

**"THE SON OF MAN HATH POWER ON EARTH TO
FORGIVE SINS."**

– MARCH 11. – MARK 2:1-12. –

FOLLOWING the miracle of our last lesson and probably other miracles not recorded in this connection, our Lord apparently made another preaching tour; after returning to his home city of Capernaum the incidents of this lesson transpired. Evidently our Lord, with his mother and brethren, had been making Capernaum his home for some time, and it is entirely probable that the house mentioned in this lesson was our Lord's own home. Dr. Schoff suggests that according to the Greek text this might read "at home," instead of "in the house." As we saw in our last lesson, however, Capernaum was the home also of Peter and Andrew, and the incident of this lesson might possibly have occurred there, though this is less probable.

The return of the young and wonderful Teacher to His own city and home was soon widely known – "noised;" the result was a considerable concourse of people, not only filling the house and the courtyard, but even the door or gateway. Amongst these callers were Pharisees and Doctors of the Law (rabbis, scribes), who came out of the various towns of Galilee and Judea to hear Jesus, and to note his miracles. – See Luke 5:17-18.

Our Lord's mission was the preaching of the Gospel, and, as already pointed out, the healings, miracles, etc., were incidentals, and not by any means his chief work or object – the "times of restitution" (Acts 3:21) not having come, the miracles of our Lord were merely attestations to and corroborative of his teachings respecting the Kingdom and the Kingdom class which he had come to call and gather – out of Israel and from amongst the Gentiles. Undoubtedly he preached the same message delivered in Nazareth respecting the Lord's spirit being upon him, anointing him to preach the good tidings

to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted and to declare a coming deliverance to the captives of sin and death, and the restoration of sight to those blinded by Satan, and the setting at liberty of all the captives subject to the bondage of corruption, but probably this one message was presented from various standpoints at various times, and various texts used, as also various parables introduced in illustration of it. This, however, was the "Word," the message, which our Lord was commissioned to deliver, and we may be sure he did it faithfully.

While our Lord was in the midst of his discourse a paralytic, evidently full of faith, borne on a stretcher of some kind by four friends, sought opportunity to reach him, with full faith in his power and willingness to heal. Finding no opportunity of making their way through the crowd, the bearers took their burden onto the roof by the outside stairway, customary in that country – the buildings being usually but one story in height. It is not at all probable that the building and roof were of the ordinary kind that would have obliged that lifting of stones and cement and dirt, and the breaking of the plaster beneath, for this would involve an absurdity, and the falling of the stones and debris and dust upon our Lord and the congregation would have been insufferable as well as dangerous. The more reasonable supposition is that the house was one of the less common kind, enclosing a courtyard capable of accommodating quite a large audience, the living rooms being built around the wall of the courtyard at one end, and a veranda or porch-roof over a part of the open court, covered with tiles, which could be removed without much difficulty. The thought would be that our Lord stood under this veranda, preaching; that some of his audience were likewise under it and others standing out, exposed to the sunshine in the court. Dr. Thompson makes the following comment:

"The whole affair was the extemporaneous device of plain peasants accustomed to opening their roofs and letting down grain, straw and other articles, as they still do in this (Eastern) country. I have often seen it done, and have done it myself, to houses in [R2583 : page

61] Lebanon. I have the impression, however, that the covering, at least of the lewan (court) was not made of earth, but of coarse matting, or boards, or stone slabs, that could be quickly removed." – Compare Luke 5:19.

Our Lord was not offended by this intrusion; He doubtless remembered that all things work together for good to the Lord's people, who will accept them thus. So far from feeling offended at the intrusion and persistency, he entirely overlooked these when balancing them with the quality which he so much admires – faith. All of the Lord's people can well take note of this lesson, and learn more and more to accept the affairs of life as they come as being all subject to divine providence and all guaranteed in advance to be profitable, to work out some good result, if we will but so permit, by receiving them in faith. Let us learn also to overlook and forget rudeness, especially where they give evidence of sincerity of heart, faith, good intentions.

In various ways we learn that under the head of "paralysis" in olden times, in Oriental countries, various diseases were included, which are now specified under different names. For instance, titanus (lockjaw) would at that time and in that country be described as paralysis – indeed, any disease which would render the individual helpless, powerless – whether merely a deadness or accompanied by violent cramps. The incidents connected with this miracle would seem to indicate that it was a serious case, and had in it something of the element of urgency – necessity for seeing the Lord quickly and obtaining his help promptly. Otherwise propriety would have dictated a different course.

