

June 26, 2016

STAND UP AND WALK

Matthew 9:1-8

They were filled with awe! (Matthew 9:8) Never before had they seen a paralyzed person stand and walk! But...just as strange to the Scribes, the teachers of the Law, is the forgiveness of sins that Jesus proclaimed. And perhaps strangest of all is the grace of the man's friends who were carrying him. This story in Mark and Luke is set against a backdrop of Jesus teaching a crowd that had gathered in a house, and the man's friends create a hole in the roof and lower him down...because they couldn't get him to Jesus through the front door.

It is interesting to note how quickly the Scribes began to question in their hearts and accuse Jesus of speaking blasphemies. In Mark and Luke, they wonder out loud, "*Who can forgive sins but God alone?*" (Mark 2:7; Luke 5:21) Well, let me tell you, you hard-hearted know-it-alls! Anyone who is willing to let go of someone's faults or shortcomings can be an instrument of forgiveness! Notice, however, that Jesus does not say, "I forgive you!" He says, "*Son...your sins are forgiven!*" The tense is passive. Jesus looked at the scene and realized that the paralyzed man had some friends. Mark tells us that there were four friends. (2:3) These four didn't hold the paralyzed man's sins against him, whatever they were. He saw *their* faith and proclaimed the man forgiven!

Social custom would have assumed the man's sins were fairly severe if they caused him to be paralyzed! Today, we don't connect the physical ailments with sin so easily, mostly because we are aware of viral causes of so many diseases. And that can be almost random. We do see a cause-and-effect relationship, however, between lifestyle and health in some circumstances, but we seldom connect particular sicknesses to single sins.

Look at what is happening in the story. The man had four friends who had either heard about Jesus, or, who had actually seen and heard Jesus speak, or, who had experienced Jesus' ability to heal either others, or, themselves. And then, these friends cared enough about the man to think together, "Let's take our paralyzed friend to Christ!" We don't know the history of their friendship, but we can admire that they would do this out of charity and hope for the man who had no way of getting to Christ by himself. Even if they never knew him well, they at least knew about him, and their hearts went out to him enough to want to bring him to Christ. And, of course, we can also say that perhaps they did it not because of who he was, but because of who they were, and, because of who Jesus is!

We don't know how far they had to carry the paralyzed man, but that there were four of them indicates it may have been quite a task. They may have gotten him close to the crowds by wagon, but to get him into the house to Jesus, they had to carry him. The way the story reads in Matthew, it's as if, coincidentally, Jesus just bumped into them unexpectedly. Still, though, how gracious that these men would be assisting the paralytic. In Mark and Luke, you have the impression that they had such hope for their friend, and such confidence in Christ, that they brought him to the Healer! They wanted healing for the paralyzed man. And they were willing to make the effort of time and energy to do so...even going out of their way for the sake of their friend.

It seems they were late. The crowd had already gathered and Jesus was already teaching. Perhaps they didn't even know Jesus was there until they saw the crowd beginning to gather. So they went and

got the paralyzed man. When they got him there, the crowds were so thick that they immediately realized they couldn't just take him straight in, so they got creative. They went out of their way to bring the man to Christ. They went up on the roof, removed some of the tiles, and, again, look at their gift of care... they lowered him down in front of Jesus. How cautious they had to be! How calculated. They had to work together very carefully lest they drop him.

Now, here's the message for all of us. Who do you know that could be blessed in some way by being brought to Christ? Are you willing to put forth the time and effort to do so? Do you have the same hope for this person and confidence in Christ that the four friends did? Can you get motivated to do such a thing? If not...then maybe you need someone to finish bringing you to Christ! Can you at least look beyond their sins, faults and shortcomings to give the impression that they are forgiven? Are there others who would work with you? Maybe it might take four people to bring someone to Christ! And finally, the toughest question of all: Are you willing to go out of your way to bring someone to Christ? Are you willing to work carefully and cautiously so as not to lose them?

Can we realize that *our* faith can make at least *some* difference in the salvation of someone else? Remember how Jesus saw *their* faith, and proclaimed the man's forgiveness! He may not have been saved by their faith, but he was forgiven by their faith, and that's a good beginning! Their faith didn't heal the man, he was healed by the power and authority of Christ. They only believed!

Jesus asked a question of the fault-finders in His midst: "*Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and walk!'*?" The answer is not given, it is presumed. It is so easy (compared to the healing command to stand) to proclaim forgiveness, that you can't help but wonder why there isn't more forgiveness proclaimed. And we who believe, who understand the forgiving grace of Christ, and, that it has been offered universally, (John 3:16), should never hesitate to let it be known that there is forgiveness in our hearts. That's the beginning of salvation! And perhaps it is the beginning of healing as well.

What will be the result should we bring someone to Christ? Well, look at what happened for the paralyzed man in the story. He *walked* home! In Luke, he went home *glorifying God*. (v. 25) In each Gospel, there was amazement! And, *the people who saw it glorified God!*

This is our religion. Bring someone to Christ!!!