

INTRODUCTION

As Jesus ministry developed people began to see certain things more clearly - who he is; what he does, and what effects it has. The record of this miracle points to these things. The friends who brought a paralysed friend to Jesus had conspicuous faith.

THEY HAD FAITH IN JESUS

Their faith in him was based on what they had seen and heard. It was common knowledge that Jesus healed many people. Crowds gathered round him as a result. When they heard that Jesus was in a nearby house they brought their friend to him.

Faith operates in situations of need. When we are not challenged we don't need faith. When we face difficulties we cannot overcome there is a tendency to become despondent. In such situations we need something we can have faith in if we are not to give up. What matters most is whether our fresh support really is dependable. But we will only access it if we have faith in it. The friends were faced with an impossible situation - their friend was paralyzed. But they had faith in Jesus.

When Jesus responded to them he mentioned forgiveness of sins; so it is appropriate to think about that. Do we see our sin as a challenge we cannot meet? Many people, when they see that, go into despair. Instead, we should have faith in Christ and access his salvation.

Their faith was more than faith in his ability. It was also faith in him as a person. He was someone they could come to; someone they could trust.

When we come to Christ for salvation - do we think only of his authority to forgive? Or what he did in the past, at Calvary? Or only his promise? It should be all of these things - and more. It should be faith in him as a person.

The friends' faith is seen in their determination to succeed. They took extreme measures in order to get Jesus' help.

No one dismantles part of another person's home without compelling reason and confidence of success. Their faith was not so much an act of desperation (though the situation was desperate) as an act of confidence. That is the case with saving faith. Our faith in Christ reflects our absolute need of him, but it also shows confidence in him. That was true even of the man who said, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief." There is no record of the friends saying anything to Jesus. They thought it was enough to present him with the need; that shows their faith and was prayer enough. The Bible often speaks of "looking up".

WORDS THAT HEAL

Jesus first words to the man were "Son, take courage; your sins are forgiven."

That raises an important question. He seemed to see a link between his illness and his sin - if so, what was it?

Occasionally there is an obvious connection between a person's lifestyle and an illness associated with that lifestyle. Generally that is not the case. The Book of Job warns us never to assume that an illness is the result of a sin.

So why did Jesus speak in that way? There are three possibilities. First, all the suffering of humanity is due to the Fall; corporate human sin is the cause of illness. The second possibility is that Jesus was drawing people's attention to the root cause of human suffering and his own role

in overcoming it. The third possibility is that Jesus was just addressing the man's conscience to give it peace.

Jesus' words certainly did that. Nothing can be more significant than having divine assurance that our sins are forgiven and God accepts us.

Jesus' second statement was, "Get up. Take your bed, and walk." It had two functions. It was a word of power, conveying the healing the paralyzed man needed. It was also symbolic, showing people the reality of the forgiveness he had pronounced. Baptism and the Lord's Supper fulfil the same function. Sometimes an experience that puts God's care beyond doubt can also serve as a reminder of his saving grace.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

The religious leaders unwittingly helped to underline the point Jesus was making. They said, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Their statement was true, so they were left with a choice - believe that Jesus was acting with God's authority, or that he was speaking blasphemy. They chose the latter. But why would they do that when his healing miracles showed God was with them.

Jesus' awareness of their thoughts also suggests divine influence. He consciously asserted his divine prerogative - "so you may know the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sin ..." He was also asserting that forgiveness is not something uncertain or in the future but available in the here and now.

His use of the term "Son of Man" is significant. A divine prerogative was being exercised by a man! He was pointing to his position - Messiah, acting as God's servant with his full authority, and his person - God and man, two natures in one person forever.

BLESSING AND CURSING

No one can see whether another person's sins are forgiven - that is hidden in the heart of God and the person concerned. The Scribes thought it was "easy" for Jesus to speak that way (not easy to pay the price of forgiveness!). By contrast the assertion of healing can be verified or falsified. Jesus did what seemed impossible to them. By healing the paralysed man Jesus was dispelling their idea that he was a con man. They could no longer be dismissive of his claim to forgive sin. The incident was a further disclosure of who Jesus is and what he does. The Scribes logic was valid but their conclusion was false. Refusing to believe he was the divine Messiah was a choice - their reasoning could have led either way. But their decision to reject his claim led them into a contradiction. The evidence in his favour grew. Their presuppositions were manifestly false. They had to shut their eyes to the facts and eventually put him to death. Many people are like that. The case for Christ is overwhelming. Consciously rejecting it leads some people to attempt to suppress Christianity.

CONCLUSION

This account is full of reasons to have faith in Christ Jesus.

The friends' conduct is an example to us, as is Jesus' response.

He has authority to forgive us and put us right with God.

He is a wonderful person, both divine and human.

His position is no less wonderful – the Christ whom God appointed to seek and to save the lost.