

Opening Words

Sometimes, when our faith falters, it is good to have friends who will pick us up and take us where we need to be.

OSL 034 – Faith Will Find a Way

I find it interesting that many remarkable events in the life of Jesus happened in homes. In our culture, we think that so-called religious events are for church, but that is not the way it was with Jesus. Yes, he said and did many remarkable things in synagogues and in the temple in Jerusalem, but he also worked wonders and taught many remarkable lessons in the homes of people.

The homes of the common people were simple structures. In Capernaum, they were made of a dark, gray basalt stone. They would have a sleeping area, an area in which to bring animals at night, a guest area, and sometimes a courtyard. Sometimes homes had cooking areas on the inside, although it could also be done adjacent to the house to keep the heat away. And, as we know, it could get hot in this part of the world which is why the roof was important. Often, families would sleep on the cooler roofs. Roofs were made with long poles set 18 inches apart, then branches were placed across the poles and mud packed in each year which would harden and give it stability. It was a house like this where Jesus was teaching one day. Let's read the story in Mark 2:1-12.

A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. ²They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. ³Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. ⁴Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. ⁵When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

⁶Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, ⁷"Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

⁸Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? ⁹Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? ¹⁰But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the man, ¹¹"I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." ¹²He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

The house where Jesus was teaching was overflowing. People were hungry to hear a fresh word from God. For hundreds of years no prophet had been in the land, and it seemed that the priests and Pharisees were entangled in an endless web of traditions that made life too complex. The word of God should give life and freedom. And in Jesus they found this life. Jesus would teach the word of God and explain to them how God's kingdom was coming into the world and the crowds would grow to huge numbers. In this house, the little crowd in the room as Jesus began grew as word spread that he was teaching. The room where he was sitting filled up, and then every room in the house was filled as word spread throughout the city that Jesus was teaching and every entrance into the house was blocked.

Some men who had heard Jesus teach previously and who had seen him work wonders heard the news. They wanted to be part of this crowd, but not just for themselves. They wanted to be part of this crowd for their friend, who was paralyzed. They picked up the cot on which the paralyzed man lay, and away they went to find Jesus, but by the time they got to the house there was no way in. Every place in the house was taken. They tried to get through the door. Can you hear them asking, "Please, our friend is paralyzed. Please let us through."

And can you hear the people answering?

"Sorry, we can't let you pass. We want to see Jesus also and there is simply no way to get in." They tried another way. "Sorry, we can't let you in. Please, be quiet, we're all trying to hear what he is saying, and we want to see what he will do. He might heal someone today."

The friends placed the mat on the ground outside the home where Jesus taught. It seemed today would not be the day for their friend's needs to be met. But one of them had an idea. Some houses had stairs that went on the outside of the house up to the roof. They could take their friend, their paralyzed friend to the roof, make a hole in it, and let him down in front of where Jesus sat.

And now, can we hear from the paralyzed man? "Are you guys nuts? You are going to carry me onto the roof?" But away they went! I'm sure they strapped him on his cot and very carefully walked up the stairs and hoisted him onto the roof. They took a moment to identify the place where Jesus was sitting. The area was packed. No one could move. Jesus was surrounded by people as he taught the word of God.

When they got to the area directly above Jesus they went to work. They started removing the packed mud. They made a small opening but it wasn't big enough so they kept working. Now the teaching had stopped. Debris was falling through directly above where Jesus was teaching. They had interrupted him, and everyone was staring at them.

And now can we hear some of the scribes who were probably thinking, "Who is dishonoring this rabbi by creating this commotion?"

And can we hear the owners of the house who were thinking, "Who is going to repair the roof and clean up this mess?"

But Jesus remained silent and allowed the events to unfold.

One man jumped through the opening. Then they heard, “OK, here he comes. Are you ready down there?”

“Yes, I’m ready. Send him through.”

Then the crowd held their breath as the edges of a cot appeared in the opening. Then some legs tied firmly onto the cot and the full body of a grown man came through on his bed, probably bellowing in a loud voice, “Be careful! Be careful! You’re going to drop me!”

