

HEALING THE PARALYZED MAN

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Reading: *Mark 2:1-17*

Picture crowds and crowds of people, flocking to see the Lord. The great miracles that the Lord was doing made so many people want to come to Him that He couldn't go into a town or city openly or the crowds would be too big. The last verse of Mark 1 says that Jesus could no longer openly enter the city, but was outside in deserted places, and that people came to Him there from every quarter.

So, for days the Lord was receiving people out in the country. Then He did come into the town of Capernaum and went into a house. Word of this got around very quickly—"It was heard that He was in the house. Immediately many gathered together so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door" (Mark 2:1-2).

Something was about to happen that would make the crowds even more amazed. And it wasn't so much what they saw with their eyes, but what the miracle they saw meant. It would have been amazing if the Lord had just made a man well, but the way He did it showed people something that amazed them even more.

Four men came carrying a paralyzed man, hoping that they could get near to Jesus and ask Him to heal the man. But there was no way they could get near Him with such a crowd. So, what they did was to climb up on the roof of the house and lower the man down into the inner courtyard where Jesus was.

Every eye must have turned to see this sight of a man being lowered down by ropes. It was clear that the man could not walk, and naturally people wondered whether the Lord could make the man well. Surprisingly, the Lord did not speak to the man about his sickness, but about something else. He said, "Son, your sins are forgiven you" (Mark 2:5).

Nobody said a word, but they certainly spoke inside themselves when they heard that. Some scribes were sitting there, who said in their hearts, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:7). They were reasoning in their hearts that "this Man" had no right to speak such blasphemy.

But the Lord knew their thoughts, and He spoke to them. To demonstrate that He did indeed have the power to forgive sins, He told the man to get up and walk. First, He said to the scribes, "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed, and walk'?" But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins..." and then He spoke to the paralyzed man (Mark 2:9-10).

The crowd realized that if they saw the man walk, that miracle would also be showing them something they could not see—the power to forgive sins. What

would this mean about who “this Man” Jesus was? For indeed, “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” And so it had a very powerful effect on people when the man got up and walked—“all were amazed and glorified God, saying, ‘We never saw anything like this!’” (Mark 2:12).

The news that Jesus could forgive sins would mean the most to people who wanted to be good, but who had done wrong things in the past. There were a number of people like that, who up to that time probably did not dare come to see the Lord. But the Lord was not born on earth just to see and talk to perfect people. He wanted to help those whom others scorned. One such person was a man named Levi (also known as Matthew). People would have nothing to do with him, because he collected taxes for the Romans. But soon after He had healed the paralytic, the Lord walked by him and said, “Follow Me” (Mark 2:14). And Levi (or Matthew) got up and followed the Lord. He was going to be one of the Lord’s disciples.

In the next verse, we are told that the Lord was dining at Levi’s house. In the gospel of Luke, we are told, “Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house” (Luke 5:29). And who else came to this feast and sat down with the Lord? People who had done wrong in the past, but who really wanted to live a good life. It was as if they—these tax-collectors and sinners—had been inwardly sick, and a great physician had come to see them. Their lives *could* change for the good.

Now some people were upset that the Lord would spend time with such people, people they thought were unworthy. Do you know what the Lord’s answer was? He said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (Mark 2:17).

The Lord came to help people who needed and wanted His help—those who were physically and spiritually in need. This picture brings us to one of the most beautiful sayings in the Word, where the Lord says, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:20). The Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church tells us what the interior meaning of this passage is. The book *Divine Providence* says that this passage clearly teaches, “That the Lord enters when the door is opened by man’s effort.... The door is opened by a person’s removing evil by shunning and turning away from it” (233).

We must make an effort in our spiritual lives. We must work to seek the Lord where He may be found—in His Word, in His church, in His world—as the paralyzed man’s friends did not give up despite the crowds around the Lord but found a way to reach Him. And we must follow when the Lord calls to us—even if we feel unworthy or unable—as Levi followed the Lord and prepared a feast for Him where He ate with sinners. And, finally, we must open the door to the Lord by turning away from evils and so welcoming His presence into our lives.

Amen.