



THE GOSPEL OF JESUS WHAT THE SON OF GOD DID

The Shocking Words of Jesus *Mark 2.1-12*

It is tempting to believe we know what is truly important for us and those we love. Thinking ourselves smart enough and mature enough to discern between needs and wants, we deceive ourselves into believing our perspective of life is relatively the same as God's. But then His Word reminds us that we are quickly tempted to confuse lesser things as the most important things.

Preachers do this all the time. Looking for a creative and powerful way to teach a text, we look for angles and perspectives that will catch peoples' attention and motivate them. That is a really popular way to read and interpret many of the events and encounters in the gospels. In the story of Jesus calming the storm, the preacher asks, "Into what storms in your life do you want Jesus to speak peace?"

Consider our text for today. Four friends seem to care for the needs of their paralyzed friend so much that they push relentlessly to present him to Jesus. The miracles Jesus performed in Capernaum have caused everyone with a need to crowd around Him. In the house where Jesus was staying, Mark records there were crowds all the way to the door. There was no way these loyal companions could get their friend, who was confined to a mat, in front of the one who could heal him. So they tore off the roof above and lowered him down. What a powerful scene!

Then the preacher concludes, "Do you have friends like these four?" or "Are you willing to do everything you can to bring your friends to the feet of Jesus?"

Insightful? Maybe. Challenging? Yes. But this is not the point of the story. Matthew (9:1-8), Mark (2:1-12), and Luke (5:17-24) are not focusing their attention on these four men. Their names, nor the name of the man on the mat, are never mentioned. Matthew completely leaves out the ripping apart of the roof and lowering him down. As important as friends are, this is not the purpose of this story in any of the gospel accounts.

A more faithful-to-the-text preacher might wrap up with this: "Notice the compassion and power of Jesus. The man was carried to Jesus on a mat, but walked away carrying his mat under his arm. This is a testimony of the love and power of Jesus over our diseases and disabilities!" That sounds like a closer-to-the-point application of the story. All the gospels record the miracle of Jesus and describe the response of the crowd as *awestruck* (Matthew) or *astounded* (Mark and Luke). Seeing a paralyzed person get up and walk is enough to amaze anyone skeptical of God's power and love.

This conclusion isn't as imaginative, but it definitely speaks directly to what we believe to be this man's most important need. If we are honest, Jesus's power to heal addresses the bulk of our prayers and deepest concerns. Jesus loves enough and is powerful enough to make the lame to walk, the blind to see, and even the dead to live again. But the miracle is not the point of the story either.

The story unfolds around the prerogative of Jesus to forgive sins because He is God. The ability to make this paralyzed man walk serves as proof that Jesus has the ability to forgive sins! The man's greatest need was not his physical limitation, but his spiritual paralysis. He was unable to rescue himself from his physical and spiritual condition. He could only trust in the power of Jesus for healing.

Jesus's compassion is not limited to his healing, but extends to include it. Jesus came to save sinners from a fate worse than sickness, paralysis, and even death. Jesus came to rescue sinners from their sin. It was this statement that left the people awestruck and astounded. Jesus had healed many people before (Mark 1:25; 1:31; 1:34; 1:39; 1:41). The game-changing difference here was not the miracle, but the lesson behind the miracle. "But so that you may know that the Son of Man had authority on earth to forgive sins – he told the paralytic – I tell you: get up, take your mat and go home" (Mark 2:10-11).

So, remember that friends are important. It is important to be a good friend and bring hurting people to Jesus. Also remember that Jesus loves enough and is powerful enough to bring physical healing to our broken bodies. But most important of all is that Jesus has come with the power and authority to meet the greatest need you have – finding peace with God through forgiveness. Jesus is the one who makes that possible and offers it to anyone who believes that He is the God-in-flesh who was sent to rescue a sin-diseased world to a loving, righteous and forgiving God.

Discussion

1. Compare Matthew's account of this story (Matt. 9:1-8) with Mark's? How does this help us understand and appreciate something we might normally miss?
2. How often do you pray for and/or talk about your friends' spiritual conditions? What would change if we prayed for people's spiritual needs as much as we prayed for their physical needs?
3. What is more important to you, the forgiveness of sins or physical health and wholeness? How can we change our perspective to see the importance for us to seek God's forgiveness and peace?
4. How has this particular lesson encouraged, strengthened, or challenged you?

Our Corporate Prayer

Heavenly Father, sustainer of life and source of our hope: we trust in your power and love to comfort and relieve those who suffer physically, especially those who are in the greatest of physical limitations and need. Give grace to all who minister to their needs so that they might be strengthened in their weakness and have confidence in your loving care. But more than that, we pray in accordance with your desire that no one should perish but all come to forgiveness through the Savior of the world, your Son, Jesus. May your Holy Spirit work through our words, deeds, and prayers so that the lost may be found and the spiritually dead made alive. We ask this so that all the redeemed may praise you for your glorious grace around your throne. In the name of Jesus, Amen.