a neurasthenia, though it has different forms, actually is a missing connection between brain and body, that's not so funny. You see, we never think about it because we do it automatically, but your brain is your managing director, and your body obeys orders. Your brain says, foot,

move one yard to the right, and your foot responds, and off you go.

And your brain says, hand, lift up yourself, and your hand lifts itself up. All right. Fine, when it's working.

But it's awful when it doesn't work. And when the foot sends an SOS back to the brain and says, sorry, can't be done. And the hand sends a message back, sorry, can't move.

Neurasthenia. The spirit of infirmity. Do you remember a man in the New Testament who said once, with my mind I serve the law of God, but with my flesh the law of sin? Romans 7, 25.

Who was the man? The Apostle Paul. The most self-righteous man who's ever lived. A Pharisee of the Pharisees, as touching the righteousness of the law, blameless.

A man of unimpeachable morality. A man who lived according to the word of God, and yet, and yet, the Spirit of God had come upon his life in such power that he had to say to himself, but with my mind I serve the law of God, but with my flesh the law of sin. What did he mean? Oh, just this.

This sort of thing, to bring it up today. With my mind I say I'm going to get up at half past six tomorrow morning and have a quiet time. But my body lies in bed because it's tired.

With my mind I say to myself, now look, when I go to the office tomorrow, I'm going to witness to that fellow about Jesus. He's never heard anything about him. But my body keeps out of his way.

With my mind I say, look, I'm going to write to some Bible training institute and get into Bible training quickly. I think I ought to do it. I feel the impulse of it.

And I never put pen to paper. You see, my mind says one thing and my body the other. And the Apostle Paul wrote that as a Christian man, not as an unconverted man, as a man whose mind had been renewed by the Spirit of God, and yet who was powerless to put into action the will of God, the spirit of infirmity, eighteen years, and she was bent double.

Listen, will you ask, answer this question, not to me, but to God, what's your infirmity and how long has it been going on? I repeat that question, what's your infirmity and how long has it been going on? I mean the thing that's taken all the joy out of your Christian life. Many a time it's brought a blush to your face. It's made you feel your Christianity is just a sham.

It's kept you silent when you ought to have spoken for Jesus. It's made you feel that you're utterly hypocritical to take the name of Christ. What's your infirmity? How long has it been going on? With my mind, the law of God.

With my flesh, the law of sin. You know, we've got the idea sometimes that Christianity is all very well for teenagers and people just about to depart from heaven. But for the age bracket between there, it hasn't been, it isn't relevant.

Have you ever noticed in the New Testament that Jesus is one who deals with long-standing complaints? Do you remember the man he spoke to who was fulfilled with a legion of demons? And he had been a long time in that case. And Jesus spoke to him and delivered him from them and he was sitting clothed in his right mind. Do you remember a man at the pool of Bethesda? Thirty-eight years, helpless with an infirmity.

And Jesus said to him, do you want to make strong? And immediately he was on his feet, whole. Do you remember a man who was outside the beautiful gate of the temple, lame, unable to walk, being carried there every day for forty years? Peter and John came along one day and said, silver and gold, have we none? The church used to be proud that it was bankrupt. It didn't make appeals for money.

It was just glad to be bankrupt. Because when it was bankrupt materially, it was wealthy spiritually. And Peter and John said, in the name of Jesus Christ, rise up and walk.

And immediately he leaped and prayed to God. Forty years, a woman with haemorrhage for twelve years, been to every doctor, only was made worse. She touched the hem of Christ's garment and she was made whole.

I have a Savior who deals with people who have long-standing complaints. Do you know that Savior? I tell you, my friend, that there's no infirmity in your life has gone on so long but the blood of Jesus can cleanse it. And there's no infirmity has gone so deep but the power of the cross can go deeper.

A certain woman had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years and was bowed together and could in no wise lift up herself. Do you find it difficult to put yourself in that picture? Oh, you say, somebody who came to me and said, Pastor, I have a shocking temper. It must be my cross.

And I smiled and I said, My dear man, it's not your cross, it's your wife's cross. She has to live with it. It's not your cross, it's your sin.

How will you rationalize what's your infirmity? Is it a desire for your own way that you won't let go? Is it an insistence upon being vindicated and proved right in a situation you won't give in to it? I wonder what your infirmity is. And it's kept all the power of the Spirit of God out of your life. And all the liberty and all the joy and all the thrill of Christian experience has gone past you.

An infirmity for eighteen years she could in no wise lift up herself. The woman and her need. Oh, but look at Jesus and the cure.

