

JESUS SAW THEIR FAITH

“When Jesus saw their faith, he said ‘Friend, your sins are forgiven’” (Lk. 5:20)

Jesus “saw” their faith. This immediately reminds us of a passage in James: **“But someone will say, ‘you have faith; and I have deeds.’ Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do” (Ja. 2:18)** It is obvious that our actions can reveal our convictions. Just as a tree is known by its fruit, what we do manifests what we believe.

Regardless of what we do, however, Jesus can discern the thoughts and intents of our heart. He does not need man’s testimony about man for He knows what is in a man (Jn. 2:25). The Scripture before us, however, does not require supernatural discernment. Everyone could see what Jesus saw. Anyone could understand that these men “did” reflected what they “believed”.

The story is about a paralyzed man who was carried to Jesus by four friends. The account is recorded in all three of the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 9:1-8; Mk. 2:1-12; and Lk. 5:17-26). While there are many lessons in this story, we will focus on “seeing faith”. The fact that Jesus saw their faith is so important that it is repeated in all three accounts (Matt. 9:2; Mk. 2:5; and Lk. 5:20).

Let us begin by quoting the account by Luke, the beloved physician. We will insert additional information from Matthew and Mark as appropriate.

“One day Jesus was teaching, and Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there. They had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick. Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. (carried by four of them -Mk.) 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. (digging through it – Mk.) When Jesus saw their faith, he said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.” The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, (Why does this fellow talk like that – Mk.) “Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” (Immediately – Mk.) Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, “Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up and walk’? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the paralyzed man, “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.” Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, “We have seen remarkable things today.” (Lk. 5:17-26)

Here are a few reflections regarding what these men “did” to demonstrate their faith:

- The first manifestation of their faith was an idea. Hardly anything of value happens by accident. We do not know whether the idea originated with the paralyzed man or one of his four friends, but it is logical to assume that it originated with faith. Transporting this paralyzed man to Jesus was not an accident. Matthew tells us that it happened in Jesus’ “own town” (Capernaum). These men of faith obviously believed in Jesus.
- The second manifestation of their faith was their plan. An idea is of little value unless you plan to do something with it, and there is no reason to plan if you don’t believe the plan will work.

- Third, please note that the plan was not easy. It certainly was not convenient! Following Jesus is never convenient for it involves self denial and taking up a cross every day (Lk. 9:23). A governor named Felix once postponed his decision to receive Christ waiting for a “convenient” time (Acts 24:25). That “convenient” time never came.
- Fourth, the plan involved the cooperation of five different men. Each would have to agree to stop whatever they were doing and make this mission a priority. One or two men could not have done it. All five were needed. No matter how badly he felt, the paralyzed man had to be willing to travel. No matter how busy they were, his friends had to be willing to stop what they were doing and cooperate with the others. When everyone is seeking first the Kingdom of God, of course, it is much easier to cooperate.
- In the fifth place these dedicated men had to be willing to change their plans and improvise. When the crowd prevented their original plan, less dedicated people would have given up and gone home. Sadly, many soul winners are looking for any excuse to quit and go back home. These men, however, were not looking for an excuse. These men were looking for a way to get their friend to Jesus, and they found it.
- The solution was bold. No matter how awkward and difficult it was, they somehow carried their friend to the roof. Even though the roof was made of tiles, they dared to dig through it. The spot was well chosen for when they lowered their friend through the roof he was in the middle of the crowd and right in front of Jesus. This apparently took some planning.
- In the sixth place these men were willing to spend money to get their friend to Jesus. Somebody had to pay for fixing the roof. Somebody also had to buy or borrow ropes to lower the man through the roof. How many church boards do you know that would approve such a plan?
- Finally, as we have already said, they had to “believe” that their efforts would work. They had no iron clad guarantee that Jesus would even take time for such a total stranger, BUT THEY BELIEVED THAT HE WOULD AND THEIR ACTIONS PROVED IT!
- Jesus was favorably impressed by what they did, for when He “saw their faith” he told the man that his sins were forgiven.

