

The love that brings

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[0 : 00] Now let's turn to the first of these passages we read from the Gospels. Luke's Gospel, chapter 5, and especially verses 18 and 19.

Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.

I wonder how far you would go in your attempts to bring someone to Jesus. Would you go as far as these men went to bring their friend to Jesus?

How far would you go to bring someone who was ill? To the doctor. In many places of the world, people have to carry their relatives for miles to get them to a doctor or to a hospital in places like India or Africa.

We, of course, take so many of our privileges for granted that we've got doctors handy and near, and we've got cars or ambulances to rush us quickly there if necessary.

[1 : 26] How much trouble would we go to bring our friends or our relatives to the doctor or to the hospital if they needed help?

Well, it would depend, would it not, upon how much you thought of them, how much you loved them. If you really loved someone, well, you would go through anything. You would expend any amount of effort and trouble and time to save their lives, to get them healed.

Well, these men were concerned to such an extent for their friend to bring him to Jesus. How much do you love your family, your friends?

Do you love them to the extent that you will be prepared to do anything possible to bring them to the Lord Jesus?

That's what we're thinking about this evening. I want to notice with you first the need of this man, the need of this friend that they brought to Jesus.

[2 : 35] Some men came carrying a paralytic. In other words, here was a man who suffered, to some extent, we don't know how far it was, paralysis.

It may have been paralysis of part of his body. It may have been from the waist down. It may have been total paralysis.

He may have been a quadriplegic, unable to move arms or legs. We don't know, we're not told the details. But here was someone who was paralyzed. And saw someone in tremendous need.

You know, there were people whom Jesus met and Jesus helped, who had various handicaps. Some who were blind, some who were deaf and dumb. But these were people who had, if you like, only one faculty that was affected.

And so some of these people could still sit by the roadside begging. They could do something to help themselves. This man was paralyzed. He couldn't do anything.

[3 : 45] Even the blind man, blind Bartimaeus, could shout out as he heard Jesus passing, Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me. But this man couldn't even get where Jesus was.

He couldn't even get within earshot of him. He was paralyzed. Well, of course, there are various needs that people have that might make us think of them and of their need of what Jesus has to offer.

Our friends and members of our family, those known to us, may have various needs. They may have emotional needs at the present time.

They may have problems or trouble. There may be social problems affecting their relationship with other people.

There may be all kinds of problems that may highlight their need. But what is brought home to us, surely, is that these men here had the concern to bring their friend, their paralyzed friend, their needy friend, to Jesus.

[5 : 03] Now, of course, they did so knowing that Jesus was someone who was concerned about the needy. He was concerned about someone who had trouble or distress or handicap or something that crippled them or whatever.

They knew what Jesus was like. So they were bringing their friend to Jesus. Do we have that concern for the people around us? Many people around us, our friends, our acquaintances, maybe even members of our own family, with so many different problems, often in distressing circumstances, and we feel so incapable of really doing anything to help them.

The whole situation seems so intractable. It seems just like this man who was paralyzed. What could these friends do to help him? Well, maybe they did what they could every day, but it didn't really solve the problem.

But they knew that there was someone who could help this man. And so they brought him to Jesus. Now, do we have that as the deep conviction of our heart?

That there is someone who can help those in distress. There is someone who can help those near and dear to us, those who are our friends or acquaintances, those for whom we are concerned.

[6 : 33] There is someone who can help them and help them in the way in which they really need to be helped. You see, as we will notice, these men came and brought this man and they laid him before Jesus.

We are not told that they said anything. We are not told that they demanded anything. They brought him to Jesus. Are we concerned enough for the people we know to do just that, to do as these people did, to bring our friends, our family, our acquaintances to Jesus?

Well, you may say, well, yes, I am. I am concerned enough, but how do I do it? Because, you see, it's not the same, is it? When Jesus was here on earth, you could get together, a few of you.

You could get a bed or a hammock of some kind and you could put your friend in it and you could cart him off there to the place where Jesus was. You can't do that today. It's different.

How does all this apply to me today, you see? Well, of course, there are two ways in which you can do this, two ways in which you can express your concern.

[7 : 46] And we'll be thinking about these as we go along this evening. But there is prayer and there is bringing people to hear the word of Christ.

There's prayer. Laying people before Jesus in that sense. Bringing to his attention their needs, their troubles, their temptations, their sins.

