

The paralysed take the plunge

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[0 : 00] Now let's turn to that passage that we read in Mark's Gospel, Mark chapter 2, and especially verses 11 to 14.

Mark chapter 2, verses 11 to 14. I tell you, get up, take your mat, and go home. He got up, took his mat, and walked out in full view of the law.

This amazed everyone, and they praised God, saying, we have never seen anything like this. Once again, Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them.

As he walked along, he saw Levi, son of Alphaeus, sitting at the tax collector's booth. Follow me, Jesus told him. And Levi got up and followed him.

I wonder, do you sometimes feel as you sit in church that you're being asked to do the impossible?

[1 : 04] I think sometimes when we listen to the Gospel being preached, we feel that we can't respond to it. It seems something too big, something too great, something really too impossible for us really to respond to.

The great question, of course, is, when we do feel like that, is, do you feel comfortable with that conclusion? Or are you aligned by it?

Because that makes all the difference in the world. Here are two men Jesus met. And it seemed, in different ways, impossible for them to respond to Jesus.

First there was the paralyzed man. And then there was Levi and Matthew, the tax collector.

And in different ways, it would have appeared to them that there was an impossibility about their situation and about what Jesus wanted. And so, I think that may be helpful for us as we think of this question for ourselves.

[2 : 24] But sometimes, we feel it's impossible for us to respond to the preaching of God's Word. I want to look with you first at the paralysis of sin.

Now that's something that obviously springs to mind in connection with the man who was physically paralyzed. He was physically paralyzed.

That meant he was unable to move. Now we don't know the extent of his paralysis. We don't know, was he what today would be called paraplegic or quadriplegic.

In other words, did he have the use of his arms? Or did he not have the use of any of his limbs? We don't know the extent of the paralysis. But he was paralyzed, physically paralyzed.

But the Lord Jesus draws his attention, and draws the attention of all of us, to a deeper paralysis. When the first words he addresses to the man has got nothing to do with his physical paralysis.

[3 : 37] He says to him, in verse 5, Son, your sins are forgiven. Now that implies that Jesus, as he looked at this man, in all his appalling physical need, stressed that there was an even greater need that he had to deal with first, and that was his spiritual need.

And he was really drawing a parallel between his physical condition and his spiritual one. And he was saying, you have got a terrible physical condition.

You're paralyzed. But there is an even worse condition that I must address first, and that is your spiritual paralysis. You are paralyzed by sin, and I must deal with your sin, I must remove your sin, I must forgive your sin, so that you're going to be able to be cured of this paralysis.

Now similarly, with Levi, the tax collector, we can compare other things we know in the Gospels with this incident, and we can see that in another sense, Levi too suffered from a kind of paralysis.

We know that he was a tax collector. And we know that the tax collectors in those days were locked into a sinful lifestyle.

[5 : 05] We see it most clearly, I think, with Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector in Jericho. We see that when Jesus' power and Jesus' love touched his life, a change came about in it, and the change affected his lifestyle.

It affected the way he handled money. Up until that time, he had been out for himself, he had been out to make as much money as he could by extorting money from people falsely, by taking too much taxes, and all the rest of it.

But when he was changed by Jesus Christ, his lifestyle was changed. And he said that he would give half of what he owed to the poor, and if he had cheated anyone, he would pay back four times the amount.

Well, that wouldn't have left him with very much himself. And that was a tremendous change in his lifestyle. So you can see that there was, before Jesus came to him, a tremendous power of this lifestyle, this corrupt lifestyle, locking him into that kind of behavior.

And so we can imagine the same kind of thing here with Levi. Tremendous reasons why he should have kept going in that same lifestyle.

[6 : 27] The wealth that he would have from it, as well as the fact, possibly, that because he was a tax collector, he was considered to be disreputable by all the religious people.

And that, in a sense, although it might have hurt at times, it gave a certain freedom. Because then you could do what you liked. You were so bad anyway, that it didn't matter how bad you became.

And so Levi mixed with that group of society known as the tax collectors and sinners. They were social and moral outcasts from the religious, what they call the good people.

So we can see how both these men, in different ways, portray a paralyzed condition. One man paralyzed physically, but Jesus draws attention to a spiritual paralysis.

Levi paralyzed, also spiritually, locked into this sinful lifestyle. I wonder, can we identify with some of these things that are being said about Levi and about this paralyzed man?