When Jesus saw her, he called her to him and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. It's dramatic. Instantaneous.

Jesus saw her. And there's nobody sees us like he does. Those of you who were at Adelaide will remember that I told you that one day I, in leaving Scotland early last November, had to get a visa.

You know what that is, of course. You see, these days a British passport which asks at the request of Her Majesty that you be given safe country custody through every country in the world, that will take you as far as London Airport. And after that you need a visa.

So I had to go and get a visa and a visa means, of course, getting a photograph taken. Now, I haven't lived in Scotland for five years for nothing. And I know a store in Scotland, in Edinburgh, and if you would like to know about it I'll tell you where it is so that you can have the same treatment if you wish it.

A store in Edinburgh where I can get six passport photographs for half a crown. Now that's very cheap. And all I do is to go to that store, put half a crown in a slot, pull the... So I had to go and get a visa and a visa means, of course, getting a photograph taken.

Now, I haven't lived in Scotland for five years for nothing. And I know a store in Scotland, in Edinburgh, and if you would like to know about it I'll tell you where it is so that you can have the same treatment if you wish it. A store in Edinburgh where I can get six passport photographs for half a crown.

Now that's very cheap. And all I do is to go to that store, put half a crown in a slot, pull the curtain round and press a button and sit still for a minute and out comes six photos. One, two, three, four, five, six.

And a girl comes along and smears them over with some sort of preservative and you take them home. I was very happy about that and I came home with a package of photographs and I noticed, I had looked at it, I noticed on the outside it said these are unfinished proofs. Unfinished proofs.

So when I got home, I opened the package and I was absolutely horrified. And I said to myself, I really can't believe it's as bad as that. And I held this picture in that hand that's supposed to be me and then I looked at the family photograph.

So when I got home, I opened the package and I was absolutely horrified. And I said to myself, I really can't believe it's as bad as that. And I held this picture in that hand that's supposed to be me and then I looked at the family photograph on the piano.

That's where you have your family photograph? Yeah, that's right. Well there was my wife and two children and myself. And I looked at myself on there and I looked at this.

Then I felt better because that was taken by a photographer and he had put all the art of photography in it. He'd taken away all the warts and pimples and spots and there was someone who looked like a movie star. It pleased me very much.

But just at that moment, as I was comparing the two, my wife came into the room. Now, thank God for our wives who halve our sorrows and double our joys and treble our expenses. And she looked over my shoulder and she saw exactly what I was thinking.

Because she knows me. And she said, well now my dear, don't you get any wrong ideas. This is really you.

And you know, that just blew the bubble completely. And you know, that just blew the bubble completely. Secretly, of course, I knew that it was true.

But I didn't want to admit it. Now I don't mind you smiling at the story, but I am concerned that deep down in your hearts you get what I'm trying to say to you, which is simply this. When Jesus sees somebody, he sees somebody like that.

He's not interested in the kind of person we want other people to think we are, nor indeed the kind of person we think we are ourselves, but he's interested in seeing the untouched proof, what we really are. And you see, those are God's term for revival in the church. When the Christian is prepared to come out from behind his camouflage and pretense and sham and show and really stand in the presence of the Lord and let the Lord look him through and through.

Do you remember that Jesus did that one day to Simon Peter and broke his heart? As he cursed and swore and said that he knew nothing about Jesus, Jesus turned and looked upon him. And Simon looked upon Jesus and their eyes met and Peter's heart broke and he went out and wept bitterly. That puts an

end, in my thinking, to the fact that some people say there's no emotion in religion.

Of course there's emotion in religion. You can't let Jesus see you as you really are and be willing to meet him on his terms without a sense of shame and failure and sin and thankfulness that his blood can cleanse it all. And Jesus saw her and he called her to him.

You know, isn't that wonderful? Listen. Supposing the story of your life and mine, which he knows about, could be recorded here completely in front of this platform right now and the whole picture put before the whole congregation. How many people would want to call us to them? I think the desire would be to keep us at arm's length.

They'd be afraid of us. But Jesus, having seen her, called her to him and said unto her, Woman, that sounds a very sort of patronizing word, that woman. Oh, but it isn't.

It's a word of tremendous love when it comes from Jesus. It's the word that he used of the woman taken in the very act of adultery. Woman, where are thine accusers? Doth no man accuse thee? No man, Lord.

Neither do I condemn thee. Go thy way and sin no more. It's the word that he used to his mother as he hung upon the cross and said, Woman, behold thy son.

