



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text

Matthew 9:1-8

Topic

Seeing the faith of a paralytic and his friends, Jesus forgives his sins, heals him, and tells him to take up his bed and go home

Title

"Bed, Faith & Beyond"

Introduction

I ran across a list of the five most commonly misdiagnosed medical conditions. They are:

1. Lupus
2. Parkinson's Disease
3. Fibromyalgia
4. Lyme's Disease
5. Multiple Sclerosis

While it is super frustrating to be misdiagnosed, I can understand that the conditions on that list are indeed hard to determine. Some medical problems are just more obvious than others. In our text today a man is brought to Jesus being carried on his bed by his friends. It's pretty obvious to everyone in the crowded room of the house in Capernaum that he is a paralytic.

Jesus looks at Him, and in His best Great Physician voice, says, "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you."

Hmm. Did Jesus miss the diagnosis?

Of course not. Whether or not it was the direct cause of his paralysis, sin was the root cause of this man's real problems.

There is something else we will discover as we read the text.

There was more than one paralytic in the room with Jesus. The scribes who had come to hear Jesus were also severely paralyzed:

1. For one thing, they never moved a muscle to help bring the paralytic to Jesus.
2. For another, their heart-muscle was so hardened that they get upset Jesus forgives the sins of the paralytic.

Outwardly and physically they seemed fine and in good health. But inwardly and spiritually they suffered from the same spiritual malady as the paralytic.

Everyone in the room (with the exception of Jesus) suffered from it. They were all born with inherited sin – born with what we call a sin nature. Then, throughout their lives, they had all committed individual acts of sin.

The physical condition of the paralytic is a picture of the true spiritual condition of the human race – we are all paralyzed by sin. There is only one cure: You need to have your sins forgiven. God alone has the power to forgive you your sins. Jesus was and is God. He was present then, and is present now, with the power to forgive you and thereby heal your spiritual paralysis.

Most of us are former paralytics who have been forgiven at the Cross. We identify most strongly with the paralytic. But that doesn't mean we can't learn something from the reaction of the scribes. We can learn never to regress in our walk with The Lord and be found thinking or acting like them.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Being A Forgiven Former Paralytic, You Should Be Cheerful and Rejoice, and #2 Being A Forgiven Former Paralytic, You Should Be Careful Not To Regress.

#1 Being A Forgiven Former Paralytic, You Should Be Cheerful And Rejoice

(v1-2)

We last saw Jesus casting out a legion of demons from two men in a cemetery. The demons entered a herd of swine who then stampeded over a cliff to their death in the Sea of Galilee.

The pigs killed themselves. It was a case of pig (wait for it) soooo-cide...

The townspeople of that region, as one, asked Jesus to depart. He humbled Himself and left them.

Who could calculate the wonders He would have done in their midst? The souls that would have been saved? It's tragic to send Jesus away when He is knocking at your door.

Mat 9:1 So He got into a boat, crossed over, and came to His own city.

His "own city" was Capernaum, where He had been based for about eighteen months. Specifically, Jesus bunked in a home Peter had something to do with - either his home or someone in his family.

You might note, in passing, they had an uneventful trip back. No satanic storm. When you are with The Lord you can't expect certain experiences to always be repeated.

Mat 9:2 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."

This would be an extreme case. He could do nothing for himself. In all likelihood the paralytic could not even speak. He lay around all day on his bed, drooling and having care-givers help him with his bodily functions.

The physical condition of the paralytic is a picture of the true spiritual condition of the human race – we are all paralyzed by sin. He will become a dramatic visual aid for Jesus to show His authority to forgive sin.

In typical Matthew minimalist fashion, he leaves out one of the funniest details.

Finding the house packed and unable to get in, the four friends carrying the paralytic go up on to the flat roof, make a hole in it, and lower the paralytic down on ropes right in front of Jesus. It's an usher's worst nightmare.

It helps us understand His statement, "when Jesus saw their faith." These guys were certain that The Lord could and would deal with their friend - they just had to get him in front of Him. Their extreme efforts spoke of their faith.

Here was a man in the greatest physical need possible. A paralytic, unable to move, undoubtedly unable to speak; all of his bodily processes had to be cared for by others. Yet Jesus spoke to his deeper need: The spiritual healing that can only come by having your sins forgiven.

