

Jesus Heals the Paralytic

(Matt 9:2-7, Mark 2:3-12, Lk. 5:18-26)

Matthew 9:2-7

"Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you." (3) And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, "This Man blasphemes!" (4) But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? (5) For which is easier, to say, "Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, "Arise and walk'? (6) But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"--then He said to the paralytic, "Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." (7) And he arose and departed to his house."

Mark 2: 3-12

"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!"

Luke 5: 18-26

"Then behold, men brought on a bed a man who was paralyzed, whom they sought to bring in and lay before Him. (19) And when they could not find how they might bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the housetop and let him down with his bed through the tiling into the midst before Jesus. (20) When He saw their faith, He said to him, "Man, your sins are forgiven you." (21) And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, "Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (22) But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He answered and said to them, "Why are you reasoning in your hearts? (23) Which is easier, to say, "Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, "Rise up and walk'? (24) But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"--He said to the man who was paralyzed, "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." (25) Immediately he rose up before them, took up what he had been lying on, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. (26) And they were all amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, "We have seen strange things today!"

The Background of the Miracle

The news of Jesus' teaching and his miracles has spread all over Galilee, forcing him to seek remote places to have any time alone. According to Mark and Matthew, he

has finally returned to Capernaum, where he has begun his ministry. Here, he took up residence in a house and soon attracted crowds of people who were eager to hear him speak. Among these who came to hear speak, according to Luke, were *"Pharisees and teachers of the Law, who had come from every village in Galilee, from Judea and from Jerusalem."* Here was a delegation made up of Pharisees and teachers of the law sent to examine him. Ironically the Pharisees had come to judge Jesus by their standards, unaware that it would be their standards might be judged by Jesus' teachings.

As Jesus began to preach and teach to the assembled crowd, four men arrived at the house carrying a paralyzed companion. They found that there were so many people inside and outside the house that they could not break through to see Jesus. Now they must come up with some way to get their friend to Jesus. Seeing their way barred by the crowds, they took the only option open to them, namely the roof. So undaunted, they climbed up onto the roof and began to strip it away.

Here the accounts of Mark and Luke diverge slightly. In Mark's account, the suggestion is that the roof was typical of those in Palestine at the time. Palestinian houses had flat roofs. The roofs were used for many purposes; for the storing things, drying flax (story of the spies in Joshua), and as places for quiet and prayer (the little one room houses had no where else that one could be alone). For that reason there was always an outside stairway up to the roof.

Luke, however, seems to describe a Greek or Roman house, with roof constructed of tiles. (5:19) *"they went up on the housetop and let him down with his bed through the tiling into the midst before Jesus."*

But in any case, regardless of the construction of the roof, the determination involved in creating an opening large enough to pass their friend through the roof was the same.

The Elements of The Miracle

As to the disease that this man brought to Jesus suffered, Luke uses a medical term to describe this man when he says, he was *"paralyzed"* or as it is rendered in the KJV *"palsied."* It was a technical Greek word used of pronounced paralysis from disease of some part of the nervous system [Lockyer p. 174]

"When He saw their faith." (Luke 5:20)

"When He saw their faith, He said to him, "Man, your sins are forgiven you."

When Jesus saw their faith he responded at once. The wonderful thing here is – this man was saved by the faith of his friends. The persistence of the paralytic's friends demonstrated the reality of their friend. Biblical faith is more than wishful thinking.

"Your Sins Are Forgiven." (Luke 5:20)

"When He saw their faith, He said to him, "Man, your sins are forgiven you."

There are several possibilities of what Jesus mean when he said "your sins are forgiven."

First, it was a belief of the Jews in those days that **all** sickness and misfortune were due to sin. We see this in Job (4:7). Job's friends advised him, *"Remember now, who ever perished being innocent?"*

Or where were the upright ever cut off." This that sin is always the cause of sickness and misfortune is not true of course. Jesus touched on this problem when he healed the man born blind in John (9:2-3). When he was asked who had sinned the blind man or his parents, Jesus' answer was, *"neither but that the works of God should be*

revealed in him." But on this occasion in saying, "*your sins are forgiven,*" Jesus may have been acknowledging that on this occasion this man's physical symptoms were directly connected to some sinful acts that have not been stated by the Gospel writers. By implication **sin** was responsible for the man's paralyzed condition.

