

## Mark 2:1-12 The Lame Walk

From prison, John the Baptist said, “Go ask Jesus if He is the Expected One or should we look for another?” Trials like John’s can bring honest doubts. Among other things, Jesus said, “*Go tell John that the lame walk.*” (Mtt.11:5) Jesus didn’t go visit John; He didn’t release John from prison; He did no miracle for him, at least not the kind of miracle we would first hope for. Jesus called John to walk by faith and not by sight. If we didn’t know Jesus better we would conclude that He was cruel beyond words. How could he not rescue his own cousin from his imprisonment and imminent death? But all John wants is a straight answer, “*Are you the expected One or should we look for another?*”<sup>1</sup> He doesn’t need any more than Jesus’ word on it. But Jesus gives him more.

He says, “*Tell John the lepers are cured, the blind receive back their sight, the lame walk, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the gospel is preached to the poor.*” Now, these things could have been easily contradicted if they hadn’t been taking place. But the evidence was so abundant no one even tried. The religious leaders of the day made no argument that Jesus didn’t do these things. Normally, that’s the first thing people do. They suspect a fake or a fraud. They look for the person who pretended to be sick and planted in the crowd who conspired with the healer to fool the gullible. The faith healer has a collaborator behind the curtain who gives him information through a wireless earpiece. But no such accusation was ever brought up against Jesus. And the Bible isn’t shy about reporting the extent Jesus’ opponents would go to discredit Him. The evidence was so abundant and convincing that Jesus did these miraculous things that they never even questioned them. There were just too many people in every village healed to refute it. His opponents simply hated him for doing them. Tell John the lame walk....

### **Capernaum:**

The atmosphere in Capernaum was as electric as it could possibly be. A confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders was brewing. It was about to reach the boiling point. Not only was there the excitement about Jesus coming back home, now new visitors had come to town. They are the denominational big wigs: the theological heavy weights. Luke 5 tells us that they arrived in force from every village and town in Galilee, Judea and Jerusalem (Lk.5). These are the men who determine if you get your ordination license. They determine if you’re orthodox or a heretic. They’re the denominational leaders and seminary professors. And they have come to town in what appears to be some official capacity to pass judgment on Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> Martha accused Jesus of not caring for her when Mary wasn’t helping her in the kitchen. When the storm was about to sink the boat, the disciples accused Jesus of not caring that they live or die. John does not accuse Jesus at all.

It didn't take long for the news to spread of the confrontation that was about to take place. A car wreck was about to occur and no one wanted to miss it. The immovable object and the irresistible force were about to meet and the mystery of physics was about to play its way out in their small town.

So many people were crowded into that house that there was standing room only. Even the doorway was blocked tight with people pushing and shoving. However, notice in verse 6 that the Scribes and the Pharisees are sitting. While everyone else is standing, pressed together like sardines they are sitting down assuming the position of authority. This is the context of Jesus healing the paralytic.

I want to organize our text around three observations: 1. Jesus has a word for grace for the paralyzed man. 2. He has a word of judgment/witness for the paralyzed Pharisees and 3. He has a miracle of healing grace for them both.

**First, Jesus has a word of grace for the paralyzed man and his friends.**

We'll come back to the love and faith of his friends in a moment. But first, let me ask this, "What do you think these men wanted Jesus to do for this man? Everybody knows. Everyone, it seems, but Jesus.

Instead of looking down at the man and saying, "Your body is healed; so get up and dance." He says, "*My son, your sins are forgiven.*" Is that it? Is that's all? I can hear the man say, "Thanks for the kind words of absolution Jesus. That's a nice religious thought and I'm glad that you care about my soul but, I'm paralyzed! I've got a more immediate problem here." And listen carefully...Jesus is saying, "No you don't." Jesus is saying, "Look I know that you're suffering, I'll get to that. I know that your paralysis is agonizingly painful. I'll get to that."

You know, I can't imagine the ordeal Chuck Frye went through those nineteen years after he was paralyzed by his stroke. I can't imagine passing that test. I get depressed when attendance at church is low. I can barely imagine the faith Chuck Frye had that gave him a glad and joyful spirit even though his body almost completely stopped serving him. By the time he was 54, this man's life was marked by brilliant accomplishments, more than most of us could dream about. And when his body quit on him he knew the Lord hadn't and in that he greatly rejoiced.