What sins can a paralyzed man commit, anyway? It speaks of your sin nature that pervades every part of your life. Whether or not this man was born a physical paralytic, he was definitely born a spiritual paralytic.

It is one of many illustrations the Bible suggests by which we may understand our sin and need for a Savior. Another is to say we are all born dead in trespasses and sins; another is to say we owe a debt we cannot pay.

The point of all of them is to show we are helpless unless God by His grace intervenes.

How could Jesus forgive his sins? In order to forgive sins, God sent his one and only Son to this world. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

In order to give us the grace of forgiveness, the Son of God became the Lamb of God. In John 1:29, John the Baptist said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

The Son of God shed His blood as our Substitute. In Revelation 5:12 John saw angels singing of Jesus, "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"

Jesus has the authority to forgive men's sins.

The crowd surrounding him, or his friends up on the roof, or the paralytic himself, may have been wanting to hear Jesus say, "Man, your paralysis is gone!" But when the Lord said to him, "Your sins are forgiven," spiritual life would have so filled his heart as to render his paralysis meaningless.

Do you agree with that? I was watching a video several years ago, a Christian video about AIDS. It was when AIDS was pretty much first becoming known; it was a scary time. Those being interviewed were dying of AIDS, but had become Christians. I'll never forget the words of one of those terminal individuals: He said he would rather have AIDS and know Jesus than not have AIDS but not know Jesus. The forgiveness of his sins had rendered his physical condition meaningless because he was headed for Heaven.

Jesus even said, "Be of good cheer." He said it before the guy was healed, when he had only been forgiven his sins.

There is no guarantee Jesus will heal you physically. Spiritually you can nevertheless "be of good cheer" knowing that He will heal your physical body ultimately either by resurrection or at the rapture.

This man was carried along to Jesus when he could do nothing for himself. Faith carries us along into the presence of Jesus when we can do nothing for ourselves, when we are spiritual paralytics.

God uses means for faith to carry us to Jesus. His Word, anointed by His Spirit, carries us to Jesus. "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

God's Spirit anointed Word comes to you in many ways. In this case it was by friends who recognized the paralytics helpless condition.

If you are saved, a former paralytic, you are now the friend of some spiritual paralytic. Get them to Jesus.

#2 Being A Forgiven Former Paralytic, You Should Be Careful Not To Regress

(v3-8)

Let's describe scribes. The root meaning of the name "scribe" is "one who writes" (compare to "scribble" or "inscribe"). The original occupation of a scribe was to make copies of official documents in the age before printing. They would also write letters, decrees and other documents.

The New Testament scribes traced their origin back to Ezra who is called "a ready scribe in the law of Moses" (Ezra 7:6).

They had a good, solid start under Ezra; but their movement eventually became legalistic. They developed an elaborate system of interpreting God's law, a strict set of practices, so that you knew what to do at all times in order to please God. These rules and regulations, rites and rituals, became a source of self-righteousness. They did nothing to affect the heart.

Their interpretations and teachings had the effect of putting religious burdens on the common people but not helping to bear them. Nevertheless, the people saw them as spiritual and respected them.

In the context of our story, they were seen as the most spiritually healthy Jews.

Mat 9:3 And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, "This Man blasphemes!"

Here is a great, simple definition of blasphemy: Claiming either to be God or to do what only God can do.

Sooner or later you are going to hear someone say that Jesus never claimed to be God. Well, the scribes certainly thought He was claiming to be God. You can only accuse someone of blasphemy if they are claiming to be God and doing what only God can do.

Mat 9:4 But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts?"

Yes, Jesus was God, but He had set aside the prerogatives of deity in order to live as a man filled with the Holy Spirit. So this wasn't Jesus acting omnisciently. It was probably the Holy Spirit giving Him a supernatural word of knowledge.

It's a good case study in the exercise of the word of knowledge - which is a gift still bestowed by the Holy Spirit today.

This was a pretty heavy accusation - saying that the guys who were recognized as the most spiritual in the room were all thinking "evil" in their hearts.

Certainly to accuse Jesus of blasphemy was evil. But, really, all their thoughts were evil. They sat there, smug, thinking to judge The Lord in order to find fault. All the while they did nothing for a poor paralytic. They didn't even get out of his way so Jesus could minister to him when his friends brought him.

