

Jesus Forgives and Heals

Mark 2:1-12

- 1 And again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house.**
- 2 Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them.**
- 3 Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men.**
- 4 And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying.**
- 5 When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you."**
- 6 And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts,**
- 7 "Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"**
- 8 But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, "Why do you reason about these things in your hearts?**
- 9 Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'?**
- 10 But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"--He said to the paralytic,**
- 11 I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house."**
- 12 Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"**

This event in Jesus' life raises some interesting questions for us. How and why do people come to Jesus? What is humankind's greatest need? When we look at our friends and family struggling with life, what is their greatest need? Who is Jesus and what power does He really have? Why do religious leaders get so upset with Jesus?

There are anywhere from 250,000 to 400,000 people with spinal cord injuries in the US. 47% with paralysis of the lower extremities; 53% are quadriplegic. 80% are male. About 90% live a normal life span. More than half were injured between the ages of 16 and 30.

I read the story of Trevor Snowden, a world class snowboarder whose back snapped in two. He describes his accident:

At Snow Qualomy Pass, Snowden was the third boarder to make a practice run off the sculpted snow ramp designed to catapult contestants over a flat area and onto a steep landing slope. The first two riders barely cleared the flat section and contest officials were worried.

"The walkie-talkie guys said to get more speed, so I touched it up a notch," said Snowden. He hit the jump and not only cleared the flat but sailed over the entire slope, landing in another flat area 103 feet below the ramp.

"I was doing a backside 360 (helicopter) and, when I turned around, I saw that I was too big," he said. "I thought about skidding on my side or leaning back but my mind just decided to stick it - to land on my feet. I was so high and so far and the hill was so flat that there was no way my body could stand the compression."

"I hit and all I remember is hearing my bones rattle inside my flesh," he said. "I hit so hard that I bounced off the snow like a beach ball."

That accident left Trevor partially paralyzed. He cannot walk and must use a wheelchair to get around.

We don't know the circumstances that brought paralysis to the man in our Bible lesson today. Imagine the situation described here.

1. Jesus in the House

Jesus is back at his Galilean headquarters in Capernaum, preaching in a crowded house, probably the home of the fishermen, Peter and Andrew. There are people on the floor, in the doorway, at the windows. Just like in chapter 1 when Jesus was in Capernaum, it seems the whole town came out to see Jesus, to hear Him, and to bring their sick to Him to be healed. The little house was bursting at the seams with people who had a sense of expectancy that something unusual was going to happen in that house, perhaps even happen to them. The atmosphere was charged, they were anticipating that God would do something.

That is a lesson to us: **When Jesus is in the house, people will come.** Jesus' presence cannot be concealed for long. Do people know that Jesus is in your house? Do people know Jesus is in this house today?

This particular house probably had outside stairs going up to a mud and straw thatched roof. Four men arrive with a paralyzed friend lying on a homemade stretcher. They've heard about Jesus, about His healings, and they believe Jesus has the power of God to heal their friend. But when they arrive at the house, they cannot enter because of the overcrowded situation, so they go to the roof.

Maybe you have come into this meeting this morning, I don't know your circumstances, and you are intrigued by the power of God. Maybe it's the power of God that you have seen in another person's life, just like these people saw in the leper's life, and in the demoniac's life, and in the life of Peter's mother-in-law--but you have never experienced it in your own life, and because of that you're curious, you're searching. If that's you, I'm glad God brought you here today. But what I want you to notice is that Jesus didn't immediately give this crowd of people what their curiosity demanded, rather He gave them what they really needed. I'm sure they came to see more miracles, but Jesus, it says in verse 2, **"He preached the word to them."**

There's a lesson here for all of us, whether we belong to the church of Jesus Christ or we're not converted, Christ is and was the greatest miracle worker of all. And yet He felt that His primary responsibility was to preach God's word. We already heard Him say that in chapter 1:39, **"Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth."**

What was the message He preached? Well, let me remind you of it in chapter 1:15 Jesus came preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, "**The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.**" The Bible, from cover to cover, is filled with that message, Old and New Testament alike - that God requires all men everywhere to turn from their sin, that is what repentance is; and to believe the gospel, that is the good news of the Lord Jesus: that God sent His Son into the world not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. That's why He died on the cross, that's why He rose three days later, that's why He ascended to heaven, that's why He's coming again some day soon.

Now imagine sitting on the floor in this house listening to Jesus. Everyone is quiet as they are hanging on every word that comes from His mouth. Jesus is preaching the word to them. But then they hear a noise above them, someone is walking on the roof--it sounds like several somebodies. The next thing you know little pieces of straw and dried mud begin to fall from the ceiling. Soon there is a ray of sunlight shining through, then a large hole, and suddenly, a man on a stretcher is lowered right in front of the preacher.