It might be questioned whether the faith was that of the palsied man or that of his friends, but we think the circumstances warrant the belief that the sick man himself exercised the faith and prompted his friends to take the steps they did in obedience to his request. This is implied in the fact that our Lord does not speak of the faith of the bearers, but does speak directly to the paralytic respecting his personal

faith. Our Lord must have seen a very proper condition in the young man's heart, else he never would have said to him, unsolicited, "Son, thy sins are forgiven thee." Nor was this expression unpremeditated; our Lord evidently wished that the miracle he was about to perform should not detract from the preaching which it interrupted, but, on the contrary, should impress it as well as illustrate it. He foreknew also that such an unusual statement would awaken in his hearers questionings respecting his authority, and thus the miracle subsequently performed would emphasize the fact that he was the Messiah, and that the redemption of sinners and the forgiveness of sins had been committed to Him by the Father.

The question of the scribes (that is, the Rabbis, the Doctors of the Law), Is not such a statement blasphemy? was a very proper one, and they are not to be blamed for making the enquiry. Our Lord did not deny its propriety, but answered it by saying, It would, of course, be easy for anybody to make the claim of forgiving sins, and it might be impossible to dispute his claim, but in my case I will substantiate my claim to be able to forgive sins by my power to heal this man physically; when, therefore, you shall perceive his miraculous cure of a physical ailment, it will be a lesson respecting the truthfulness of my statement in regard to his sins – that you may know that as the Son of Man I have power, authority, to forgive sins. (Compare Luke 5:24.) Then came the healing of the paralytic, which, put in this form, became a proof, not only of our Lord's healing power, but also of his power to forgive sins. And when the sick man, in obedience to our Lord's command, took up his couch or stretcher and went forth in the presence of all, no wonder they were amazed and praised God.

Apparently all were fully satisfied with the demonstration, Luke saying that they were all filled with fear – reverence – in view of so mighty a demonstration of divine power in their midst. It was not a lesson of fear toward God in the sense of a dread of an unthinkable everlasting future torment, but a fear, in the sense of respect for the God whose love and sympathy and compassion had been so

wonderfully manifested – a God who not only was willing to forgive sins, but also willing to help and to relieve his creatures from the difficulties which sin had brought [R2584 : page 61] upon them. Say what we will about the depravity and crookedness of human reasoning, there is, after all, a power of common sense in humanity which, if properly actuated, is the strongest possible lever in moving them in the right direction – far more influential with reasoning people than all the false and unreasonable theories which could be concocted.

One lesson for us, found in this incident, is that we, like our Lord, should seek to turn every earthly matter to some good account as respects our real mission in the world – the declaration of the good tidings, and the selection of the Kingdom class to be joint-heirs with our Lord in his Millennial glory. Another thought is that in every instance the healing of the soul from the sickness and condemnation of sin should be placed first, as the highest and most important thing, far outranking physical conditions and blessings.

Although our Lord proved to his hearers that his pronouncement of forgiveness was evidently backed by power and authority, as evidenced by the miracle, nevertheless he did not explain to them the how and the why of his conduct, and hence, while giving them proof, he left the questions of their minds unanswered. His hearers belonged to the house of servants, and not to the house of sons – the holy spirit of begetting and adoption not having yet been given because Jesus was not yet glorified. (John 7:39.) To the house of sons, however, this matter is explained in the Scriptures, in the light of the holy spirit, so that we may understand the how and the why as well as the fact, thus:

There was a provision under the Jewish law for the forgiveness or covering of the sins of the people, through the offering of special sin-offerings by the priests, but our Lord Jesus was not a priest of the Aaronic order, and the palsied man before him had not brought a sin-offering, under the terms of the Jewish law. However, we see the situation in a new light when we realize that the paralytic evidently

brought to the Lord the sacrifice appropriate to the [R2584 : page 62] new dispensation, "a broken and a contrite heart," full of faith, and remember also that our Lord at his baptism assumed the office of the antitypical high priest the moment he was anointed with the holy spirit, and that his sacrifice of himself was counted as given by him and as accepted by the Father, from the moment of his consecration to death, symbolized in his water baptism. Hence we see that our Lord's authority to pronounce the forgiveness of sins was in virtue of his having sacrificed his humanity (which was in process of consummation upon the altar) while he, as a new creature, was a priest of the new order, the "royal priesthood," fully empowered to forgive sins.