[7 : 48] Can we identify with some of that for ourselves? That we perhaps feel that we're locked into a lifestyle. We're locked into perhaps a whole lifetime of habits that we've developed.

that we can't seem to break out of. And we seem to be confronted with an impossible situation. So much so perhaps that as we come to church, and we may come to church week after week, that we feel even before the gospel is preached, we feel it's impossible.

We feel nothing can really be done about this. We seem to be locked into this situation. We seem to be paralyzed just as surely as this man was paralyzed physically.

Well, there is truth in that impression because we're told in God's Word in Ephesians chapter 2 the Apostle Paul tells us that we are dead in trespasses and sins.

that means that when God's Word comes to us, it is not coming to people who are alive and able of themselves to respond to that Word.

[9 : 07] It's coming to people who are dead. And the great miracle, the great power of God in His Word is to make the dead come alive.

So, when we have this impression that we're paralyzed, that we're locked into a sinful lifestyle, we have a correct impression.

We are dead in our sins. Now, there are two aspects of that I want us to think about. The first aspect of it is insensitivity.

If someone is paralyzed, it means that in whatever part of their body they're paralyzed, they're unable to feel.

You see, you're paralyzed because something has gone wrong with the nervous system in that part of your body. The normal case that we tend to think about, paralysis, is to say the back has been damaged at a certain point.

[10 : 13] and from that point where the spinal cord has been damaged or broken, then there is no feeling below that point because the nerves are the parts of the body that carry the messages to bring feeling to the brain so that we're able to respond.

So, in paralysis there is an insensitivity. person who has a paralyzed limb, you touch that limb, he doesn't feel it.

He's insensitive to it. Now, when the word of God tells us that we're dead in our sins and when here, by implication, we're being told that we are paralyzed in sin, it involves this.

There is a deadness, there is a deadening of the effect of sin in our lives, a loss of feeling.

Now, that loss of feeling can express itself perhaps in different ways. It can express itself in the normal sense of the word feeling, loss of feelings, loss of emotion.

[11 : 29] It may be that we can see our own condition and we can see how bad it is, we can grasp intellectually that God's word says that we are sinners and that God's word tells us that if we continue in this condition, then we are eternally lost.

We can appreciate all these things with our mind, but it doesn't seem to have any impact upon us emotionally. It doesn't move us. You see, we're deadened.

We're deadened by sin. Sin has such an effect upon us that we are paraline. Now, it may not be that you may be guilty of gross sin, but the very fact that we are all born in sin and shaped in iniquity means that we are paralysed in sin.

We are deadened in this sense. And unless God awakens us, unless God's power by his spirit comes and touches our emotions, then we won't be able to really feel what we ought to feel with regard to our sin and our perilous conditions.

But also, of course, there is a deadening of conscience. There is a deadening effect of this particular feeling, the feeling of conscience.

[12 : 59] our conscience speaks to us and warns us about what we do that's wrong. But you see, sin has a deadening effect on conscience.

And the more we go on in sin, the more of a deadening effect it has. When we're young, when we're children, our consciences may really prick us very strongly when we know what we've done that's wrong, we're ashamed, we're embarrassed, we go and hide even physically.

But as we get older, if sin is not dealt with in our lives, then there is a deadening effect. We begin to lose the shame, we begin to lose the embarrassment.

And no longer is the conscience that once spoke so clearly and strongly to us, no longer does it seem to be functioning. We've silenced it, we've smothered it, we've deadened it.

You see, this paralysis of sin extends even to the conscience. And you see, that is a very perilous condition to be in. We may think we're all right.

[14 : 19] We may think as we think of the gospel being preached, and it not really moving us, not really having any effect on us, well, we may think, well, I don't really feel I'm all that bad.

I don't really feel I'm as bad as what the preacher says I am. And you see, that is a very perilous condition to be in. Because it's not just what the preacher says, it's what God's word says.

And if we're not moved by what God's word says, if our conscience is not affected by it, then we're in a perilous condition, and we ought to be alarmed. But our conscience has become deadened.

The things that once would have frightened us no longer frighten us, would become hardened to God's word. But not only is there an insensitivity in paralysis, there is also an inability.

The two aspects of paralysis are first, lack of feeling, secondly, lack of movement. The limb is there, it looks perfectly alright, it looks perfectly whole, but you can't move it.

