

Lesson 3

A Paralytic Healed

Mark 2.1-12

Introduction

As Mark 1 ends, Jesus has been moving around the region of Galilee *preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons*, 1.39. As He did, Jesus encountered a leper, immediately healing him. The leper promptly disobeyed Jesus' stern instructions to say nothing about his healing, which resulted in Jesus *being unable to enter a town openly. But he was out in deserted places, and they came to him everywhere*, 1.45.

Days or weeks pass, and Jesus returns to Capernaum. The text says *it was reported that he was at home*. Most biblical scholars believe this was Peter and Andrew's home. Again come the crowds. *So many people gathered together that there was no more room*, 2.2a. We can imagine people crowding in, getting as close as they can, and standing outside listening through the windows. It would have been quite a scene.

A Lame Man is Brought to Jesus

Four men arrive on the scene, carrying a paralyzed man on a mat. There is no way to enter the house. Undeterred, the men carry the paralytic up on the roof, where they begin to dig through to reach the individuals inside. The typical Jewish house had a flat roof, which was often used as a place of relaxation. The roof could be easily accessed by an outside stair on the side of the house. The roofs of many homes in Judea were made of brush tied together and clay poured into forms. In his account, Luke mentions they let the man down through the tiles of the roof, Luke 5.19. What the roof was comprised of is not really that important, however. What is important is the faith of all these individuals.

The faith to overcome any obstacle

Nothing would stop these men from getting their friend to Jesus. It would have been no easy task to carry this man up the stairs and then find the necessary tools to dig through the roof. There would have to be some quick planning on their part as well, because they were able to lower the man right down in front of Jesus, Luke 5.19. Think of the controversy this would have stirred ... on several levels. First, imagine the audacity of going to someone's home that you do not own and tearing into their roof. Second, understand the social dishonor they were incurring. Mark 2.6 says some of the Scribes were sitting inside the house. Their very presence impacted the atmosphere of the place as wherever they went, they demanded honor and the best places to sit. Imagine their disgust when these commoners appeared through the roof lowering their friend down to get in front of Jesus. Third, imagine the disruption. Mark tells us Jesus was inside the house teaching and reasoning from the Scriptures. Many teachers would become irritated by the way the audience's attention would have been diverted. The paralytic's friends aren't embarrassed at all. They know there is a risk but it's a chance they are willing to take. The only thing on their mind is their friend and his desperate need.

This is the first time Mark's gospel addresses the concept of faith. One of the key components of *faith* as demonstrated here is the action connected with it. Biblical faith involves much more than just knowing or feeling. Here, the men helping the paralytic act on their knowledge about Jesus, *moving in active trust that Jesus is sufficient for one's deepest and most heartfelt needs.*²⁶

Understanding the paralytic's plight

It is thought the man in our text was a paraplegic. The disease could have been brought on by an injury at birth or an accident that ruptured the spinal cord.²⁷ Whatever the case, his condition made him completely dependent on others. There was no cure. While the man would not have been shunned by society (unlike the leper), it was generally believed that such disabilities were caused by sin. That would have left the man to deal with being stigmatized by many in his community. Society in general believed that the "key to health for a person included right relationships with oneself, with others and with God."²⁸

How the paralytic saw Jesus

Again, think desperation. There is no hope for a cure without outside, supernatural intervention. The paralytic's only hope was Jesus. The matter was urgent. His life was one of misery, completely unable to care for his most basic needs. Every day would have presented great challenges, while also being full of immense boredom, despair, and hopelessness that the situation would ever change. Jesus was the answer. He had the power to make this man whole again. There would be no denying him. The paralytic *had* to get to Jesus.

How Jesus received the paralytic

With all the disruption and chaos, it would be natural to think that Jesus' first reaction would have been one of irritation or anger. Instead, Mark says Jesus was impressed by their faith. You just have to wonder if our Lord had a pleasing look and smile on His face as the man is lowered in front of Him. The first words out of His mouth are not what we would think He would say: *Son, your sins are forgiven, 2.5*. First, he addresses the paralytic as a *son*. While it is a term of endearment or affection, it is more-so a term of a superior who acts with authority and benevolence.²⁹

Why does Jesus first address this man's sins?

