

WHICH IS EASIER?

Matthew 9:1-8

Matthew recorded the story about the Lord Jesus Christ returning to Capernaum from a marvelous mission and tour of miracle working and what happened there. Upon his arrival He went to a certain house where He always received a cordial welcome, probably to rest for a few days. When Christ entered a heart, a home, a village or a city it soon became known. So, as soon as the news got out that He was at this particular house, the crowds assembled there.

Some assembled where Christ was out of curiosity. They wanted to hear His words of wisdom and to see His works of power. Others were there in the role of self-appointed critics, seeking an opportunity to find fault with Christ. Still others were heart-hungry, and were there in search of help.

To Christ the chief value of that crowd was the opportunity it gave Him to preach to them. Our Lord was not a religious entertainer, but a divine instructor. Instead of tickling their fancies, He taught their minds. He neither feared their frown, nor courted their favors. He clearly taught them the way of salvation, and revealed to them the will of God for their lives.

Christ was interested in and concerned about the needs of those who came to hear Him. Never once did He turn His back on any person who came to Him seeking help. People knew that Christ was not trying to get something out of them, but was offering to help them. Christ had something important to say to those who heard Him. He had the solution to the problems of His hearers. Christ spoke so they could understand. Christ spoke the truths of God in such a way that even the most unlearned were helped.

In Capernaum was one man who could not go to the house where Christ was preaching because he was paralyzed. His disease was not as painful as cancer, as loathsome as leprosy, or as fatal as leukemia, but it was one which left 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. Then, to make bad matters worse, his soul was imprisoned in sin.

Four men, who were believers in Christ, and who were friends of the man who was paralyzed, firmly believed in the ability and willingness of Christ to heal the paralytic. They planned and brought him to Christ, lying on a pallet, which must have looked something like a stretcher on which injured football players are carried off the field. These friends could not heal their friend, but they were willing and glad to bring him to the One Who could heal him. When they brought him, they were not seeking medals for themselves, but help for their unfortunate friend. With faith in Christ and confidence in His power to heal, these men came bearing their helpless and hopeless friend on their strong shoulders.

When they arrived where Christ was, the house was full of people and the door was blocked. They had great difficulty in getting this man to the Saviour because of those who came and listened and watched it all. The crowd refused to get out of the way and let a lost and afflicted man get to Christ. In many places and on many occasions the greatest hindrance in getting the lost to Christ is church members.

Lesser men than these bearers of the paralytic would have said, "Well, it's no use," and would have turned back, but these men had determination, ingenuity and persistence. There is sure to be a way where there is a strong will. They persisted in their purpose, and

refused to despair or to quit. Any weakling can resign. These men stuck to their task. Nothing could have stopped them. Even though the crowd was a barrier between the man and the blessing the Lord had for him, they resolved to see that he reached Christ some way. They climbed 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, let him down through the opening into the presence of Christ, and then watched to see what Christ would do.

Christ saw their faith and it made him glad. He admired the faith, the inventiveness, the courage and the perseverance of these men. He stopped His sermon and turned His full attention to this one man who needed help. That's the way our Lord was, and that's the way He is. He didn't need anybody to tell Him the story of this afflicted man. Paralysis tells it's own story. The hopelessness of the man and all of his unhappiness were written on his face. Some people turn away from that sort of thing, because they don't like to see suffering or affliction. Such was not the case with Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ saw the condition of the man, and He saw the faith of the four men who brought him, along with the faith of the paralytic. 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. To get the attention of our Lord that is an unbeatable combination -- the condition of an unfortunate man and faith on the part of the people who have no other way to turn.

Seeing the faith of the men who brought him, and being delighted with the boldness and strength of the faith which they displayed, our Lord immediately bestowed upon the paralyzed man a far greater blessing than the one which he sought, namely, instant, complete and permanent pardon. To the man our Lord said: "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee."

That was a remarkable thing for Christ to say. First of all, forgiving a man's sins is not the first thing most people would think of when a paralyzed man is brought with the hope that he might be healed. Secondly, there were those in those days, as there are those in our day, who wonder whether anybody has the right to say to another, "Your sins are forgiven you." The Saviour certainly flung hope and cheer into the man's heart by giving him what he needed -- forgiveness of sin or cleansing from the past. The forgiveness for sins is God's greatest gift to man. The consciousness of the forgiveness of sin through God's pardon and love is the source of true happiness.

Our Lord's question is directed to us just as much today as it was to the scribes in His day. He said; "Which is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or 'Rise and walk'?" Regardless of whether you think that the Lord's pronouncement of forgiveness is an arrogant challenge to God, as the scribes did, or to regard it as a meaningless sham or nothing, as a lot of people do today, the question is still the same: "Which is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or 'Rise and walk'?"