[15 : 35] It's paralyzed. There is no action. Now, sin also has a paralyzing effect in this way. there is an inability, there's an incapacity in sin.

Now, that doesn't mean to say that we can't do all sorts of things as we live in this world. Of course, we live normal, physical lives and we're able to do all sorts of things.

But the incapacity of sin is this. Whatever you do as a sinner, you cannot please God.

That is the real inability of sin. The great doctrine in the scriptures called total depravity does not mean that you can't do things that are recognized as helpful to other people, beneficial to society and all these things.

sin. Nor does this doctrine mean that every single passion is as bad as it could possibly be. It doesn't mean that, because the Bible doesn't say that.

[16 : 52] What it does mean is this, that every single aspect of your personality is tainted by sin. and it makes every single aspect of your personality unable to please God because it is tainted by sin.

God's demand is absolute holiness, absolute perfection, because that's how he created us in the beginning. sin. But we are unable in any part of our personality to give that perfect love and response to God.

That's our total depravity. That is our inability of this paralysis of sin. And so it doesn't matter if you can say this morning, well, I've tried to do good in my life, I've tried to help people, well, that's great, that's good.

But it doesn't matter in regard to your relationship to God. It is not going to make you perfect. It is not going to make you acceptable in face of the law of God.

You are unable, you are dead in trespasses and sins, you are unable to please God. So that is what this paralysis of this man teaches us.

[18 : 24] That's what this condition of Levi teaches us. Here were two men who were paralyzed in sin. One showed in his own life a physical paralysis that paralleled his spiritual paralysis.

But Levi was just as much paralyzed, locked in to this sinful lifestyle. Are you paralyzed today by sin? And have you appreciated it and understood it that you are paralyzed?

Have you perhaps just accepted that and you just feel comfortable with that and you think that is some kind of excuse that you can make to God and say, well I'm paralyzed, I can't do anything.

are you alarmed by it? You're alarmed that you cannot respond. Now perhaps you look back on times when you knew God was near to you and God was speaking to you and you didn't respond.

And now you feel you can't respond. Well you ought to be alarmed by it and you ought to make sure that you heed what God is saying to you this morning in his word.

[19 : 36] today you may by his grace respond. The second thing I want to notice is this, the personal approach of Jesus to those who were so paralyzed.

We know the story of how this man came to be brought to Jesus, his friends brought him in with great effort and with great consternation no doubt to everybody else.

They lowered him down through the roof. in front of Jesus. Jesus goes directly to this man. He doesn't concentrate on his friends who've lowered him down.

He doesn't concentrate on all the kerfuffle and all the noise that's been made about this great mess being made in the house. He goes straight to this man and he says to him, son, your sins are forgiven.

man. You see, Jesus makes a personal approach and a very direct approach to this individual man.

[20 : 45] And that is what God does to us in Jesus Christ still today. He doesn't just address us all as sinners, as a sinful human race.

today he speaks to us as individuals. He makes a direct approach to us so that his word today is not being spoken to a congregation, it's being spoken to individuals.

And you know, that is what people discover when they come to know the grace of God. So often preachers have heard this being said to them, you know, I felt there was nobody else there in the church, I felt you were talking to me.

Sometimes they say, how could you have known those things about me? Did somebody tell you about me? Because you see, God by his spirit has enabled the preacher to so address the word of God to that particular individual, that that particular individual has felt exposed.

He has felt his own sin exposed and condemned. And he has felt that God is speaking directly to him. And that is what God is doing today to you. He is speaking directly to you.

[21 : 59] If you will hear him, if you will respond to him. He is speaking in this direct personal approach. Jesus Christ, speaking to you today just as much as he was speaking to the paralyzed man or to Levi.

Notice also how he made the same direct personal approach to Levi. We don't know what history there was before this. how much Levi knew him before or how little he knew of him before.

But Jesus as he was walking along he saw Levi sitting at the tax collector's booth and he said follow me. Well you can't get much more direct or more blunt than that.

Jesus again made this direct approach. And notice that in this particular case it is brought out that he demands a response.

You see he doesn't just say something to Levi that can be left at that. He's giving him a command. He's giving him an invitation that must be responded to follow me.

[23 : 11] in the same way he comes to us today in our paralyzed condition. He personally approaches us and he demands a personal response.

He demands a response of faith. both with Levi and with the paralyzed man he demanded that they should trust him.