At first glance it might appear that Jesus is giving credence to the connection the Jews often made between disease, paralysis, and sin. Before we go down that road, it is important to remember that not all physical issues are the result of sin. Some are, Luke 13.1-5, some aren't, John 9.2-3. Our story here in Mark seems to indicate this is a special situation. There is no record of any other healing by Jesus that

²⁶ Edwards, p. 76.

²⁷ Elwell, Walter A., and Barry J. Beitzel. "Paralysis, Paralytic." *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988, Vol. 2, p. 1615.

²⁸ Van Reken, David E. "Disease." *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988, Vol. 1, p. 634.

²⁹ Edwards, p. 76.

combines a person's physical infirmity with sin. Jesus says *your sins*, seeming to speak to a specific situation, rather than something more general. We can speculate that Jesus probably knew of this man's particular sin and its relation to his paralysis. Thus, Jesus first addresses him at his deepest need.

The other thing to consider here is the man's belief in Jesus as the Son of God and the natural human reaction in the presence of deity. In every case where a moral finds himself or herself in God's presence, the only thing on their mind is their sin.³⁰ It could be that Jesus, knowing what was on the man's mind, reacted to his greatest concern . . . removing his sins and declaring him "not guilty." Jesus could easily see the authentic faith of this man and with His authority, forgave him of his sin.

It is a lovely story because the first thing that Jesus does for every one of us is to say, 'Child, God is not angry with you. Come home, and don't be afraid.'³¹

Jesus' Confrontation with the Scribes

Only God can forgive sin. The Scribes considered this as an insult, and therefore accuse (in their minds) Jesus of blasphemy. *Who can forgive sins but God alone?* Over the next few verses, Mark reveals that Jesus has both the **ability** and **authority** to do so. Verses 8-11 reinforce the fact that Jesus is the Son of God:

- 2.8 – He read their minds. Only God can do that.
- 2.9-10 – Notice how Jesus doesn't argue with what the Scribes believed. Instead, Jesus affirms the truth that only God can forgive sin.
- 2.11 – Jesus demonstrates His divine power by healing the man of his paralysis.

Jesus wasn't the blasphemer they believed Him to be. He was the Son of God as He claimed to be.

For the 21st Century

How strong is our love for others? The friends of this paralyzed man faced daunting challenges and yet were undeterred. They faced an unyielding crowd. They don't care about the judgments and objections of others. But they did care deeply for their friend and their love propelled him to deliverance *from sin and disease*. How far will we go out of our way for others, even when we risk being judged as fools for our efforts?

Will we move with conviction? All five characters in this story were moved by the conviction that Jesus was the only hope they had. Jesus is our only hope, and that is true for everyone, Acts 4.12. When we believe Jesus is the only way, we will go to great lengths to encourage everyone we know to come to Jesus.

How solid is our faith? A wavering faith would have stopped long before the faith of these men. Their faith was *persistent, creative, and sacrificial*. They found a way. They were aggressive. They took the initiative. They were fully invested. Have you ever considered what happened to the roof after the story? Someone had to repair it, requiring time, labor, and expense. *Are we willing to pay the price?*

³⁰ Think of Isaiah's reaction to being in the presence of God, Isaiah 6.5. Peter's reaction was similar as well, Luke 5.8.

³¹ Barclay, p. 55.

For Thought and Reflection

1. Where is Jesus when this story takes place? Who are some notable attendees who are *sitting* inside?
2. How does Mark describe the crowds as he sets up the story?
3. When the men carrying the paralytic come to the house, observe the crowd, what do they decide to do?
4. Read all three accounts in the synoptics (Matthew 9.1-2; Mark 2.3-4; Luke 5.17-20) and describe Jesus' reaction as they lower the man through the roof right before Him.
5. Why do you think Jesus first addressed the man's sin problem?
6. What is the reaction of the Scribes (Mark 2.7)
7. How does Jesus respond to what the Scribes were thinking?
8. What is key to understanding the type of faith Mark first describes in his gospel? Is it just a mental acknowledgement or is there something more? Explain.

9. What do we learn about persistence from today's lesson?

10. What do we learn about Jesus' first reaction to sin when a person approaches in humility?

11. What do we learn about sacrifice in this lesson?