Jesus says, "Look, I know that you are suffering physically and I will deal with that in the future. But right now you need to know that there is something eternally worse than physical suffering and that is eternal suffering and living without knowing that your sins are forgiven before a holy God or living without God's peace. The main problem in a person's life is never their suffering it is their sin.

Jesus is saying this man has underestimated the depths of his own heart. He has set the bar of his aspirations too low. We understand it; we all do it. This man hasn't yet gone deep enough or reached high enough.

Look, it's only natural and right that he wanted to be healed of his paralysis. We can all relate. But, we often think that if I could just be healed of my suffering everything would be OK. We think, "If I was just a little more attractive. I was just a little more athletic, if I was just taller, thinner, heavier or smarter. If I had a smaller nose, bigger lips, more friends, a husband who was more attentive or a wife who was more sexual or a bigger house, a better job, a more perfect church and different color eyes, healthier body, then life would be satisfying and OK. But the list is endless.

### **My Peace is not as the world gives peace...**

If all Jesus did for this man was to heal him of his paralysis what do you think would happen in a few months? The world's peace is fleeting. Jesus doesn't give peace the way the world does.

I can remember saying to God...*"Lord if you would just give me this one thing I will be content and never need to ever ask for another."* I prayed, *"Lord when I ask Debby to marry me if you will just let Debby say, 'Yes,' I'll never need to ask for another thing."* Soon it was something else; then it was something else. That is so because the roots of our discontentment run really deep.

Jesus knows that giant thing we often strive and long for, that thing or condition we think will make our lives bearable and satisfying and give us personal fulfillment and happiness won't ultimately do it. You can get it and for a while it will make you feel better but quickly it fades and you go on to new idols.

Jesus tells this man, "I'm not going to simply give you your most pressing wish without you seeing your deepest need."

Isn't it true that we all have something we think will make us satisfied and fulfilled other than Jesus and God's will for us? It's the same temptation Eve and Adam faced in the garden. He gave them everything. He said they could eat of every tree in the garden as far as the eye can see minus one. Guess which one they desired? The one about which God said "No". And when they got it they were even more miserable.

"Listen," Jesus says, "I'm the only savior that says, *"If you get me I will fulfill you and if you fail me I will forgive you.*" There is no salvation in any other thing: not in success, physical or material prosperity financial security, accomplishment or achievement. It's understandable that we want these things. But they fail as a place of our deepest hopes and yearnings. And we are so tied to them as the

source of identity, security and significance that it is agonizing and painful to have them torn away from us.

In the children's book *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* there is a nasty and selfish little boy named Eustas. No body likes Eustis and for good cause. Along with his cousins, he gets on Prince Caspian's ship and travels to Narnian islands. On one island he stumbles into this cave and discovers a treasure of mounds of diamonds, rubies and gold coins. He's beside himself with joy. And he begins to think about how he can finally stand tall over all the others, boast and get anything he wants and show all the others how much better he is than they are.

But he falls asleep. And when he wakes up he realizes that he is in a dragon's cave and lying on the dragon's treasure. He looks at himself and realizes that he has become the dragon himself, ugly and mean. Now, his ambitions are all lost. The ugliness and greed of his heart had turned him into an ugly and mean dragon.

Soon, Aslan the Lion of Narnia comes to rescue Eustas. He takes him by a pool of water and tells him to undress. Eustas discovers that the dragon skin comes off like a garment. So, he begins to rip and tear at the skin and tears it off. But, to his disillusionment each time he scrapes a layer of dragon skin off, there is another one underneath. He does it again with the same result. As soon as he gets it off another layer of dragon skin resurfaces from underneath. He tries it several times until he realizes he can't get rid of the skin.