There was Levi sitting at his receipt of custom. There he was locked into that sinful lifestyle with all the benefits that flowed from it.

He knew it all. He maybe knew the debit side as well as the credit side. He knew the downside as well as the upside. But he knew it. It was familiar to him.

He could rely upon it. But here Jesus comes and he says to him, follow me. And suddenly Levi is presented with the unknown.

[24 : 13] What's going to happen? There's only one thing he knew. He knew Jesus. There before him asking him to follow him. It was a question of personal commitment to him. It was a question of personal trust.

In the same way the paralyzed man was asked after Jesus had said to him, your sins are forgiven. He was asked, get up, take your mat and go home.

Again, a direct personal approach that demanded a response. It demanded trust in the Lord Jesus and commitment to him. Now that is the way that Jesus dealt with everybody that he met to whom he made this kind of approach.

It is a direct personal approach. And it is demanding a personal response of faith and commitment. And that is exactly how Jesus speaks to us today.

He speaks to you and he's not demanding of you in itself a changed lifestyle. That comes later. He's not demanding of you to jump through all kinds of hoops or to follow all kinds of regulation.

[25 : 27] What he is demanding of you is that you turn your attention from everything else and your eyes are focused on him. Imagine that day when Jesus spoke to that man.

You could have heard a pin drop I bet in that place even though a few moments before there had been bits of tile and plaster and everything falling on the floor. But at this moment you would have heard a pin drop as Jesus said to this paralyzed man, I tell you get up, take your mat and go home.

There was this directness of Jesus' approach to this man and Jesus is speaking to you just as directly today and he demands a response.

But notice how in this personal approach of Jesus he was demanding the seemingly impossible. You see this man was paralyzed and Jesus was saying get up and go home.

And with Levi locked into his comfortable sinful lifestyle Jesus was saying follow me. It seemed impossible.

[26 : 45] and so I want to look with you at what we may call the plunge of faith. Because in having faith, in coming to trust Jesus Christ, you are taking a plunge.

That's what we see illustrated here in both these cases. They were faced, as I've indicated, with the seemingly impossible. impossible. Now, often in life we may be faced with a seeming impossible.

I don't know if you've ever learned to swim. But before you learn to swim, it seems to you impossible that the water can support your body.

Now, you may be presented with all the scientific arguments as to why your body could actually float in the water. But it wouldn't make the slightest bit of difference to you as emotionally you felt it is utterly impossible that I can float in the water.

It is utterly impossible that this water can support me. Because every time I've gone into the water, I've gone down. And you see, as you think today about your response to the Lord Jesus, you may be thinking like that.

[28 : 11] You may think it's impossible. I'm locked into sin. I'm paralyzed. Any time I've ever tried to make any kind of move towards spiritual things, towards the Lord Jesus, I've sunk.

It hasn't really got me anywhere. water. Well, that's a feeling that I'm sure every person who has come to trust in Jesus can identify with.

And it's a feeling that every person who ever learned to swim can identify with. But the point is, there comes the time when you commit yourself to the water.

There comes the time when you trust. You may have been given all the good advice, you may have been shown all the right way, but there comes the time when you commit yourself.

now this is exactly the same with faith. There are all kinds of things that may hold you back, or may be trying to hold you back, and we know that we have an enemy of our souls who delights to hold us back, and he uses all these kinds of arguments to hold us back.

[29 : 34] But there comes the time when you must take the plunge. You must come to the time when you do the seemingly impossible. You see, it seems impossible that you can be freed from sin.

It seems impossible that there can be a change come into your life. But as Jesus confronts you with this demand for commitment to him, and as you respond to that in trust, you suddenly discover that the impossible is possible.

You suddenly discover that as you do the thing, it becomes real, and it becomes something incredibly possible. So, these two men took the plunge.

These two men did the seeming impossible. There was the paralyzed man, he was lying on his bed. He had to be brought to Jesus by his friends. And when they couldn't get in the door, they couldn't sort of lift him up off his bed and sort of walk him into the house.

They had to take him up on the roof, knock a hole in the roof, and lower him down. He was absolutely helpless. And now Jesus says to him, get up, take your mat and go home.

[30 : 59] He told him to do the impossible. But the man got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. He did what seemed impossible.

He took the plunge. As Jesus told him to do this, he responded. And as he responded, he found he was able to do the thing that he couldn't do before.