Bringing all these things to him. But also, there is the more physical bringing of people to hear his word.

For we are firmly convinced, are we not, that people can meet with the living Lord Jesus Christ today, just as surely as this man did in the preaching of his word.

That where the gospel is proclaimed, there Jesus is, to meet with people and to bless them. So these are the things we're going to be thinking about this evening in the light of the tremendous needs that are around us.

[8 : 53] But of course, the condition of this man reminds us of the more profound need of all human beings. Here was a man who was paralyzed.

Now many of the diseases and handicaps and disabilities that Jesus dealt with and healed speak of something greater than themselves.

Jesus used the blindness of a blind man and his healing of that blindness to remind others who thought that they could see that they couldn't really.

In other words, he was speaking of spiritual blindness. And surely here too, the paralysis of this man speaks to us also of sin. It speaks to us of the absolutely debilitating effects of sin.

Sin paralyzes us in our relationship to God. The Bible speaks of our inability to please God in our natural condition.

[10 : 01] You see, that is the condition of your friends, members of your family who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the condition of every one of us in our natural state, without grace and without God.

We are unable to please God. We are paralyzed. We have this paralysis of sin that prevents us from coming to God, from seeking to please God.

And that's why we're in the condition we are. Sin has paralyzed us. So this man speaks to us too, of this general condition, of all people everywhere.

We are surrounded by people. People who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ. And they're like this man, paralyzed. And they need someone who's going to pray for them.

They need someone who's going to bring them to where they're going to hear about the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what we're concerned about this evening.

[11 : 12] Are you deeply aware of the need of those around you? Not just the need of society in general, but specific people known to you.

Have you that concern that these men had concerning their friend so that they would bring him to Jesus? Well, we see the need of this man.

But secondly, we see the opportunity. They were presented with a tremendous opportunity. We read at the end of verse 17, and the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick.

Now, I'm not going to go into that in any detail, because I don't understand totally what's meant there. But what I do understand is this, that there was a tremendous window of opportunity presented to these men there.

Jesus was there, and we're told that the power of the Lord was there, the power of the Lord to heal. Now, I'm not going to go into all the other explanations that we could bring in here, and questions we could raise as to whether at other times the power of the Lord wasn't there and so on.

[12 : 26] I'm not concerned about that this evening. I'm concerned about what this brings before us. There was this opportunity presented, the power of the Lord present to heal.

Now, we too are presented with tremendous opportunities. We all know that at the present time, we are being presented with a tremendous opportunity when Billy Graham comes to preach here.

I don't know if we've all really grasped what a great opportunity this is, because here is someone whose name is known.

Here is someone who is admitted into the very highest levels, into the White House in the States, and is familiar with politicians throughout the world.

Here is someone who is known in the media. These are things that haven't just happened. We believe that God is in control of all things, control of history.

[13 : 29] He is in control of this. And he has brought about this marvelous situation where a Christian man of good Christian character has been put into such a position.

And a man who has been given by God tremendous preaching gifts. God's hand is in this. And so we today are being presented with a tremendous opportunity so that people will know what we're talking about when we say Billy Graham.

they will have some idea of what he stands for, what he represents, that he is a preacher of the gospel. And that he preaches it anywhere, not just in churches, but in stadiums and so on.

And anybody and all different kinds of people can go along to hear him. Here we're being presented with a tremendous opportunity when a tremendous amount of work and preparation has been put into all of this.

all the work and arranging these meetings and all the prayer that has been offered to God asking him to bless the preaching of his word on these occasions.

[14 : 43] And then of course there is the preacher himself who is, as I referred to this morning, a preacher who has preached to more people than any other preacher that has ever lived.

A preacher who preached on one occasion to over a million people in one place, in Seoul, in South Korea. These are staggering things.

And that God has raised up this man to proclaim his word and to proclaim the gospel, that it is only through Christ that people can have eternal life.

But above all, we believe that these things have happened, these things have come to take place because of the power of God.

That's what our text says here. It's very easy for people to focus upon the preparation, the organization, or upon the man himself. But you see, isn't it the power of God?

[15 : 44] If you asked a great preacher like Billy Graham, what is the explanation of it all? Well, he wouldn't say, oh, it's my gift, it's my organization. He would say, it's the power of God. He would say, it is the message that I proclaim and it is the power of God applying that message.