Finally Aslan says, "You're going to have to let me do it." Eustas, says, "I was afraid of his claws...But I was desperate by now...The first tear he made went so deep I thought it had gone right into my heart. And when he began to pull the skin off it hurt worse than anything I had ever felt before. While he peeled the beastly stuff right off, just as I had done except this time it hurt. There it was, lying in the grass only ever so much thicker, darker and more knobly looking than the others. Then he threw me in the pool. It smarted like anything but only for a moment. Then I saw that I had become a boy again."

Like Eustas and the paralyzed man in our text, we think we know what we need. But Jesus says, "No! I must go deeper and take my claws and go all the way into your heart and change the main things your heart really needs."

Jesus calls us to make Him our true savior. And the process He goes through to reveal that He is the only real savior will be agonizing for those of us who have other idols. This Jesus has claws. And they are designed by His love and grace to tear out the idols we so easily cling to so that we can live at peace with God and each other. To what do you give the power of your gladness and hope? Is it really Jesus or is it something else? Beloved, the reason you may not be getting the thing you want is because you might make an idol of it and your witness to Jesus would be compromised.

Jesus' words to this man have little to do with what he has come to Jesus for. There are more important things. What you and I need is peace with God, not a peace the world and worldly ambition offers. What you need is peace with God, reconciliation with God, forgiveness with God, and the love and grace of God's blessing on your life. And when He is our peace the world can't take that away and we can bear witness to real peace. What we need is to trust Him, believe in Him and hope in Him. Those are the words of Jesus to the paralyzed man and his friends. "My son, your sins are forgiven."

### **Second, Jesus has words for the paralyzed Pharisees as well.**

In stark contrast to the five men who would do almost anything to get Jesus' help and blessing, the Scribes and Pharisees aren't doing anything but sitting and passing judgment. Instead of honor and respect, there was disrespect; instead of praise and wonder there was only criticism.

In vv.8-11, Jesus gives to them words of witness to His true identity. The Scribes and Pharisees were also paralyzed...with anger and bitterness. And, they say, "Who can forgive sins but God alone! This man is guilty of Blasphemy!" They were half right. Only God can forgive sins.

Imagine Ron punched Dwight in the face. What if I came along and said, "Ron I forgive you." Dwight says, "Wait a minute Ron sinned against me. You can't forgive him. He offended me!" Do you know what Jesus is claiming when He says, "I forgive all your sins?" He was claiming that all sin is against Him! They say, "Only God can forgive sin," because ultimately all sin is against God.

Jesus is implying, "Every bad thing you've ever done is against me." The only One who could possibly say that is your Creator. God made you for a purpose and when you violate that purpose you violate the One who made you. Only your Creator and Lord could say that. By forgiving him Jesus is claiming to be - God with us - your Lord.

They recognize that Jesus is not claiming to be just a miracle worker...He's claiming to be Lord of the universe.

"Immediately, Jesus knew this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, 'Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven," or to say, "Get up, take up your mat and walk?" But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, He said to the paralytic, 'I tell you, get up, take up your mat and go home.'"

Now, Jesus' question can go either way depending on your perspective. From one perspective it's easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven." Because, *How can*

*anyone prove that you have deceived them?* Anybody can say the words. That's an easy thing to say because nothing is demanded of you to simply say it.

But from the perspective of the Son of God who has come to make peace for us with God, to say, "Your sins are forgiven," was infinitely, beloved...infinitely more difficult. I think this is what Jesus is getting at. For the Son of Man who came bringing the kingdom of God with Him, healing a man's body would cost Him very little. But, to forgive all our sins will cost Him everything.

His question points to the cross. Jesus knows what they're thinking. If He heals this man - not merely as a miracle worker - but as one claiming to be "God with us" demanding their allegiance, they're going to kill him.

So, He looks around. Half the people want to use Him to make their lives better the other half want to kill him. Yet, what does He do? He heals the man which set in motion the grounds for his death.

The only way that man's spiritual legs will walk is if Jesus' feet are pierced. The only way that man will dance forever will be if Jesus dies. Notice Jesus sees them at their worst. Not one person is there for His purposes. They are all there for their own. And yet, *while we were yet sinners Christ dies for us!* O Beloved what love that will never wear out. Isn't this the love your heart yearns for? Look, we experience the failure of love every day. People say they love you and then they will break that commitment in a heartbeat. If you're sensitive you will just get more and more jaded. If the love of others is your ultimate hope you're in trouble. But Jesus will never break his covenant of love with you. When the Lord of the universe - who has the authority to forgive sins - sees you at your worst and still gives all of himself in love to you, that should melt your hearts with wonder and awe and peace.