These guys sat there listening to the Word of God but with a critical, what's-in-it-for-me spirit. They didn't come to be ministered to or to minister to others. Let's be careful to never act that way.

Mat 9:5 For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise and walk'?

No one could ask better questions than Jesus. No one.

He put them in a no-win situation. Obviously only God could say, "Your sins are forgiven you." But if The Lord could say, "Arise and walk," wouldn't the miracle validate His authority to forgive sins?

These guys never move, never speak, in Matthew's account. They come across even more paralyzed than the paralytic.

Mat 9:6 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."

Mat 9:7 And he arose and departed to his house.

Quick observation. He says, "power on earth to forgive sins." On earth, i.e., during your lifetime, is when sins can be forgiven. Not after. There is no second chance after death to hear the Gospel preached and be saved. There is no place of further punishment by which you can earn your way into Heaven. This life - this is it.

I've been mentioning this a little more frequently in our studies lately because there is a movement within Christianity towards universalism of some sort. It's the teaching that eventually everyone will somehow be saved.

I wish it were true. It is not.

Jesus called Himself "the Son of Man." It was a phrase familiar to the Jews, especially the scribes who spent time researching their Scriptures. The prophet Daniel used the phrase to describe the promised Messiah.

More than just claiming to be both God and their Messiah, Jesus was challenging these students of Scripture. If the Messiah was One Who had power to heal... And if Jesus was performing these healings that only their Messiah could do... Well, you do the math.

The scribes had a saying: "A sick man does not recover from his sickness until all his sins are forgiven him." It's not true, by the way; but since it was what they believed, God was willing to meet them on their level.

There is a sub-theme in these verses regarding faith and works. We've seen that the paralytic's friends had a faith that showed itself in their works.

Now the formerly paralyzed man shows his faith by his works: He picks-up his mat, as ordered, and goes home, as ordered.

Mat 9:8 Now when the multitudes saw it, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such power to men.

God's glory is the physical, visible demonstration of His nature and character. The people saw God as ready to forgive, willing to heal, wanting to save. It was not the representation of God they got from the scribes.

The scribes in that house were not saved. They were spiritual paralytics. Most of us are saved. We need to be careful comparing ourselves to them.

It is possible for us to use them as an example. They had a great start under Ezra, but they regressed into legalism and self-righteousness. Sadly so can Christians if we are not careful.

Let me just throw out some random thoughts.

First, we see that these guys were not evangelical. By that I mean they weren't bringing anyone to see Jesus. It's important for each of us, for our own spiritual vitality, to remember that we are commissioned to share Christ with paralytics and the spiritually dead who owe a debt they cannot pay. We are not all evangelists but we can, at some level, do the work of an evangelist.

Second, we already noted that they came to hear Jesus with a critical spirit. There's a difference between discernment and criticism.

We want to be discerning - like the Bereans who are described in the Book of Acts checking-out the apostle Paul's teachings by comparing it to the Word of God.

While we certainly do not want to be drawn aside by error, we can become so narrow in our thinking that almost no one can meet our standards of orthodoxy. Let's be discerning and not critical.

Third, the scribes should have given-up their seats to make way for the paralytic. Maybe I'm reading into this, but I think sometimes we don't see more of the Lord's power because we are not sensitive to our surroundings. Be aware of what is happening around you – especially when believers have gathered around the Word.

This also means we should have a big view of the world in which we live. There are needs to be met all around us and all over the world. If we are prospering, it is so we can help others.

I love the fact we sponsor missionaries and support kids through Gospel for Asia... That we helped build a church in India and built more than a dozen Jesus wells and that we have money again to send to GFA this year.

I love the fact our body is ministering to the homeless community in Hanford.

Let's do more with what God has blessed us with.

Here's a suggestion: If you are stirred-up to start something, or to do something, think about outreach before you think about anything else. Christians certainly need to learn how to walk, but nonbelievers are still paralyzed and need to be reached.

You might recall the story Jesus told about the Pharisee and the tax collector who both were praying. The Pharisee went on-and-on about how spiritual he was, prefacing it by saying, "I thank God I am not like... this tax collector."

We ought to, with real humility, pray that we never regress to become like that Pharisee or like the scribes in this story.