It is possible that the paralyzed man had committed some sin and was haunted by the memory of it. Even if sin had not caused the illness his past sins may have caused him to be afraid that he would not be healed.

We know by means of modern medicine that illness often has a psychosomatic element. It is possible that this man's paralysis had been brought on some previous sinful conduct. If this man's mind was sick, his body would be sick as well. We now know that many physical illnesses are brought on by an unsound mental state. So Jesus using the most to date in 21st century medicine treated him by freeing him from his feeling of **guilt**. When this man understood that his sins were forgiven, he was healed.

Finally, Jesus was claiming that he had divine power forgive sins and it was this claim that so shocked the Pharisees and Scribes who were present. The religious leaders were baffled because by their own admission the man could not be healed until he was forgiven. Now he had been cured and therefore they had to admit that he must have been **forgiven**. The sign of his sin now became the sign of his cure.

Who is this who speaks blasphemies? (Luke 5:21)

"Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

The question behind the religious leaders charge that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy was, "*Does he (Jesus) have the **right (exousia)** to forgive sins?*" In their opinion only God had the ability and authority to forgive sins. This was a part of the very issue that they had been sent to answer. What they want to know was, "*Is he the Messiah, and if so how should the religious establishment react to him?*" This miracle presents Jesus' ability to immediately cancel the bondage of sin. So able to dispute his miracles they fastened to his words.

Yet even today some people regard it as presumptuous for human beings to claim they know their sins are forgiven, and that they are assured of heaven.

"Which Is Easier?" (Mt 9:5, Mk. 2:9, Lk. 5:23)

"Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise up and walk!'"

Answering a question that they had voiced only in their own minds, this is in fact a second miracle. Jesus said, "*Which is easy to say* (not easier to do)." The obvious answer is that it is easier to say that sins are forgiven. It is easier because there is no way to tell whether such words have any meaning. Forgiveness is a transaction that takes place between an individual and God.

The Effect of the Miracle

"And They were all amazed." (5:26)

"And they were all amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, 'We have seen strange things today.'"

The word translated amazed is (**ekstasis**) from which we get our word *ecstasy*. In classical Greek the word implied an intense but **passing** excitement. When he said they were "*all amazed*" the "all" is best to be taken as referring primarily to the delegation of **Pharisees** and **Scribes**.

"They glorified God" (Luke 5:26)

"And they were all amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, "We have seen strange things today."

Some take this statement as a positive assessment of the delegation's reaction to the miracle healing. It is just as likely that this phrase reflects the delegation's unwillingness to give Jesus any **credit** at all for this miracle. The truth is that there is no proof that any miracle ever changed a **closed** heart. And it soon becomes apparent that this miracle did not change the conviction of these religious leaders that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy.

"They were filled with fear" (Luke 5:26)

"And they were all amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, "We have seen strange things today."

The Greek word translated here as fear is the most common term for fear – (**phobos**). The religious delegation was afraid to take a stand against Jesus. They were convinced that because the teachings of Jesus did not agree with their own understanding of God's plan Jesus must be wrong. And although they were convinced that he was wrong they were too afraid of the reaction of the people. They would risk taking a stand and denouncing Jesus because the miracle had filled them with uncertainty and fear.

The result of their fear was that the people heard them say, "This is strange, really strange." But in reality what was strange was not that Jesus could forgive or heal but that in spite of what they had experienced they still clung to their wrong thinking.

Application

Some people have been so crippled, physically or psychologically, that their ability to relate to God or even to other people has damaged or even paralyzed. Their recovery may well need help from their friends to persist in overcoming obstacles – as the paralytics companions did – and to offer care, acceptance and prayer.