And so we have this tremendous opportunity at the present time when the power of God is present in this remarkable way. Well, you may say, that is a great, unique opportunity.

But what about when this opportunity may be passed? Is that the only opportunity we can ever have in our Christian lives? Of course not. And I think if we lay all the emphasis on this as the great opportunity, then we do not do justice to all of what God's word says to us about this.

Because you see, the power of God is present to heal and to change people's lives wherever these things are. Wherever there is prayer for God to bless.

Wherever there is the preaching of the gospel. And wherever there is a desire on the part of God's people that there indeed would be a blessing of that preaching.

[17 : 07] And so we've got to be concerned for the opportunities that we have. The opportunities that we have week after week where the gospel is proclaimed. You see, when Billy Graham comes to Scotland, that's not the only time the gospel is preached in Scotland.

it is preached every large day up and down this land. And so we've got to be concerned that we're praying for these opportunities. We've got to be concerned that we're praying for the preachers who are preparing the message and who are preaching the message that the power of God would fall upon that preaching and that people's lives might be changed.

And we've got to be concerned that we are making use of these great opportunities. We have this great window of opportunity when Billy Graham comes to preach.

Are we concerned that we will bring people who are in need of the gospel of God to hear Billy Graham preach? We ought to be. Are we concerned that we will bring people not only at that opportunity of the mission but week after week here to hear the preaching of the gospel?

It is the same God. It is the same power of God. It is the same gospel of God. And surely it is that ongoing work faithfully done year after year that is something that God owns as well as the great times of opportunity such as a mission presents.

[18 : 50] So these men saw the need of their friend and they saw their opportunity. But of course that would not be enough without the fact that they took action.

In verse 18 some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. You see it is great to appreciate the needs of people around us and it is great to see the opportunities that are presented to us but we could do those things we could grasp those things with our minds we could see that these things are so we could even be moved by the needs of others around us and yet not actually take any action about it.

And if Mission Scotland does nothing else but to impress upon us the need for action the need to actually do the things that so often we talk about well if it only does that it surely will be worthwhile and a great blessing because you see these men didn't just see the need of their friend they were aware of that they didn't just see their opportunity but they actually brought him to Jesus.

Now involved in that of course there were such things as planning and cooperation because you see one of them couldn't have brought that man on his own he had to be carried no doubt some considerable distance and so he had to be carried as Mark's gospel tells us by four men one at each corner of his mat or of his little bed to carry him to Jesus.

So these four at least had to get together to organize themselves to plan this operation and to work together to do it. Now there I believe is a picture of what is required in the New Testament concerning the work of the church.

[20 : 53] And especially the work of evangelism. We sometimes talk about evangelism as the art of man fishing because Jesus spoke about the fact that he was making his disciples fishers of men.

And sometimes the picture we have of that is of the lone fisherman with his rod and line fishing away. But the picture that Jesus no doubt had in his mind as he called these fishermen was the picture that was so familiar there on the Sea of Galilee.

a team of people people like James and John people like Peter joining together in their boat working together to catch the fish with their nets.

And so we're reminded that evangelism is not just an individual affair. Praise God for the individuals who see the need for evangelism and go ahead with it if nobody else is doing it.

And so often the churches have been falling down and individuals have done what the church at large ought to be doing. But you see the biblical pattern is that we should be working together on this.

[22 : 08] And isn't it good also that in Mission Scotland we have this opportunity to do that? Working together at a congregational level to be concerned and committed. Working together too with Christians of other churches who believe that salvation is through Jesus Christ alone.

Working together with them in this work of the gospel. So there is planning and there's cooperation in these things. But then of course these men actually did it.

They didn't just talk about it they didn't just think about it they didn't just feel about it they actually did it. They made plans they made preparations they maybe thought the thing out but they did it.

And that of course is what it comes down to. Mission Scotland will be a total failure if it's just Christians who go along to Pottery and to Murrayfield at the Celtic Park.

Total failure. Because Christians are already in the kingdom of God they're already saved. What's the point in them going to be entertained? we need as Christians to make sure that we are bringing along others who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ who need him.

[23 : 22] And that's what these men were doing they actually brought this man to Jesus. And of course their purpose as we mentioned already their purpose was to lay him before Jesus.