And that's exactly it. There's a mystery in it, of course. And there's a mystery in it every time a sinful human being responds to the Lord Jesus. But it is as you respond, you are given the strength.

And here I think we see something of the secret of that mystery. Because the final thing I want to think about is the power of Jesus evidenced here.

it is brought out earlier in the passage when Jesus says in verse 10, but that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.

[32 : 15] He said to the man, get up, take up your mat and walk. In other words, this was a question of Jesus' authority, authority of Jesus' power to do what he decided to do.

And we see that Jesus had the power to do the impossible. You see, it was Jesus' power that flowed to this man.

He gave the paralyzed strength. power to so that there was this mysterious coincidence of the man's faith, his response to Jesus and the actual ability to respond.

Where did the ability come from? It didn't come from the man himself, it came from Jesus, who at that moment gave him the power, miraculously healed him.

in the same way, Jesus, he tells us in this very passage, has authority to forgive sins.

[33 : 23] Now, what's at the root of our problem? What's at the root of all our paralysis? It is sin. We are dead in trespasses and sin. Jesus has authority on earth to forgive sins.

Why is he authority? Because he is the one God has appointed to deal with sin. He came for this very purpose to bear our sins upon himself upon the cross, to pay the price of our sin, so that he can remit sin, he can forgive sin, he can remove sin.

And so Jesus has the power to deal with the paralysis of our sin. Today, as we may be conscious of some particular sins, or as we may be meditating on the truth of God's word, that we are sinners, this is what we must turn to, the one who came into the world to deal with sin.

Christ died for our sins. It was the Apostle Paul's succinct summary of what the gospel is. Christ died for our sins.

So, Jesus has the power today to remove sin, to forgive your sin, and to deal with the power of sin in your life, so that at this very moment you respond to him, he gives you the power to respond, and he gives you the power to trust in him, and to live for him.

[35 : 00] And, of course, involved in this, as we see particularly in the case of Levi, is that Jesus gives the grace of personal commitment and faith in Christ himself.

You see, when Jesus told Levi to follow him, we're told that Levi got up and followed him. There was this immediate response on the part of Levi.

Levi locked into his sinful life, yet responded. by committing himself and committing his whole life to Jesus. So that he left there all his worldly possessions, all his hope of worldly advancement, and he followed Jesus.

Now, let's make no mistake here. We're not told in the Bible that everybody has simply to leave their worldly responsibilities and assets and all the rest of it.

Because Zacchaeus was a tax collector just the same as Jesus, just the same as Levi, but Jesus did not tell him that he had to leave everything and follow him.

[36 : 16] What he told Zacchaeus by implication was that he had to put right what was wrong in his lifestyle, and that's what Zacchaeus was committed to doing. He was following him nonetheless in his own situation.

But here we see it in this dramatic and striking way that Matthew was called to leave all his means of worldly advancement and power and all the rest of it and to follow Jesus.

And by God's grace through Jesus Christ he was enabled to do so. He was personally committed to Christ. So today the Lord Jesus is able to give that grace to you so that you will follow him, so that your lifestyle will now be changed.

The whole direction of your life will be towards Jesus and considering well what does Jesus want me to do, how does Jesus want me to live, I want to follow him, I want to live the kind of life that pleases him.

Jesus is also able to do that, he's got the power to act in your life in that way. So this morning as you perhaps have been confronted again by something of the impossibility of your situation, the paralysis of sin, remember the power of Jesus Christ to deal with your sin.

[37 : 48] Remember he is personally approaching you and demands a personal response. by God's grace, may you know that response and the reality of its life changing power in your own experience.

Let us pray. our gracious and loving heavenly father, we thank you for your own word that speaks to us about real people who lived long ago in different kinds of circumstances, in a different society, and yet people with the same feelings as ourselves, people with the same problems as ourselves, people who are sinners just like us.

And we thank you that it tells us of how Jesus met them and dealt with them. Enable us to know that today his power and his concern is just as much as it was then.

We pray that your Holy Spirit would apply these words that have come from your word. and that all that is away from the purpose and away from the point would be forgotten.

But that which is your true word would be applied to our hearts and would be life-changing. O Lord, we so need that life-changing power of your word and your spirit to be active in our society.

[39 : 27] yet we know that you don't change societies in themselves. You change individuals and thus change societies. O Lord, we pray that you would please bless your word to individuals today that our society itself may be transformed by this grace and this power.

Lord, we ask all these things in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.