Son, behold thy mother. And it's the word he uses here, Woman. You see, Jesus is never angry when he faces our sinfulness.

He's never mad with us. He didn't expect us to be any different. And he doesn't blame us for being like that.

But what he does blame us for is staying like it when he's provided the remedy. And with a look of absolute concern and compassion and love, Woman, thou art loosed. And the word means divorced, separated.

It's the word that Pilate used to a crowd one day when he cried, Which of these two prisoners, Barabbas or Jesus, do you want to be released? Unto you released. It's a word of final separation. Woman, thou art released.

Thou art loosed. Thou art set free from thine infirmity. Now listen to me carefully.

Jesus deals with our sin like that. He breaks the power of cancelled sin and sets the prisoner free. I love the language of Top Lady.

Nothing rock of ages cleft for me. Nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to thy cross I cling.

Naked, come to thee for dress. Helpless, look to thee for grace. Foul, I to the fountain fly.

Wash me, Saviour, or I die. Let the water and the blood from thy riven side which flowed be of sin. The double cure cleanse me from its guilt and power.

Thou art loosed and this infirmity which was for eighteen years was immediately broken. And I don't mind how long and what nature your infirmity may be. How you may have battled with it and struggled with it and fought with it.

I'm here to tell you tonight that the Christian message of the New Testament is this. That when a fellow or girl, man or woman, comes to the end of themselves and they're bent double and they know they can't do a thing about it and they're absolutely beaten, Jesus says, Thou art loosed from thine infirmity. Oh yes.

When we stop fighting, he gets a chance. When we stop trying, he comes into business. Thou art loosed from thine infirmity.

And to someone who is absolutely held and gripped like a vice in the power of some sin tonight, here, who is a Christian, professing Christian and got no joy and no liberty, and Jesus Christ right now in this meeting can snap the power of it, not gradually, but immediately as you trust him and his Holy Spirit floods your life to fight the battle for you. And immediately the Scripture says she was made straight and glorified God. I was meeting a friend of mine not so long ago in London.

He'd been over for a trip to the States, preaching for six months. He'd come back to Southampton. I met him off the boat train.

I was going to take the chair at a meeting to welcome him home. I met him. We went to have lunch together.

Before we had lunch, we went to wash our hands. He removed his jacket and lo and behold, he had three watches up his arm. And I said to him, why, my good friend, you know the time.

He said, yes, I do. I said, my word, those watches must have cost you a fortune. Oh, he said, no, he said, I bought them wholesale from a firm in Philadelphia.

But he said, even then, I must admit, it was over 500 American dollars. Yes, I said, I thought so, they're beautiful. And then I said something.

Do you sometimes do this? I said something that I wish I'd never said. Sort of blurted it out, and it was too late. But I said to him, oh, the duty you must have paid must have been terrific.

And he coloured. And I knew I'd said the wrong thing. But I couldn't get out of it.

And he said, duty? What do you mean by duty? Well, I said, you know at Southampton that car the customs officer puts before you and says that everything you have purchased while out of Britain you have to declare whether it's for personal use or family use or resale. And he just looked away from me and went out to the restaurant. And he muttered, I didn't bother.

And that night, I took a chair at a meeting at which he gave a magnificent address. And I wasn't the least bit impressed. Listen.

Has the Lord straightened you out? Has he made you straight? May the rough places smooth and the crooked places straight. For it is then, you notice, that this story says, she glorified God. You won't, I trust, take offence when I say that the trouble in the church is crooked Christians who need to be straightened out.

And God can do that for you to know if you're prepared to give him the chance. Let us pray. Just let us have a moment of silent prayer before we sing our closing hymn.

Someone here with the spirit of infirmity bow down. No power, no liberty, no joy. Would you hand that over to Christ, admitting that you're beaten and you can't do anything about it.

And trusting him, the living Lord, to come in in all his power when you're at the end of yourself and for him to fight the battle for you. Oh, we thank you, Lord, that thy purpose is to save us completely. To give us deliverance and victory day by day.

That there may be upon our faces and in our voices the note of joy, the note of liberty, the note of deliverance. For we thank thee that we have a Lord who breaks the power of cancelled sin and sets the prisoner free. Oh God, do thou give to each one of us a vital testimony to the power of the living Christ in our hearts.

We believe that that's what the world is desperately needing. Help us to go back to our office tomorrow. To our job.

To the place where we're working. There. To say a word in the name of the King.

To say a word that speaks of reality and power because Jesus has become real to us. We ask it in thy name. Amen.

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