Now isn't that a tremendous thing that's said there? because so often we can go wrong because we've got our own mind made up as to the kind of help people need. And in our praying and in our dealing with people we've got our minds made up and we're thinking this is what they need and we need to go about things this way with this person.

But really so often what we need to do is to lay this person before Jesus. We need to say Lord there are problems here I don't even begin to comprehend.

There are needs here there are sins here that I don't even begin to comprehend. I simply lay this person before you.

I ask you to bless them I ask you to reach out to them. And similarly in our bringing of people we don't know what the preacher is going to preach.

[24 : 32] That's true just as much of a mission like it's coming up as of week by week when God's word is being proclaimed. But we simply need to bring our friend or the member of our family and pray that God would speak to this person in the way that God sees fit.

You see so often we may be concerned that well we don't know what the preacher is going to say. We don't exactly know what the service is going to be like so we don't invite someone.

Surely our faith ought to be in God and the power of God to speak to that person and although we may think it's a totally inappropriate service has no relevance at all to that person so often it is shown to be the case that something quite surprising has spoken to a person.

Sometimes a service may appear to be of primary relevance to Christians and yet a non-Christian has been blessed through it. They have heard of something about the Christian life and they've said well that's something I've never heard of before that's something I would like to know more about that's something I would like to have and so God has spoken to that person.

So we come and we lay that person before the Lord Jesus Christ. That's surely what we seek to do in bringing people to him. But then these four friends encountered difficulties.

[26 : 02] It wasn't plain sailing was it as these friends brought this paralyzed man to Jesus and it's never plain sailing when we try to bring people to him either. There was of course quite simply first of all the crowds verse 19 when they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd.

Now we may say well what a tremendous problem to have. You see Jesus was there and he was teaching we're told in one of the other gospels and people were crowding there to hear him.

They were in the house they were around the house outside the house so that these men couldn't get near him. We may say what a tremendous problem to have. Would that here tonight the church was crammed packed full so that it was difficult for people to get in.

What a great problem to have you may think. But it was a problem to these men. A problem that they couldn't get near to Jesus. And sometimes it's not just the problems of apparent failure that cause us difficulty but also the problems of success.

The bigger a church gets the more impersonal things become. The more people feel lost in the crowd. The more difficult perhaps it is for someone who would perhaps like to speak to the minister but can't pluck up courage to do so the more difficult it is for that person to do so.

[27 : 25] Or to speak to an office bearer or to anyone. So you see we've got to be conscious of these things. And we've got to know that there are problems that we've got to face up to and we've got to be concerned about and we've got to be praying about.

But there was a specific difficulty mentioned here for we read in verse 17 as he was teaching Pharisees and teachers of the law who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem were sitting there.

In other words there weren't just crowds of ordinary people we may say but the place was jammed full of these theologians and academics and people who were only interested in being critical of Jesus.

And you know it's often the case that that too is a tremendous difficulty which we confront. That people have all sorts of wrong understandings of Christianity because of people like this.

They think Christianity today is represented by someone like the Bishop of Durham. And these people have such a high profile on television and in the media.

[28 : 39] They are there crowding out people from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And you know that's some problem that we've got to face up to today too.

We've got to be concerned about that these kind of problems and difficulties will be overcome. Now how did these men face up to these difficulties?

Well the way they faced up to them was with persistence. They came there to the house. They had heard Jesus was going to be there. They carried their friend we don't know how long.

They arrived there and the place was crammed. And they said we can't do anything here we might as well go back home. Is that what they said? No. They said we're here.

Our friend is in need. We know that Jesus can help. The power of the Lord is here present to heal. We're not going to go back. We're going to get in there somehow.

[29 : 40] So in other words they didn't give up. how many times we've been concerned about people maybe prayed about people for a little while.

Then things got difficult. We've maybe tried to witness to people and maybe to begin with they listened to us and discussed things but then gradually they seem to build up resistance against it so that no longer do they seem open to talk about these things.

And so we give up. We come up against problems and difficulties in trying to bring people to the Lord Jesus Christ and so we give up. These men are before us as a standing example of how not to give up.

They came there and they were confronted with a seemingly impossible situation but they didn't let it put them on. They would stop at nothing to get their friend to Jesus and they did a most unorthodox thing.