This had to be quite a chaotic situation. What's the owner of the house thinking as his house is vandalized? What are the guests thinking as they are covered with dust and their time with Jesus is interrupted? And, what does Jesus think of the abrasive forwardness of these intruders?

Imagine having friends like these men. Friends who care about you so much that they'll do the unusual in order to help you. We know there were at least four friends carrying the stretcher and the text implies that there were more. Here they are a group of friends who care about one of their own. These four that bore this man to Jesus were ingenious with their faith. They climbed the outside stairs to the roof of the house, they uncovered a portion of the roof, and they lowered the man down to the ground - bringing him nearer to the Son of God. Now can I challenge you this morning, believer in Christ: how many people have you lately brought near to the Son of God? When is the last time you brought someone to the place where the word of God is preached?

We don't know how long this man was paralyzed or what brought about the paralysis. We simply know that he is suffering with this incurable ailment and his friends watch him suffer. They hear about Jesus, know that He's in town, and decide to take their friend to Jesus. They were interested in his healing; little did they know that he would come away with much more.

2. Jesus saw their faith.

Jesus recognized that these men had faith. I imagine that a smile on Jesus' face as He saw these men digging through the roof, because He recognized their action demonstrated faith that could not be hid - just like Jesus' presence could not be hid in the house. Now may I ask us all today, including myself: what visible acts of faith do I need to do, do you need to do, in order to bring others to Christ? What visible acts of faith--like the men carrying this paralytic--what do you need to do? What do I need to do?

Actions of faith that bring people to Jesus will require that I expend energy. I might have to do something hard and uncomfortable, like climbing onto a roof and digging through it. I will have to leave my self-consciousness behind and not

be afraid of what others will think. I will cost something to bring people to Jesus. Someone has nicknamed these four friends: 'Sympathy', 'Cooperation', 'Originality', and 'Persistence'. All those things are needed if we are to overcome the hindrances to bring others to Christ.

These men showed that kind of faith. Did these men recognize that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God? I doubt it. Did they come asking for eternal salvation from sin and death? No, theirs was probably more of a curious, seeker type of faith than saving faith. They didn't say to themselves - "Jesus is preaching the gospel so let's take our paralyzed friend so he can get saved." They came to Jesus so He could heal their friend. It wasn't a mature biblically grounded faith. But it was faith that was headed in the right direction and a faith to which Jesus responded.

What initially brings them to Jesus is not their deep spiritual concern. They aren't overwhelmed with the lost condition of their friend. It's not their friend's sinfulness that they see as a problem. It's his suffering. There's no indication that they have made any theological connection between sin and suffering. They aren't coming to Jesus as the Redeemer who forgives sinners, but to Jesus the one who is moved by compassion at the suffering of the multitudes.

They simply are not mature in their understanding of redemption. However, they know at least two things - their friend needs healing and Jesus heals.

Let me pause for a moment here to say that this is normally the level at which the Spirit of God is beginning to work in lives and causing people to seek after the living God. Often God uses pain and suffering to arouse people to seek Him. Not every beginning prayer is as clear as the publican who went into the temple and cried out, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

More often than not the cry is one of desperation - "I'm hurting. God, please help me. Have mercy on me."

Also, more often than not, this is the level at which we become concerned about others. We see their suffering and not their sin, and we cry out for them. Though there is a deeper level of concern for someone's life that we need to approach, I don't want to minimize any genuine concern for others that causes you or them to turn to Christ for any kind of help.

In verse 5 we read that Jesus saw their faith. It wasn't mature saving faith but it was genuine faith accompanied with unusual action. Jesus responded to this faith.

Trevor Snowden talks about the spiritual impact of his snowboarding accident. The accident brought him closer to Christ, he said, by forcing him to understand that there are more important things in life than snowboarding.

"I had everything," he said. "I was fully sponsored by Fila, I was finally getting a regular paycheck, MTV was filming the Bud Tour and I was finally ready to really break out into the sport. Then it was all taken away."

Snowden said that one reason he has adjusted so quickly is that he was already unhappy with his life. "I had all those great things but I was still kinda bummed, life just kinda sucked," he said. "When it was all taken away, it was refreshing to know that I had a new beginning. I was wrapped up in snowboarding, because that's all I had."

3. Jesus forgives sins.

We can bring everyone's need to Jesus, but we know that Jesus will always probe the deeper issues of life. He's always looking at the heart issues. Is the discussion of forgiveness ever inappropriate or irrelevant? Do Jesus' words seem a bit out of place to you?

As He looks deep into the heart of this paralyzed man, he sees a heart crying out for release from guilt.

