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The Paralytic (Jan 1959)

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Scripture readings: Matt. 9:2-8. Mark 2:1-12. Luke 5:16-26

The dual miracle performed by Christ upon the man sick of the palsy is a proof of the benevolence and the grace of Christ. As we engage in a consideration of this remarkable event, we may be sure that Christ has not changed; He is Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and forever.

The Helpless

This man in the hopelessness of his case, affords a true picture of the spiritual condition, as God knows it, of all those around us who are unsaved. It illustrates the spiritual state of the whole of humanity as seen by the eye of God. Moreover, the miracle wrought upon this man is a picture of what God in His grace and mercy can do for a man who is spiritually impotent because of sin. His four friends and their efforts on his behalf show how God blesses the instrumentality of those who seek to bring the lost to Jesus. This entire narrative speaks forcefully to us who are saved concerning our responsibility toward our neighbours; in fact, to all fellow-travellers to Eternity.

Dwight L. Moody once said, “If a man tells me that he has been saved and does not desire to work for the honour of God, I doubt his salvation. Laziness belongs to the old creation, and not to the new.”

The Helpers

The very first point of interest here is the united action of the four friends of the sick man. Working as a team, these four bring the one man to Christ. Let us think of this joint action as an illustration of soul-winners from the four corners of the globe bringing the perishing to the Saviour. These four friends might also remind us of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the four Evangelists who, through their Gospels, have been bringing sinners to the Lord for more than 1900 years. In many cases of genuine conversion, the work of bringing the souls to Christ has been shared by parents, friends, Sunday School teachers, Bible Class leaders, and itinerant preachers. This is teamwork and should be thought of as such. We note that the four helpers worked together and shared the burden equally. There was no competition. They each took a corner of the couch. What would have resulted had they not worked together? Had they pulled in opposite directions, or had one dropped his corner of the couch, it would have meant disaster for the poor paralytic. Moreover, humanly speaking, God would have been robbed of the glory due to His name.

Their devotion, self-control, and unity in team-work brought peace of conscience, new bodily powers, as well as the surge of a glorious freshness of life to the broken man. It also brought glory to the Lord for, “When the multitude saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men.”

Similar miracles can happen today in man’s spiritual being. We are reminded of the occasion when they brought the ark of God into the newly completed temple, “It came to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as

one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord;…then the house was filled with a cloud, … for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God" (2 Chron. 5:13-14). We, likewise, learn that it is where brethren dwell together in unity that the Lord commands the blessing, even life for evermore (Psa. 113:1-3).

The active principle of unity was seen to be productive of mighty blessing at Pentecost. Repeatedly, we read of those primitive Christians that they were of "one accord" (Acts 2:1). As a result of their striving, labouring, helping, working together, not in equality of tasks, but in unity of effort, each man according to his gift, there were added to the Church 3000 souls. This accomplishment was not a superficial success, not a "flash in the pan," for "They continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts. 2:42).

We must not all expect to be as Peter on the Day of Pentecost, delivering the powerful address. We may be merely as "of the eleven," or, even more inconspicuous, as of the hundred and twenty.

Dr. Joseph Parker illustrated the need of keeping our God-given places and of exercising our God-given gifts without envy for the advantages of another by the fable of the lady's pocket watch. The tiny delicately made watch supposedly became dissatisfied with its humble sphere of usefulness in the lady's pocket. One day as it passed over Westminster Bridge with its mistress, it envied Big Ben. "I wish that I could be up there; I would then be able to serve the multitudes," said the little watch to herself. "You shall have the opportunity, little

watch," came the supposed reply. Dr. Parker proceeded to describe how the tiny instrument was drawn up to the tower by a slender thread, and how when on the level with Big Ben's face, it was asked, "Where are you, little watch? I cannot see you." No, it could not be seen at such a distance; its elevation had been its annihilation. In the lady's pocket it always had been at hand to serve the useful purpose for which it had been made, but now in the place of Big Ben it was more than useless.

These four workers were not deterred by obstacles. It is true that the crowd came between them and Christ, but they got above the crowd. If men are an obstruction to you in the pursuance of faith's purpose, look up. Go up! The roof also came between them and Christ. This was an obstacle which would cost time and effort to remove, but they were men who "sought means" (Luke 5:18); they exercised holy ingenuity. We must do this in seeking the salvation of others. Do we watch, pray, visit, exercise care and thought, and employ all the ingenuity of a lover of souls to bring men under the Word of God?

John Wesley once was walking with a troubled man who said, "I do not know what I shall do with all this worry and trouble." Just at that moment they saw a cow looking over a stone wall, and Wesley said to the man, "Do you know why that cow is looking over the wall?" "No," said the man, "I do not." "Why, she is looking over the wall, because she cannot look through it," said Wesley, and then added, "You must do that with all your wall of trouble; look over it and above it."

The Healer

The four members of this team were unwavering in their faith. They knew they must bring the man to Christ.

Their confidence in the Lord's ability and willingness to heal was undaunted and unfailing.

Their faith was seen and rewarded by the Lord. Faith is always God-honouring; whereas, self-reliance always spells disaster (Deut. 8:17. Judges 16:20. 2 Chron. 26:15-16).

This man was healed; the results were immediate, perfect and complete. God never does things in any other manner. Moreover, through the healing of this impotent man, glory was brought to the Lord, and unforgetable encouragement was given to the four friends.

The Hinderers

In those days as in ours, there was much unwarranted criticism, as they were not affected by it, neither should we be. Their act of faith met with the Saviour's approval, so what did the criticism matter when they had His smile? The building of the temple in Ezra's day met with both opposiion and criticism. This is frequently the case today, but we may well afford to ignore detractors and critics.

"They that turn many to righteousness shall be as the stars forever and ever." "In due season we shall reap if we faint not."

A soldier once said, "When I die, do not sound taps over my grave, but rather, reveille—the morning call, the summons to rise."