They climbed up onto the roof of the house. We don't know whose house it was but they knocked a hole in the poor man's roof and they lowered their friend down in front of Jesus. Now that speaks to us of the tremendous commitment these men had to their friend and the tremendous faith they had in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[31 : 06] You see they weren't prepared to be put off by all the problems. They weren't prepared to be put off by the crowds. They weren't prepared to be put off by these theological know-it-alls.

They weren't prepared to be put off by any of these difficulties. They were going to get their friend to Jesus and lay him there in front of him. Have we got that kind of persistence in prayer and in witnessing and in bringing people to the Lord Jesus?

We need to have that if we are really going to be successful in serving the Lord Jesus Christ today. And finally we see that these men had success.

These men had success. If they had given up halfway along, if they had said well there's no way we can get in today, we'll come back tomorrow, maybe Jesus wouldn't have been there tomorrow.

Maybe the time of opportunity was gone. But these men didn't give up. And these men saw success. We're told in verse 20 that Jesus saw their faith.

[32 : 16] Remarkable expression. Because you don't usually think of faith as something that is seen. Think of faith as something unseen. Faith is something we exercise in our minds.

It's not apparent perhaps so often to other people that we do have faith. But here these men's faith was seen. I wonder if that standard was applied to us.

Could people see our faith? Your workmates, your neighbors, members of your family, do they see your faith?

Oh yeah, they may have heard about it, they may say oh yes, such and such a person goes to church, he's a churchman. But do they see your faith? is it a reality in day-to-day experience?

The faith of these men was. It was real. Jesus could see it. And everybody could see it. Because these men believed in Jesus to the extent that they were prepared to create havoc with this man's house to get this man in there in front of Jesus.

[33 : 26] how committed are we to bringing people to the Lord Jesus for him to deal with them.

And then of course in this successful outcome of what these men did, there is the fact that Jesus saw to the root of the trouble. You see, the first words of Jesus to this man was not concerning his paralysis, paralysis, it was concerning his spiritual paralysis.

He says to the man, the first words he said, friend, your sins are forgiven. Now you see, there is the remarkable thing. Maybe the friends had never ever thought of such a thing.

Maybe something like that never entered their head that this is what Jesus would say. But they were prepared to simply come and lay this man before Jesus. Now we're prepared to do that, to be open minded in that right spiritual way.

Jesus will deal with our friends, the members of our families. Jesus knows what's wrong. Jesus knows the particular point of need. Jesus knows where his word is going to have entry into their minds.

[34 : 42] Jesus knows what perhaps secret sin they have that you don't know anything about that's holding them back. But the word of God will come to them and will speak to them at that point of need.

You need to bring people simply to that place where they can meet with Jesus and hear his word. And so that was the beginning of this great transformation in this man's life.

There followed physical transformation upon the spiritual. And that reminds us that of course someone coming to know the Lord Jesus Christ their whole lives are changed.

we're not always promised complete healing for physical problems in this life. But we know that there are intractable problems in society today that can be dealt with when a man is transformed by the grace of God.

Millions of pounds in our society are wasted because of alcoholism. that when a person comes to know the Lord Jesus Christ it's not just that he is saved that he has eternal life his whole life is transformed he is free from his addiction also.

[35 : 59] And that's but one example of the great transforming power of Jesus Christ. And so as we look at the many problems around us today and maybe problems of people known to us and dear to us we know that what we have to do is to bring them and lay them before the Lord Jesus Christ and ask him to speak to them to deal with them.

But we must bring them. We must bring them in prayer and we must bring them physically to hear the preaching of the word of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we have that compassion that these men had for their friend then we'll stop at nothing until we get them there.

so how much do you and I love our friends and members of our family? Do we love them to this extent that we're prepared to stop at nothing to bring them to Jesus?

Let us pray. Our gracious and loving Heavenly Father we recognize that your word rebukes us as well as encourages us and we have to confess that at the present time your word has exposed our own sin and our own failure even as your people.

Oh Lord we pray that you would look upon us in mercy not only forgiving our sin but equipping us and encouraging us to change the way we look at things and the way that we act so that we may indeed seek to actively encourage others to come to the Christ whom we know.

[37 : 49] And we do pray your blessing upon the preaching of your own word and the preaching of the gospel in the coming days whether in the mission or week by week in the churches in this city and throughout this land that gracious Lord you might stir up your people to be concerned to pray for its success and concerned to bring others to hear this marvelous word of life which we know.

We ask these things in Jesus name. Amen.