As Jesus looks at this paralytic man, he looks past his paralysis deep into his heart. He knows that the deepest yearning of this man's heart is to be rid of guilt - to be forgiven. A Dutch poet called man's guilt 'the root of all human problems.' A British psychologist has called forgiveness 'the most healing force in the world.'

The OT background sets the stage for understanding that there is a relationship between sin and disease and forgiveness and healing. "It was not God's intention that man should live with the pressure of death upon him. Sickness, disease, and death are the consequence of the sinful condition of all men. Consequently, every healing is a driving back of death and an invasion of the province of sin." (Lane 1974, 94).

The presence of illness in any of our lives is a reminder that we belong to a race of sinners. Not that a particular sin always brings about a specific consequence of illness, but all illness is linked to the fall of the human race and is evidence of that fall. The presence of illness brings about a longing for wholeness that can never be attained without forgiveness. "What we cry out for, all of us, sometimes without knowing it, is to be whole within, to be restored at the center of our being, to be at peace again with God. And that happens when God forgives us" (Brownson 1993, 93).

The experience of illness, i.e. the effects of sin, should always drive us to the cross where Jesus died so that sin can be forgiven and the ultimate effect of sin, death, could be conquered.

Aren't you glad that Jesus forgives?

4. Jesus faces the critics

As He looks into the hearts of the religious leaders, He sees skepticism. The religious leaders heard Jesus' pronouncement of forgiveness and didn't say anything at loud. But, in their hearts they were ridiculing Jesus.

They have a theological problem with Jesus. Actually, their theology is sound, but their judgment is in error. They understood properly that only God can forgive sin. This is affirmed repeatedly throughout the OT Scriptures. But there's no room in their thinking for the possibility that God could take on human flesh and that Jesus could possibly be the incarnation of God. So they conclude in their hearts that Jesus is guilty of blasphemy. This charge follows Jesus all the way to His crucifixion. To them Jesus is a charlatan, a fake. Words are cheap, and how can one verify whether or not forgiveness has taken place?

Jesus asks them a few questions in verses 8 and 9: **"Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'?"**

Which is easier to say? The religious leaders thought that words of forgiveness were easier; Jesus implies by his question that the physical miracle is the easier of the two. It's a far greater miracle for a man to be forgiven than for him to walk again. "To offer forgiveness took infinitely more. For that, God needed to come among us and share our humanity. For that, he had to take on himself the whole weight of our guilt and rebellion. He had to suffer and be forsaken in our stead. He had to die on the cross for our sins. That's how difficult how costly it was for the Almighty God to forgive sins" (Brownson 1993, 95).

If forgiveness is our deepest need and God's grandest miracle, there's nothing in all the world we ought to seek more eagerly, both for ourselves and for others (Ibid., 95).

This man's sins may have been connected to his suffering, we don't know for sure -- but Jesus dealt with the primary problem first, He dealt with his sin. You might be here this morning, and you're suffering in your life because of sin, because of habitual sin. It's not hard to work out: if you drink too much you suffer for it, if you smoke too much you suffer for it, if you gamble too much you suffer for it, if you sleep around too much you suffer for it. The wages of sin is death, and the way of the transgressor is hard, and my friend: it's no use looking to God and praying the odd prayer that God will take your problem away if you won't let Him take your sin away!

If Jesus is God, and only God can forgive sins, then Jesus holds an exclusive power to forgive. Jesus has authority to forgive men's sins on earth. You don't need a priest, you don't need a Pope, you don't need a minister, all you need is the Lord Jesus Christ.

5. Jesus heals the man.

Jesus now addresses the skeptics. They consider him to be blaspheming when he says, "Son, your sins are forgiven." So, he gives the skeptics an opportunity to come to faith.

Jesus opens a window of opportunity for these skeptics. His healing of the paralytic is not only an act of compassion (Indeed, it is!) but a confirmation of his authority to forgive sins.

Listen to His words and look at the healing of this man. Can He really forgive sins? Can He and will He eventually remove all of the effects of sin?

To make it even more personal - does He have authority to forgive my sins? Will He, whether now or later, remove the effects of sin in my life and in this world?

Have you turned from your sin? You say: 'I haven't got the power', He'll give you the power to do it if you're willing. Have you believed in the Lord Jesus, and the Lord Jesus alone, and said: 'Lord, I'm sorry for my sin, and I want You to save me, save me now'? Do that today, by faith, sincerely from your heart, and He will forgive your sins, for He alone has the power.

When Jesus healed this man everyone was amazed and they praised God, saying, **"We never saw anything like this!"**

Who do I know that needs this amazing Jesus? To what extent am I willing to go to bring them to Jesus? What do I really believe Jesus can do?