

The Healing of the Paralyzed Man

Luke 5:17-26

Luke 5:17-26: Now it happened on a certain day, as He was teaching, that there were Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting by, who had come out of every town of Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was present to heal them. 18 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!"

Background Notes

This miracle of the healing of the paralyzed man in Capernaum is also recorded in Matthew 9 and Mark 2. Many of us remember this miracle from our Sunday School days because of the unusual and creative way this man was brought to Christ. The home where Jesus was teaching was crowded with people – there was standing room only! The paralyzed man's friends couldn't get in through the door, so they went up on the roof and cut an opening large enough to lower their friend on the stretcher - right in front of Jesus!

Here is where some background knowledge of 1st century houses is helpful in understanding and applying the teaching of this miracle. When the men carried the stretcher up onto the roof and started cutting a hole that was large enough to lower the man down through the roof without spilling him, don't get the idea that they were up there with saws and axes - or that they were slipping and sliding all over the place because of the sloping roof! 1st century houses in Israel had a flat roof and an outside staircase up to the roof. And the roof was not composed of shingles, plywood, and beams that had to be sawed up and destroyed. The roof of this first century home consisted of large roof tiles (v19) that were laid across interior walls or ceiling beams, with an outer layer of clay and straw mixture on top. All of this was easily removed and replaced – so no permanent damage was done to the roof!

It's important to know this background - not just to understand what was going on, but also to prevent us from making wrong applications of Scripture. For example, suppose I told you that this story means it's OK to destroy property in order to bring more people to Christ. If your church needs more parking spaces so more people can hear the gospel, this miracle indicates we can just knock down the fence of the neighbor next to the church and expand the parking area into his backyard. After all, the Lord commended these men for destroying the roof in order to get their friend to Christ - so why not destroy the neighbor's fence? What's the answer? The answer is that they didn't destroy the roof - or wreck anyone's property! Knowing the background of the miracle prevents us from making wild and incorrect applications.

Doctrinal Points

1. The Lord honors the faith of concerned believers.

In verse 17, we learn that some Scribes and Pharisees were in the crowd. These men were the teachers of the Law. When the Lord told the paralyzed man that his sins were forgiven (v20), the Scribes and Pharisees began murmuring: *"Who can forgive sin but God alone?"* The Lord knew what they were thinking and said (v23), *"Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise up and walk'?"*

What's the answer to that question? If you're God, either one is easy to say - and back it up with divine power. If you're man, then the answer is "neither"! I would have loved to have seen how dumbfounded the Scribes and Pharisees were when the Lord said (v24), *"But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins...I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house"* - and the man got up and walked away with his bed on his shoulder, glorifying God! I wonder if the healed man gave a thumbs-up gesture as he walked past those skeptical religious leaders?

Everyone there was amazed and astonished at what they witnessed! They were filled with fear - reverential fear - and said, *"We have seen strange things today!"* You'd better believe it, they had seen strange things! They had never seen anything like *this* before!

The key verse for our doctrinal point is verse 20: *"When Jesus saw their faith, He said to him, 'Man, your sins are forgiven you.'" In other words, the Lord not only saw the faith of the paralyzed man, but the faith of the four men who carried the paralyzed man to Jesus. What a great lesson for us - the Lord honors the faith of concerned believers!*

However, it's important to realize that the faith of those four friends did not save the man. The Lord could only tell the paralyzed man that his sins were forgiven because the man *himself* exercised *his* faith in Jesus. But the Lord honored the faith of his four friends who had brought him - by faith - and in that way they had brought him to salvation.

The Lord still honors the faith of concerned believers. Are you praying or a friend or relative who is not a believer - someone who is paralyzed by sin and need to meet the Lord? Continue to do whatever you can do to bring that person to

Christ. Think of creative ways to share the good news with them! And don't give up praying. God honors the faith of concerned believers.

2. The Lord empowers the lives of committed believers.

In verse 24, the Lord said to the paralyzed man, *"I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house."* Notice that the Lord did not pick up the bed for the man. He didn't ask others to pick it up for him. The man himself was to pick up the bed and carry it. (Remember, this "bed" was not a monster four-poster bed frame with box spring and mattress - it was just a pad that could easily be rolled up and carried.)

Carrying our own beds is part of the spiritual picture and the teaching that is in this miracle. When the Lord forgives us and heals us from the paralyzing disease of sin, He doesn't immediately take us home to Heaven - and He doesn't necessarily remove all of our problems in life. But He gives us the strength to "pick up our beds and walk"! He empowers us to deal with our problems in the right way - and move on with life. These problems may be physical problems, people problems, job problems, financial problems, or any other kind of problems. The Lord empowers the lives of committed believers.

Practical Application

1. Just be willing to handle one rope!

How did the four men let their paralyzed friend down through the roof on his bed? Most likely they tied ropes to the corners of the sleeping mat. Suppose one of the four had mishandled his rope - or worse yet, dropped his rope, spilling their poor paralyzed friend down through the hole in the roof? This would have been a very serious turn of events.

I'm afraid this is what happens all too frequently today. Christians start to get involved, saying they say they want to help their "paralyzed" friends - but they don't stay involved. They drop the one rope that they're carrying, and they may even think that's no big thing - but it can have very serious consequences.

When bringing others to the Lord, we don't have to carry the whole load - but we do have to carry our share. And we must take our "rope responsibility" seriously. Be willing to handle just one rope!

2. Let's learn to work with one another.

The four friends had to work as a team. Each one had to carry his share of the load, and they had to work together as well. Carrying their paralyzed friend through the crowded streets took teamwork. They all had to move at the same pace. And keeping the bed level when they carried him up to the rooftop was no small task. They had to work together as a

team – and *each team member was important* for getting the job done! And the very important job here was the ministry of getting their friend to Christ.

The lesson for us is obvious. We need to work with one another as team members in ministry. We have the great truth of the Body of Christ given to us in 1 Corinthians 12. Just as all the various parts of the human body have different functions, but must work together for good health, so believers all have different functions in the Body of Christ - and all the various believers, functioning well together, are important for the good health of the Body of Christ! *“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body.”*

So we all have an important function in the Body of Christ, and we all have to respect the various functions and work well together! This is why 1 Corinthians 13, the great chapter on **love**, directly follows 1 Corinthians 12 about the different members of the Body. We have different functions, but we must function together. That takes teamwork – and a lot of love! The four friends couldn't argue about which way to go and start pulling the bed in different directions. They had to function as a team or their paralyzed friend would never have met the Lord.

Because of their love for the Lord Jesus and their love for their paralyzed friend, the four men were able to function as a team and be successful in the ministry of getting their paralyzed friend to Christ. This is a great lesson for all of us. Let's learn to work well with one another!