

The Healing of the Paralytic: A Lesson About Faith

- *The Setting:* Jesus returns to Capernaum (probably to Peter’s home—cf. Matthew 4:13 and Mark 1:21, 29; important to note that this would have been a relatively small and simple home made with stones with a flat roof that would be frequently used for relaxation, oftentimes with an exterior staircase providing access), and the people discover that He’s back. They gather at the house to hear Jesus teach the Scriptures. The crowd of listeners was so large that people were crammed outside against the house.
- *The Problem:* A group of men carrying their crippled friend arrive on the scene, trying to get to Jesus. They were unable to, because of the great crowd.
- *The Inciting Moment:* The friends, insistent on getting their needy comrade to Jesus, are not ready to give up. They climb up the stairs to the roof, and begin tearing up the clay roof above where Jesus was teaching. When they had created a large enough opening, they lowered their friend down into the house near where Jesus was.
 - NOTE: This was pretty bizarre considering that this wasn’t their house and considering that teaching below would have been interrupted as debris began falling upon those inside. This would have created quite the scene...embarrassment and social awkwardness.
- *The Rising Action:* When Jesus saw the faith of these friends (and apparently of the paralytic himself) so clearly demonstrated in their aggression, persistence, and boldness (they weren’t embarrassed) in getting their needy companion to Jesus, He responded by performing an invisible, and yet most important, miracle (more important, in fact, than the physical healing of this man, which was, of course, what these men had desired in bringing their fellow to Jesus)—the salvation of his soul. Jesus would later actually respond to his initial request and heal him physically, too.
- *The Conflict:* When the religious leaders heard Jesus forgive this man’s sins, they were troubled. Their doctrine correctly taught them that only God could forgive sins, but their evaluation of Jesus incorrectly led them to conclude that He was blaspheming. The other valid option—that Jesus was God—was never even considered.

- I’m not sure that my conclusion would have been any different, especially since I’ve been trained as a good Bible student to live by the book. Yes, a logical conclusion was that this man Jesus was God, even the Messiah, but there was so much practical and convention wisdom that went against that idea. It “made more sense” to be doctrinal and conclude that He was a heretic. Any good pastor would have concluded the same; so, I’m not going to fault the scribes here in verse 7.

Jesus, knowing this internal conflict within the scribes, begins to help them understand that the option they so readily dismissed (i.e., He is God) was the truth. He asks them whether it is easier to say, “Your sins are forgiven,” or “Get up, pick up your pallet and walk.” Obviously, it is easier to say the first because it is invisible and cannot be visibly proved. The latter can be verified immediately through physical and visible evidence. So, Jesus now determines to effectively say the latter in order to prove that He had effectively said the former.

- *The Miracle:* The man “immediately” got up and walked “in the sight of everyone.”
- *The Response:* The people were “amazed” and “glorified God.” They also continued to come and listen to Jesus
 - At this point, however, I believe that a reproof against the scribes is in order. Jesus had sought to correct their legitimate, but incorrect, conclusion—the physical healing proved the veracity of His claim and power to forgive sins, and should have caused the Scribes to change their conclusion and submit to Him as their God. We know, however, that this was not their response.

Principle 1: Jesus knows and can meet our greatest (and perhaps unknown) needs when we have faith in Him.

- This man had faith in Jesus’ ability...this was more than knowledge about Jesus, belief in Jesus’ existence. I believe that this man sincerely and earnestly believed (as revealed in tearing the roof up) that Jesus could meet his needs and fix his problems. However, I don’t think that his faith was fully mature, correctly focused, or fully taught. His faith in Jesus is unquestioned, but it seems that he’s overlooking some things that we would consider integral, like Jesus’ purpose to save people from their sin. However, when he came in confident expectation to Christ to fix the problem, Jesus in His omniscience and grace honored his unwavering faith, by meeting his greatest need.

- The content of saving faith has changed throughout the ages (e.g., “Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness”), but saving faith is always rooted in the ability and promises of God. Today, saving faith is a confident belief in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and in His ability to completely fulfill His promise to save to the uttermost those that come unto God by Him.
- This man demonstrated saving faith by unwaveringly and desperately clinging to the truth that if he just got to Jesus, Jesus would know what to do. He didn’t have all his theology worked out; He hadn’t thought through all the details of who Jesus was...but He confidently believed in Jesus’ ability to meet his need. And he discovered that faith in Jesus gets all of Him—Jesus met his physical and spiritual needs.
- Grace – He didn’t give them only what they asked for. Faith in Jesus, even though not fully mature (i.e., they believed in His ability to physically heal, but perhaps they hadn’t considered His ability to spiritually heal), was what pleased Jesus and caused Him to respond by meeting the need, not just the request.

Principle 2: Christ honors our faith when we bring other people to Him. And, considering that He alone really knows the true needs, He may do more than we ever expected.

- Had they allowed the circumstances to deter their perseverance to get their friend to the only One who they believed could help him (e.g., embarrassment from the situation), their friend would not only have never walked, but he also would have never experienced salvation. Their faith was in some way catalytic to the spiritual healing of their friend.
- This would have been one of those sobering “wow” moments, in which they would have been very thankful for God’s grace in overlooking their limited faith and using it to draw this man (and perhaps themselves) to Himself.
- From the paralytic’s perspective, he had done nothing (except believe). His friends had been tools. God had orchestrated everything (i.e., He had given the crippled man these friends and stirred within them this faith in Jesus’ physical-healing ability). Jesus saw and met the true need though these friends.
- Comparing Scripture with Scripture, this passage cannot be teaching that a man can be saved by someone else’s faith. However, the passage is emphasizing how influential your faith can be in the salvation of someone else.

- Apply this thought... (How can we demonstrate faith by bringing people to Jesus? Not bringing people to Jesus reveals a lack of faith.)
 - Bringing the unsaved to Jesus:
 - Inviting to church events
 - Witnessing
 - Giving out tracts
 - Bringing the saved to Jesus—“fellowship”:
 - Giving a word of encouragement
 - Advising someone
 - Prayer

Principle 3: I don’t need any other proof from Jesus; I just need to trust Him.