

Theme: - The healing of the Paralytic

The last ten verses of chapter 1 tells us that Jesus had just finished a tour of Galilee teaching and healing many people, and the first verse of chapter 2 tells us that he had now arrived at Capernaum, and that he was at home. So, home for Jesus was probably the home of Peter and Andrew since they lived in Capernaum, and Jesus wouldn't want the problem of looking after his own house, and we are also told that he went to Peter's house after attending the synagogue in Capernaum, see chapter 1 verse 29. It is quite possible that it was in Peter's house that Jesus was teaching, and which brought crowds of people gathering around the house listening to him.

Before we move on we need to know that people in Jesus' day didn't have houses surrounded by fenced in gardens, and there wouldn't be glass in the windows, and in many cases no locks on doors and people could walk right up to your house, life in Palestine was very public. So, when Jesus started to teach in Peter's house other people would be walking by and would hear and start to gather round as was the case in our story, because being able to listen to a teacher for most people was rare and a great privilege.

Now while he was teaching the crowd, who had gathered at the windows, doors, and indeed those who had crowded into the house to hear him, other people had brought a paralysed man to the house to be healed because they had heard what he had been doing in Galilee.

Now again a bit more about Palestinian houses, normally they would have a flat roof which was a good place to relax in the sunshine, and indeed to sleep, on hot nights, and to get onto the roof there was usually an outside stairway. The flat roof would have rafters, clearly far enough apart to pass a man through and the rafters would be covered with strips of wood with a baked clay covering, strong enough to walk on, but soft enough to dig a hole in to lower a person through.

So, when those bringing the paralysed man to Jesus, saw that they couldn't get near the door, carried the man up onto the roof, and dug a hole in it big enough to lower the man through. Although quite hazardous for the poor paralytic, who had to hold on tight, would also be hazardous for the people below, because the debris would end up falling on them.

We are then told in verse 5, "When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'" There are many hints in the Bible that tell us that in those days people connected sin with illness, and death. The book of Job is a prime example of where sin, illness and death are connected, It argues that if a man is suffering then he must have sinned. Therefore, if that were true then to be forgiven your sins would cure you of your disease, but Jesus didn't want to confirm that belief, so the paralytic was not cured of his paralysis.

Now just before he said to the paralytic, 'your sins are forgiven,' we read, "Jesus saw **their** faith." So, an equal or greater faith, may have been with those who brought him to Jesus

and who destroyed Peter's roof, because their act of faith wasn't for their benefit, but for the welfare of their friend.

We should also note that there is no mention by Peter of the destroyed roof, and that surely would have been because Peter was feeling overwhelmed by joy at seeing the fruits of their labours in the faith of those who had destroyed his roof, which overshadowed any consideration for the house which could easily be repaired. The faith of the paralytic and of those who brought him was not demonstrated in an emotional feeling but in the determined and visible action of getting him to Jesus. Jesus can read people's hearts, but he doesn't need to here, the faith of those people is there for all to see.

Returning now to when Jesus first saw the paralytic, Jesus said, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Now I'm sure the paralytic was not expecting that response, rather he would have expected, 'Son you are healed, get up and walk.' He was expecting to be cured not for his sins to be forgiven.

Now, in saying 'your sins are forgiven,' could have meant that Jesus was telling him that God had forgiven him or that Jesus had himself forgiven him. In either event, whether Jesus forgave or simply announced God's forgiveness, his words raised two issues for those who heard him. Firstly, what authority did Jesus have to forgive the man's sins? This is the issue that leads to the grumbling of the scribes in vv. 6-7. Secondly, what is the relationship between sin and illness? The people of that time would answer that all illness is God's judgment on sin, but few people would believe that today.

Regarding the forgiveness of sins, we now know that through repentance, which I spoke of in my last sermon as a genuine desire to change both in the way we behave and in our relationship to God, we will receive forgiveness by God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Regarding the relationship between sin and illness, the answer is complex, some illnesses, both physical and emotional, are the result of specific behaviours.

If we believe in sin at all, we must admit that some illness producing behaviours are sinful. For example, people who smoke, use recreational drugs, or engage in promiscuous sex are obvious examples of people's sin causing their own illnesses. In other cases, one person's sinful behaviour can cause anxiety in others, which can lead to serious illness, a child seeing abusive behaviour in parents, or young people being asked to produce unrealistic results at exam times are but two examples. Other illnesses or even death, caused, for example, by the environment or by accidents, can happen to sinners and saints alike.

Now it would seem that there were some scribes also listening to Jesus and although they didn't have the courage to challenge Jesus out right they did judge him in their hearts. And Jesus knew that in their hearts they were condemning him for blasphemy because it is only God who can forgive sins, because all sin is against God. Then Jesus challenges them by saying, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts?"

Then in verse 9 he addresses the Scribes by asking, "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk?'" Jesus didn't

ask which is easier to do but which is easier to say. And of course, it is easier to say, “Your sins are forgiven” than to say, “Stand up and take your mat, and walk.”

Because those in and around Peter’s house had no way to verify whether the man’s sins had been forgiven, but they could easily verify whether he could stand up and take his mat and walk.

So, when Jesus said, “Stand up and take your mat, and walk,” Jesus was stepping out in faith, which all the onlookers including the Scribes would realise, because if the man succeeds in standing and walking, it will become obvious that Jesus was working through God’s power and was therefore also able, with authority to say, “Your sins are forgiven.”

In verse 10 Jesus introduces himself with a new name, ‘Son of Man’, the title, ‘Son of Man’, comes from the book of Daniel chapter 7 verses 13 and 14, where God gave the Son of Man “dominion, and glory, and everlasting dominion.” However, if you look it up in the NRSV, Danuel actually refers to him as a ‘human being’ which theologians tell us means ‘Son of Man.’ Indeed, the earlier King James Bible does refer to him as the ‘Son of Man’ in Danuel. The advantage of the title Son of Man over the title Messiah is that the Jews were expecting a deliverer, a Messiah, who would be a great army general to liberate Israel, and Jesus as we know was not that sort of liberator.

In verse 10 and 11 Jesus also throws out a challenge, he says, “So that you know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, he said to the paralysed man, ‘I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.’” And in verse 11 Jesus confirms his authority by ordering the paralytic to take up his mat and go to his home. The man immediately responded by doing what Jesus commanded. Jesus’ word, like the creative Word of God in Genesis 1, has power and it is effective.

The challenge in verses 10 and 11 was of course aimed at the scribes who had probably come as spies for the Sanhedrin who were the authority on all religious matters in Israel.

The result is that all who were there and saw it were amazed and glorified God. Had Jesus been a blasphemer, as the scribes had charged him with, the end result of his efforts would not be the glorification of God, but of himself. However later on in Mark’s gospel we find that the scribes had refused to believe what they had seen with their eyes, whereas everyone else were amazed and declared that they had never seen anything like this.

In our gospel reading today, four people brought a paralytic to Jesus for healing. Their persistent faith in the face of difficulty was rewarded. That surely is a strong message for us today that our persistent faith in Christ, no matter what the difficulties, will also be rewarded, and like the paralytic will also bring us great joy.

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