No one could believe it. They were astonished that these men would attempt such a foolish thing, but all their thoughts were silenced as Jesus shouted out, and was it with laughter and joy in his voice? “Take courage my son!”

And then they were through. The crowd had made a space for them right in front of Jesus who looked at the paralyzed man and said, “Friend, what faith you and your friends have shown! Your sins are forgiven!”

Such faith the paralyzed man and his friends had shown. Such courage they revealed! Such initiative they had taken and such creativity in getting to Jesus. This is what Jesus was looking for. He was looking for people who would seek him with all their heart. He wanted a living faith. He wanted a faith that had legs to it and it was shown by a man who could not walk and his friends who were prevented from entering the door. When Jesus saw their faith, he told the man who was paralyzed, “your sins are forgiven.”

But not everyone in the crowd rejoiced.

Some of the religious leaders, scribes and Pharisees, were indignant that Jesus would make such a statement. They started murmuring among themselves. “Jesus can’t do this. He cannot pronounce the forgiveness of sins. That is a right reserved for God only on the last day. This is blasphemy!”

But Jesus knew what they were thinking in their hearts and he called them out.

“Why are you thinking such evil in your hearts? Why are you reasoning this way?”

The scribes and Pharisees said nothing, astonished that Jesus knew their thoughts. Jesus looked at them and then he said, “I have a question for you – which is easier, to say to the man, ‘your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘rise and walk?’”

The Pharisees and scribes did not utter a word. The crowd was silent. Everyone knew the answer. Of course it was easier to say, ‘your sins are forgiven,’ because who could tell what went on inside a man’s heart. But to say, ‘rise and walk,’ that would be harder for one would put his reputation on the line and everyone would know immediately if one’s word was true or not.

The silence continued, and then Jesus walked over to the paralyzed man, loosed the straps that held him to his bed. He stood up and in a loud, clear voice so that everyone could hear he turned to the Pharisees and said, “This is so that you may know that I, the Son of Man, have authority on earth to forgive sins” – he then turned to the paralyzed man and said, “Rise, take up your bed, and go home.”

The paralyzed man felt a surge of energy through his paralyzed body. What was happening? The man sat up. He rubbed his arms. He rubbed his legs. He got up onto his knees and then he stood in the presence of all.

And now, can we hear the voices of the people. The house full of people surely began to say things like, “It can’t be. I don’t believe it. Look, he’s walking! We’ve never seen anything like this. Praise be to God!” The people at the entrances who had refused to let the paralyzed man in were straining to hear and see, “What’s going on? What’s going on?”

The crowd parted and the once-paralyzed man picked up his bed, and he and his friends with joy on their faces walked through the crowd, out the door, and went home.

The Pharisees and scribes were speechless, and Jesus dismissed the crowd, and as people walked home a holy fear ran through their hearts and they said, “We have seen a remarkable thing today”.

In this episode of the life of Jesus about the paralyzed man and in our previous lesson about the leper, we have two stories of healing. One dealt with a man who had a skin disease. One dealt with a man who was paralyzed. One was never allowed into the city. The other was not allowed into a house. One took initiative on his own as he ran into the city and laid himself at the feet of Jesus for mercy. The other needed help from his friends to get to the feet of Jesus.

But the result was the same – the leper was cleansed of his skin infection. The paralyzed man was healed. The leper was received back into his community. The paralyzed man was able to walk home. The leper was touched by the compassion of Jesus. The paralyzed man had his sins forgiven.

And in both cases, Jesus showed his authority over every sickness, every infirmity and every problem that came his way. The kingdom of God had come to that village that day!

My question to you is, “has the kingdom of God come to you?” Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth. He wants to be your Lord. He wants to touch your life with his grace, and he especially wants to forgive your sins, like he did with the paralyzed man. He wants to bring you into relationship with himself.

And so, will you reach out to him today? Don’t let anything get in the way. Find a way to come to Jesus like the men who took their paralyzed friend through the roof! Show your faith, and God will reward you abundantly.