Furthermore, this willingness of our Lord to forgive and to heal gives us a suggestion of his willingness and ability to do these same things (forgive the sins and heal the body) when the times of general refreshment shall come from the presence of Jehovah – "the times of restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began." – Acts 3:19-21.

THE MIRACLE VIEWED AS A PARABLE.

The various difficulties under which humanity labors, called diseases, illustrate sin in various respects; for instance, palsy or paralysis represents a condition of sin in which the individual loses his power – sometimes merely becoming impotent, in the sense of helpless: at other times, in combination with this may come an insensibility of conscience, a deadness to all principles of righteousness, such as the Apostle describes as "past feeling." In this condition are quite a good many at the present time; they are not only helpless as respects all ability to go to the great Physician, but additionally they are devoid of any desire, any appreciation of their need; they have no feeling on the subject. These must be left for the present, but we may rejoice that the time is coming, according to the promise of the Lord's Word, when all shall come to a realization, a

sensibility of sin, and to a knowledge of the way of escape from its condemnation and its penalties. In the present time, however, some, like this paralytic, are not past feeling, and yet are so helpless as to need the assistance of friends in bringing them to the Lord.

Every true Christian should be such a friend to every fellow-creature who has a desire for the Lord's blessing, and healing from sin-sickness; and such should be not only sympathetic but helpful in bringing their friends to the good Physician of the soul. Nor should they be readily stopped by impediments, obstacles, but like those in the illustration, they should be ready and willing to take advantage of every proper circumstance and condition to place their friend near to the Lord and his power, that the blessing might result. And will not the Lord be pleased with our faith as well as theirs, if we persistently do all in our power in their aid?

"True faith, like truest love, invents;
Denied the door, it circumvents."

Another thought here is that the first and most important thing for all is the forgiveness of sins. It is in vain that any would endeavor to avoid this first essential step toward acceptable Christianity. Some are inclined to put doctrine instead of faith and repentance, but this will not do. There is no use whatever in endeavoring to grow a crop of wheat on soil whose sod has not been broken. The fallow ground must first be broken up ere the seed can find proper root and bring forth fruit. So only those whose hearts have been plowed and brought into the condition of meekness and contriteness, and a desire for fellowship with the Lord – these alone are proper subjects to be brought to the Lord. True, it is not within our power to break the stony hearts, nor to plow the fallow ground; all that we can do is to note those in whose lives experiences have produced such results, and to sow the good seed of the Kingdom in such hearts. This being the case, we must not be surprised that not many are ready for present truth; but toward those who give such evidence we are not to make the mistake of leading

them to suppose that repentance and forgiveness are nonessential, but rather we are to point them to these as primary conditions upon which alone they can properly make progress, both in knowledge and in grace, so as to attain ultimately to the gracious things which God has promised to them that love him. [R2584 : page 62]

THESE MANY YEARS.

– DEUTERONOMY 8:2. –

"These many years! What lessons they unfold
Of grace and guidance through the wilderness,
From the same God that Israel of old
In the Shekinah glory did possess.
How faithful He, through all my griefs and fears
And constant murmurings these many years!

"God of the Covenant! From first to last,
From when I stood within that sprinkled door
And o'er my guilt the avenging angel passed,
Thy better angel has gone on before;
And nought but goodness all the way appears,
Unmerited and free, these many years!

"Thy presence wrought a pathway through the sea;
Thy presence made the bitter waters sweet;
And daily have Thy hands prepared for me
Sweet, precious morsels – lying at my feet.
'Twas but to stoop and taste the grace that cheers,
And start refreshed, through all these many years!

"What time I thirsted and earth's streams were dry,
What time I wandered and my hope was gone,
Thy hand has brought a pure and full supply,
And, by a loving pressure, lured me on.

How oft that hand hath wiped away my tears
And written 'Pardoned!' all these many years!

"And what of discipline Thy love ordained
Fell ever gently on this heart of mine;
Around its briars was my spirit trained
To bring forth fruits of righteousness divine;
Wisdom in every check, and love appears
In every stroke throughout these many years!

[R2584 : page 63]

"Lord, what I might have been my spirit knows –
Rebellious, petulant, and apt to stray:
Lord, what I am, in spite of flesh and foes,
I owe to grace that kept me in the way.
Thine be the glory! Merit disappears
As back I look upon these many years.

"Thine be the glory! Thou shalt have the praise
For all Thy dealings to my latest breath;
A daily Ebenezer will I raise,
And sing Salvation through the vale of death –
To where the palm, the golden harp appears,
There to rehearse Thy love through endless years."
