

## Miracles of Jesus - 3

# Jesus Heals the Paralyse<sup>d</sup> Man

All the people in Capernaum seemed to be heading in one direction. Like bees returning to a hive, their steps converged on the door of the house where Jesus was staying. Mark tells us that *“it was heard that he was in the house”* (Mark 2:1).

### Mixed Motives!

Some came to hear him speak. His radical teaching sounded so different from the pompous, legalistic language of the scribes. Warm, practical and full of hope, he could still make you feel uncomfortable, for he had a way of spotlighting the human weaknesses that pride would prefer to forget.

But he spoke of a loving heavenly Father Who cared equally for the poor and the rich, and Who called all people to a Kingdom where faith was the only fee for admission. He used vivid, compelling pictures that stamped themselves onto the memory and left you wanting more. Even though our modern English gospels are translated from Greek and we live in an alien world of computers and motorways, there is no doubting the power of his words. They still turn people’s lives upside down after all these years.

Some of the people who came to the house had no love for Jesus at all. As Luke records, *“there were Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting by, who had come out of every town of Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem”* (Luke 5:17). The Pharisees considered themselves



the official interpreters of the Law of Moses, the preservers of synagogue tradition. They spent years studying the rulings and sayings of their predecessors, and enveloped the religious life of the Israelites in a suffocating cocoon of rules that made obedience impossible.

They viewed Jesus, the young carpenter, at first with scorn, then with alarm and resentment. His lack of qualifications upset them. His sharp disdain for their traditions made them angry. They envied how the crowds flocked to hear him, and longed for an opportunity to discredit him. The fact that they had come up-country from Judea and Jerusalem shows the urgency with which they viewed his challenge. Their grim faces were very evident amongst the happy, earnest audience of country folk that hung on Jesus’ words.

There was a third group of people waiting outside the house at Capernaum while Jesus taught. These were

those who had come because they were ill, and they hoped that he might make them better. Some were lame; some were blind; some had their families with them to bring them to Jesus. They knew it was no good interrupting while he was talking, but they desperately wanted to be near the door of the house when he finally emerged, so that he could lay hands on them and drive their diseases away. Jesus could easily have spent all day healing the sick, but he deliberately chose to devote more time to teaching. In his view, the healings were not the real purpose behind his mission. They were the evidence that his teaching had the authority of God.

## Good Friends in Action

It was this last point that brought about an extraordinary miracle on this particular day, an event so striking that three individual accounts were recorded and have come down through the centuries from the gospel writers. It started when a man 'sick of the palsy' (paralysed) was brought along by four of his friends. They loved him so much that they were determined to try to get Jesus to see him, but as the man was unable to move, their only chance was to carry him. They dropped him onto a cloth bed, and one at each corner, pushed their way through the crowd. But even the street outside the house was jammed with people.

*Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door (Mark 2:2).*

If their friend had been able to walk, they might have made a passage for him to get to the front, but as he lay

horizontal on a bed, they had no hope of getting near. It was a bitter blow.

After a while the curious crowd saw the four men talking together and pointing at the house. They then seized their long bundle, and grunting with effort, dragged and pushed the sick man up the stairs at the side of the house, and onto the roof. Flat roofs are normal in the Middle East. In countries with little rain, leaky roofs are no problem, and the level top with a parapet round the edge provides a cool area to sit and sleep when the sun goes down. The apostle Peter, for example, was taking his afternoon siesta on the roof of Simon the Tanner's house when he had his strange dream recorded in Acts chapter 10.



The course of events was not visible to the circle of listeners inside the house, but soon they became aware of a heavy knocking above the ceiling. Pieces of plaster began to rain down from above, and at length a bright shaft of sunlight stabbed through as the four men on top broke a hole through the roof. All conversation ceased, as with renewed vigour the friends enlarged the opening until their heads could be seen as four dots silhouetted against the cobalt sky.

Satisfied with their work, they disappeared for a moment, and then their long-bedridden bundle, held fast with ropes, began to slither precariously through the hole and descended to the feet of Jesus and the astonished onlookers.

## Healing and Forgiveness

It was an act so bold that it compelled admiration. Never had a queue been jumped so decisively. But the situation provided Jesus with a unique opportunity to teach the Pharisees a lesson, and to drive home a fundamental truth about his mission.

As the paralysed man lay pale and still on the floor before him, and the four anxious faces peered down from above to see what would happen, Jesus was naturally touched by their love for their friend, and their obvious conviction that he would make him better. But first he spoke to reassure the sick man:

*When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you" (Matthew 9:2).*

All three Gospel records record that Jesus acknowledged their faith. The friends relaxed. He had not been offended by their intrusion into his teaching session. He was going to do something.

But the Pharisees stiffened. Not a word passed their tight lips, but he knew at once what they were thinking.

*And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, "Why does this man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:6-7).*

It looked as though Jesus had given them an excuse to have him arrested for blasphemy. But now he began to trap them in their own hypocrisy and convoluted legalism.

*He said to them, "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'?" (v8-9).*

With a little reflection, the answer is obvious. It would be much easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven", because nothing would happen. There would be no way of telling whether or not they had. But if he said, "Arise and walk", it would be obvious at once if he was an impostor. The man would continue to lie on his bed. Deliberately Jesus had chosen the harder option.

*"But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins" — He said to the paralytic, "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house" (v10-11).*

To their amazement, the paralytic jumped up, folded up the sheet and walked out of the door into the sunshine, praising God.



Neatly and efficiently, Jesus' argument had destroyed their accusation. Only God could give the power to heal a man with paralysis, and if he had God's power to read men's thoughts and to heal at a word, he certainly had the authority to pronounce the sinner forgiven.

The Pharisees would assume a sinner needed an impressive animal sacrifice to be forgiven. But they were blind to the fact that the sacrifices of the Law of Moses pointed forward to the forthcoming death of Jesus himself. The forgiveness of all our sins would depend, at last, on his offering of himself.

## Healing for Everyone

There is also another striking connection between disease and sin, which this act of healing demonstrates. Diseases, all of them, came into the world as a result of Adam's sin. They form part of the curse; they are one of many causes from which, eventually, we all must die. Jesus' great mission was to reverse the curse; to undo, by his own obedience, the effects of Adam's disobedience. He is, at last, to destroy even death itself. The apostle Paul writes:

*For he must reign till he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death (1 Corinthians 15:25–26).*

By healing disease on a small scale, Jesus showed his power to conquer sin, the cause of disease, for all of humankind.

In fact, there was powerful symbolism about this particular healing. The palsied man, stiff and unmoving, really would have resembled a man in whom

sin had already done its work and brought about death. He was as near to a corpse as a living man could be. And lowered down by his friends on ropes into that dim, congested room, packed full of people; is not that what we see, each time we go to a funeral?

The difference is that Jesus was there too, in the room with all the others. He was to enter the grave voluntarily, to save us all. And just as the four friends looked down, and saw their companion walk out of the room with praises on his lips, so Jesus will release from the tomb all those who put their faith in him. At the day of resurrection, they will be raised from the dead, no longer oppressed by pain and tears. Jesus himself proclaims:

*I am he who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death (Revelation 1:18).*

It will be the greatest miracle of all time, and by that "Amen" he guarantees it will surely happen.

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