The kindness of the Lord brings about repentance. If you don't get this grace you will never repent from the heart. You just aren't able. Oh you can for a while. But in time you will default to what your heart really believes. So, believe in this love: in this Jesus.

So Jesus' word to those paralyzed by bitterness, criticism, and accusation is that Jesus can heal the soul and the body. And in His time - for those who believe in Him - He will do both!

**Finally, Jesus does a miracle for them both.**

He indeed heals the man and calls him to pick up his mat and tells him to go home, ransomed, healed, restored, and forgiven. I wish I could have seen the look on the faces of his family as he came through that door walking and leaping and praising God. What do you think they talked about for the rest of their lives? That same act was a witness of love to those who believed and a witness of

judgment to those who didn't. It made some happier and some even more bitter. Some went away singing and dancing in the streets others went away embittered and surly. How about you and me?

Joni Erickson, a paraplegic, was attending a service when the minister asked everyone to kneel down and worship. Tears came to her eyes because she couldn't do it. And when she bowed her head she remembered that when she sees Jesus, her body will be like His, raised up and functioning with all its faculties. She writes this.

*"Just before the wedding feast of the lamb, I will drop down on grateful knees and then I am going to be on my feet dancing. Can you imagine the hope that this gives someone with a spinal cord injury like me or the hope this gives to someone who is manic-depressive? No other religion promises new bodies [and] a new material universe. Only in the gospel of Christ can people hurting like me find such an enormous hope."*

Beloved, all of the physical pleasures and tangible joys of this world, all rolled up together, will only amount to a piece of lint compared to the tangible and physical joys of the new heaven and the new earth and serving the Lord with new bodies unaffected by sin. Do we resent the path Jesus calls us to live or do we say, "Thank you Jesus for healing the paralysis of my heart. And for the promise that someday, whenever it pleases you, you will heal my body as well."

### **Community...**

One last thing I want you to notice about in the text. Verse 5 says, "Seeing *their* faith Jesus said, "My son your sins are forgiven." We can't tell if it was the faith of the four friends or all five of them. But it does tell us that this man was a rich man. He was rich with good friends. Rejected at the door they carried his body around back and up the stairs to the roof. In those days the roof of a house was flat with beams spanning the walls several feet apart. Branches, tree limbs and thistles were laid across the beams. On top of the branches they put about a foot of dirt and sowed it with grass seed. Typically the roofs were about two feet thick.

When these men got up on the roof, they began digging a hole several feet wide and about two feet thick. So, imagine that scene with the noise of shoveling and dirt, branches, dirt, and debris falling from the ceiling on top of everyone. They tied their friend up in a rug and they lowered him down in front of Jesus as the Pharisees knocked off the dust from their robes. Then all four of them stuck their heads in the hole to see what Jesus would do. Whatever would have happened that day, rejection, acceptance, healing or not, this paralytic was a rich man. He had four friends who loved him and would do almost anything to get him to Jesus. Seeing their faith....Jesus healed him.

Sometimes our faith alone isn't enough. We need others to come along side and help us out. Who are you carrying today into the presence of Jesus? The love and great faith of friends got this man to Jesus. Do we have great love and faith? Do we befriend others like this? And if you don't have a friend like this maybe you need to be a friend like that. "A man that has friends shows himself friendly." Pr. 18:24

Beloved, no one can ever love us like Jesus. Some wanted Jesus to be their heavenly vending machine. Others wanted Jesus to shut up and go away. Still others began to think of how they could kill Jesus. And yet, even though none of them sought Jesus for what he wanted Jesus announced that he came to forgive sinners and give us peace with God. While we were yet sinners Christ died for us, the just for the unjust. He has seen us at our worst and loved us still with an undying love. He will not let lesser things be our hope and joy. So, His love has claws. But blessed are the wounds of a friend... especially the wounds of Jesus' love and mercy.