

FROM PARALYSIS TO POWER

Mark 2:1-12

After one of His tours, the Lord Jesus returned to Capernaum, the place where He had made His home or retained His headquarters after His rejection by the residents of Nazareth. Upon His arrival in Capernaum He went to a certain house where He always received a cordial welcome. The news of His arrival soon spread throughout the village. When He entered a heart, a home, a village, or a city it soon became known.

Crowds went where the Saviour was. From various motives they assembled at the house to which He had gone. Some were merely curious. They went to hear His words of wisdom and to see His works of power. Others were heart-hungry, and were there in search of help. Still others were present in the role of critics. They were seeking an opportunity to find fault with Him.

Various people draw crowds, but what counts is what one does with those that assemble. To Christ the chief value of a crowd was the opportunity it presented for the preaching of the Word of God. He was not a religious entertainer, but a divine instructor. Instead of tickling their fancies, He taught their minds. He clearly taught them the way of salvation, and revealed to them the will of God for their lives.

I. The Paralyzed Sinner.

Our scripture lesson portrays a poor man who was suffering from that terrible form of physical malady called palsy. Due to an insidious disease of the nerves, his muscular action had lost its motion, and he was not able to command the muscular activities of his body. Palsy is not so painful as cancer, nor so loathsome as leprosy, nor so fatal as leukemia, but it is a disease which leaves its victim absolutely helpless. One can visualize him as being paralyzed on one side, perhaps with his face drawn to one side, probably unable to speak, and likely slightly mentally impaired, although quite able to understand what was said to him. Powerless to move, all that he could do was to lie on the bed where loving relatives or kind friends placed him. Helpless and incurable, he was truly in a pitiable condition. And to make bad matters worse, his soul was imprisoned in sin.

II. The Persistent Saints.

This paralytic had some friends who were believers in Christ. On this particular day four of them were talking about what their Lord was doing, especially emphasizing the cases of healing. We do not know who these four men were. Their names are not given. Nothing is said about them as to their business or how long they had been Christians. They had a simple confidence in the ability and reliability of Christ. They trusted implicitly in the Saviour's trustworthiness. They were assured that He had the disposition and the power to fulfil His own program--"the recovery of sight to the blind, and setting at liberty of them that are bruised."

These four men loved the paralyzed sinner and had a feeling of compassion for him. One of them remarked that he wished their palsied friend could get to the Great Physician. This idea led to a discussion which resulted in a plan for them to go and carry their friend to Christ. Love always prompts to action. Thank God for Christians who plan to bring others to Christ. It is letting people alone that results in their going to hell. It is planning to go after them that brings them to Christ.

These men did not stop with planning. They pushed their plans. Happily and enthusiastically, they made their way to the afflicted man's house and advised him of their intention to carry him to the Lord Jesus. One by one they took their respective places at the four corners of his pallet, and away the paralytic goes to see the Saviour. Each one carried his corner without complaint, and without refusing because there

was something he did not like about one of the others or the manner in which either of them was doing his job. I have no doubt but what these men told their friend various things about Christ, and especially about His teaching regarding sin and its forgiveness. As a result of their testimony, the paralytic had a double concern, a concern about sin as well as about sickness.

When these men got to the house where Christ was, "they could not come nigh unto Him for the press." He had difficulty in getting to the Saviour. That is striking for Christ is the most accessible Person in all the world. And yet, there are some who think they must put His beloved mother, Mary, between themselves and Him as a Mediator. This man had difficulty in getting to Christ because of the crowd that came and watched and listened and enjoyed it all, but that was all. They refused to get out of the way and let a lost and afflicted man get to Christ.

When the four men found the way to Christ blocked by the crowd, one can visualize the spokesman for them turning to a somewhat plump lady, and saying, "Pardon me, madam, for this intrusion, but if my suggestion in no wise conflicts with any other plans you have in mind, I would respectfully request you to kindly step aside while we pass with our unfortunate friend through the line to Christ for healing. For this gracious favor we shall be eternally indebted to you. Thank you so much." In response to his plea she retorted, "I have been here longer than you have, and I am anxious to get through myself. Why should I allow you to precede me in the line?" After several polite but futile attempts to get through, the four friends retired a few yards and laid down the pallet or couch on which the paralytic was lying. In many places the greatest hindrance in getting the lost to Christ is Christian people.

But these men would not be defeated. They loved this helpless and unsaved man. Moved by a feeling of compassion, they wanted to get him to Christ. They had an energetic and inventive faith enough to overcome all obstacles. They persisted in their purpose, regardless of circumstances. They refused to despair or to quit. Nothing could stop them. Their remarkable faith was made manifest by their works. They stuck to their task. Any weakling can resign. These men refused to give up, even though the crowd was a barrier between the man and the blessing which the Lord had for him. Since they could not take the man through the door, they would see that he reached Jesus some way. When they were unable to bring the man to Jesus in one way, their pushing inventiveness made another way. Too many Christian workers give up too soon in this matter of bringing sinners to the Saviour. These men had the four characteristics essential to soul-winning: love, faith, persistence and ingenuity. All honor to these four bearers who had the necessary qualities for effective service. They could work together in harmony; each was willing to bear his share of the burden; they were moved by loving sympathy for the unfortunate man; they were willing to take great pains to accomplish his cure; and they had unquestioning faith in the power and willingness of Christ to heal.