The answer is the same too: "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house."

This is our Lords' answer to all the ills that trouble mankind. Christ knows what is the matter with all of us much better than we know ourselves. We like to think that a little patching up here and a little touching up there will solve our problems, but the Lord knows better than that. He knows us better than we know ourselves. If that broken bone of yours were to be healed instantly, would it make a better man of you, or a better woman of you? If your disease were to be cured suddenly, would it change your life or would you go on being what you were before?

Looking into the hopeless eyes of the paralyzed man, our Lord did something that no one else

can do in the same way. I can tell you that your sins are forgiven, but I can do that only in the name on the authority of the word of Jesus Christ. On His own and with the power which He had as the Son of God Christ forgave sinners. When He talked, He spoke as God. When He acted, He acted as God. He was God in every sense of the word. This is what the Apostle was talking about when he said that in Jesus Christ dwelt the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

Christ knew all about suffering. If suffering is the lot of humanity, it was His lot too. He became a man for this, to be a man among men, and to be a man for men. He literally came to take our place. He took it all, right down to the death each one of us is destined to die. He was obedient to His Father for all of us. He died for us. For all of that, God has given Him a name that is above every name.

What does the Lord have to say to you? "Son, take heart; your sins are forgiven you." Don't say that this is just some theological hokum proclaimed by a preacher. This is the Lord of heaven and earth telling you this glorious fact. He knows you a lot better than you know yourself. He is not bamboozled by all your pretense, and He is not taken in by all the fine feathered defenses you have built up around yourself. He knows you, and He knows what you need more than anything else in the whole world.

You need to know what life is all about. Is life just a great big hyphen between the cradle and the grave, or is it something more? Is it something with meaning and purpose? If life is to have meaning and purpose for you, you had better get wise to yourself. You do not have much time left. That hyphen between the cradle and the grave is mighty short, as a lot of people have discovered -- too late! Getting wise to yourself by getting wise to the Lord. Turn that hyphen into an arrow with purpose and direction.

Christ gave hope to a paralyzed man that day. He put a man on his feet that day. Telling him to arise, take up his bed and walk was merely incidental. Even the incidental is a mighty demonstration of power. But the power of the Son of God, giving meaning, purpose and direction to all of life, is in His other actinn, "Son, drop the hang dog look and take heart; your sins are forgiven you."

Our Lord had a heart of compassion and love for people. With His whole heart He helped them -- really helped them as only He knew how to do.

Our Lord really knew people. John told us that "He knew what is in the heart of man." He knew how bad it can be, how desolate life becomes when a man makes a mess of it, how things can look when storms come along and turn the field of life into an impassable mud hole that looks something like a pig sty. He knew how people fell when the heart goes out of them.

Our Lord knew that you don't cure anyone by trying to graft new skin over an ulcer. There is no use healing a man's paralysis, if he is going to walk around on two sound legs with the same emptiness in his eyes and the same hopelessness in his heart. Christ was interested in changing people so that life would be different for them. He was interested in permanent results, not just in temporary alleviation of pain. We are finding today that a lot of pain is relieved when people begin to understand what life is all about; when they discover through faith in Christ that there is forgiveness for what is passed; that it is possible to face the future and whatever it may bring with courage and hope; that death is not the final chapter, but the beginning of a great and new chapter as faith in Christ is turned into fulfillment.

Which is easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven you" or "Arise and walk?" A lot of people think they know the answer to that one right away. To show them that they are wrong, the Lord healed the paralytic. He went off happily on his way to his house. This did not happen in a corner. Multitudes saw it and marveled, and then glorified God.

Christ has power to forgive sins, and He does forgive them. I have seen how His forgive-

ness works. People who had no hope at all have acquired a new reason for living. They got this from Christ, and so can you. Listen to Him and know that He means what He says, "Your sins are forgiven you." That statement calls for a response. That response is faith -- the kind of faith that takes Him at His Word and follows Him. Our Lord has what it takes to make a man a man and to make a woman a woman. He says to you: "Son, daughter, take heart; life is not an empty dream." Things don't have to go on as they are. The situation is not hopeless. The God Who made this great world in which we live has a heart for you. Out of love for you, He atoned for what you have done wrong. He takes you as you are, forgives, cleanses and blesses you. His Son says to you: "Take heart, your sins are forgiven."

Which is easier, really, to go on in dull existence without Him, or to accept the gift of life from Him? Accept the gift of life from Him, my friend. The One Who gave Himself for you will forgive you, and save you, and bless you, and make you a blessing to others.