When they could not bring the man to Jesus in one way, their pushing inventiveness made another way. They climbed up the outside stairway to the low and flat roof and walked out on it. They laid the paralytic down on the roof, removed some of the tile, and let him down through the opening into the presence of Christ. They looked down and watched to see what Jesus would do. The Master recognized in their action, not an outrage upon decency and propriety, but an exceptional expedient to meet exceptional difficulties. Christ admired the courage, the inventiveness, the perseverance, and the faith of these men. Men of faith hold on, keep their mind on the task, and their eyes on the Master.

What did it take on the part of each man to pick up his particular corner?

1. A recognition of need.

They were fully conscious of the serious condition of their friend. If we are going to bring unsaved people to Jesus, then we must be conscious of their help-

less and hopeless condition without Him. It is so easy to see the material, physical, and mental needs of those about us, but we are almost blind to their spiritual needs. Each of the four men carried his corner faithfully because he was fully convinced of the seriousness of his friend's condition.

2. An implicit faith in Christ.

Each was fully persuaded that Jesus could and would do something for his sick friend.

3. A purposeful desire.

Each wanted to bring the need and the fulness of power together.

4. A sacrificial spirit.

Each was willing to make a real sacrifice in order to bring his friend to Jesus. To bring the paralytic to Jesus, each man had to take time out from his personal business, had to expend physical energy, and had to give up the privilege of hearing the greatest preacher of all time. It always costs something to hold up your corner.

5. A persistent effort.

Full of enthusiasm, and agreed upon their plan of action, the four men set out with the paralytic. When they reached the house the doorway was blocked by a crowd. This crowd was unwilling to get out of the way and let them bring the palsied man to Jesus. That was almost enough to dampen their ardor, daunt their courage, and frustrate their enterprise. Their faith and determination were put to a severe test. They might have convinced themselves that the task was hopeless, and that they might just as well abandon the attempt and turn back home. But true faith is not so quickly defeated. Difficulties might test, but could not defeat the faith of these men. On the contrary, it developed in them an ingenuity in devising means of overcoming the obstacles. Here was the sick man, there was his Healer, and it was their business to bring the two together somehow, cost what it might. May God help us to press on in the face of every possible obstacle.

6. A cooperative spirit.

It was one thing to be aware of the man's condition and to believe in the certainty of Christ's power, but it was altogether another thing to effect a meeting between the two. Bringing the man to Jesus was more than a one man job. He sought the cooperation of three others who were like-minded, all of whom were willing to lend a helping hand.

One man was inadequate, two were insufficient, three a lopsided party, but four made the perfect combination. There was one corner for each man to hold up, and he did it. When all four took hold at the same time, lifted together, and walked in unison, it did not take long until they had the man where he needed to be. We need to work together. Are you holding up your corner? Are you meeting your Christian responsibility? Don't fail to carry your corner.

7. A prevailing faith.

At last every hindrance had been overcome. All that they could do was accomplished. Their task was ended. What a feeling of satisfaction must have filled their hearts when they saw their task completed!

III. The Powerful Saviour.

When they brought the man to Jesus, it was then the Master's turn to act. What did He do? He first of all took cognizance of their faith. In that plural pronoun there was included the faith of the paralytic together with that of the four men who brought him to Jesus. Notice that the Word does not say when He saw their clothes, nor when He saw their bank account, nor when He saw their standing, nor when He saw their

education, nor when he saw their prestige, but when He saw their faith. It was because of the faith of these five men that Jesus spoke the life-giving words. When they showed their faith by their works, Christ exercised His great power.

A young preacher went to assist an older preacher in a series of meetings. Early in the series, the young preacher gave the invitation that is given in so many meetings, "All of you who have friends that are lost, and who want us to pray for them, come and give us your hand, and tell us about them." No one came except one old lady, stooped with years. And as she took the young preacher by the hand, she said: "Pray for my son, John." After the service was over and they were leaving, the minister inquired as to the identity of the old woman and her son. The older preacher replied: "I wouldn't pay any attention to her. She has been doing that at every revival meeting for twenty years. Nobody pays any attention to her. And John; you see that tramp sitting out there by the side of the road? That is John."

The young preacher wandered out to where John was, and sat down by his side, talked to him about his soul and invited him to the service. John said to him: "I don't know whether I will come to the service or not, but I want to tell you, I have been coming to this church for twenty years, and you and my mother are the only ones who ever said anything to me about being a Christian."

That evening at services, John was seen in the rear of the building. When the invitation was given, he came down the right aisle. The old mother came down the left aisle and met him there at the front, threw her arms around his neck and said, "Thank God, twenty years is not too long to wait to have a joy like this."

Jesus said to the paralytic, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee." When He said that, Jesus spoke home to the deepest needs, not only of that man, but of every man. Forgiveness means the remission of a penalty and the restoration of a broken fellowship. Not only did the powerful Saviour forgive this man, but He saved him from the consequences of his sin. This He did by healing his body. This man was healed in body as well as healed in soul in response to faith. That exceeded the fondest expectations of the four. Two cures were wrought on him at one time. Jesus said, "Arise, take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house." As the word was spoken, the power was imparted, and the man who came through the roof with his back on the bed went out of the door with the bed on his back. Think of the joy of the men on the roof. But the Pharisees who were looking on criticized. There never was a congregation where there were not critics, and too often criticism comes from those who might be expected to rejoice. One day a learned man said to Mr. Moody, "You made thirty-eight grammatical errors in your sermon today." Mr. Moody replied, "I am quite sure that I must have made even more than that. I have not had the educational advantages that you have had. But I am trying to use all that I have for the glory of God. Are you?" How much did that man get out of Mr. Moody's sermon. The person who looks only for the mistakes of others find very little in life to enrich himself. Criticism is the poorest substitute in the world for service.