THE BIG MIRACLE AND THE LITTLE MIRACLE

- We repeat: **“When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Take heart son; your sins are forgiven’” (Matt. 9:2).**
- It is interesting to speculate whether the man “took heart” or was “disappointed” by what Jesus said. How would you feel if you expected to be healed only to be told that your sins were forgiven?
- When the Pharisees and teachers of the law heard Jesus forgive his sins they concluded that He was speaking blasphemy. Immediately Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked this probing question: **“Which is easier: to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven’ or to say ‘Get up and walk’?”** How would you answer that question? Which do you think would have be “easier”? Which to you is the bigger miracle, forgiving sins or healing paralysis?
- We do not know exactly why Jesus performed many of His miracles, but in this instance we are told exactly why this miracle was performed. Jesus said: **“But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins . . .” He said to the paralyzed man, “I tell you get up, take your mat and go home”.**
- Now let us focus again on which is the big miracle, and which is the little miracle? Many conclude that the “big miracle” is physical healing. Physical healing is much in demand. It is

not uncommon for those who emphasize physical miracles to be multi-millionaires flying around the world in their personal jet planes. By contrast, those who emphasize the forgiveness of sins often live in poverty and obscurity.

- We repeat that physical miracles are temporal while the forgiveness of sins involves eternity.
- Obviously, eternal matter should be our priority. When the disciples of Jesus rejoiced that the demons were subject unto them, Jesus said: **“Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Lk. 10:20).** Which of the two would cause you to rejoice?

THE MIRACLE OF SALVATION

Jesus said: **“The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent” (Jn. 6:29).** Saving faith is not easy, it is a “work”. It requires the concentration of our mental energy. It is not easy to see what is invisible (Heb. 11:27), we have to look hard. We can easily see physical healing, but not the forgiveness of sins.

When we see one man who is very rich, and another man who is very poor, our initial reaction is to pity the man who is poor. With deeper reflections, however, we may remember the story Jesus told about the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-31). In that story the poor man was eternally saved and the rich man was eternally condemned. Which man would you rather be?

The miraculous signs performed by Jesus were recorded that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing we might have life in his name (Jn. 20:30, 31). Every one of those miraculous signs, however, was temporary. The sick, the deaf, the blind, the lepers, the paralyzed all died and their bodies, which were once healed, have now returned to the dust of the earth from which they came. Of the many miracles Jesus performed, only the feeding of the 5000 and the resurrection are in all four Gospels. When Jesus fed the 5,000, how long did that miracle last? Yes! They all ate and were filled, but in only a few short hours they were hungry again. It is with specific reference to this miracle that Jesus said: **“Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life which the Son of Man will give you” (Jn. 6:27).**

Before healing the paralyzed man, Jesus injected into the story the forgiveness of sins. Further, He asked them to compare physical healing with spiritual healing and decide which was easier. One miracle, as you know, is temporary and the other is eternal. Which do you think is easier? Remember! When our body returns to the dust our spirit returns to God (Eccl. 12:7).

But let us return to the question of how our actions can demonstrate what we believe. The apostles who witnessed the miracles of Jesus must have pondered this question many times. What did they conclude? What was most valuable to the Apostles, physical healing, or spiritual healing? What the Apostles “did” reveals the answer. By looking at their actions we can “see” their faith. Note:

- The apostles left the security of home and business to follow Jesus.
- They all were persecuted for their faith.
- When Jesus commanded them to go into all the world and preach, they did (Matt. 28:18-20).
- Regardless of their physical suffering, they were determined to obey God rather than men (Acts 4:19).

- When they were beaten they did not complain but rejoiced that they suffered disgrace for Jesus (Acts 5:41).
- They believed that the sufferings of this life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will later be revealed (Rom. 8:18).
- Paul, for example, sought to fix his eyes on the unseen, for he knew that the things we see are temporary and the unseen things are eternal (2 Cor. 4:18).
- Paul spoke for the apostles like this: **“For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings. We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world—right up to this moment.”** (1 Cor. 4:9-13).
- IT IS OBVIOUS THAT WHAT THE APOSTLES “DID” CONFIRMED WHAT THEY “BELIEVED”!

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

When anyone watches your actions, what do they see? Can anyone “see” your faith? Many of our brethren in Europe only go to church 3 times in their lives. (1) When they are christened. (2) When they are married. (3) When they die. Or as the saying goes, they go to church when they are “hatched”, “matched”, and “dispatched”. Sadly, their actions reveal that they don’t have any faith at all.

We must emphasize again that the things of this earth are temporal! A new car has absolutely no value to a dead man. That’s why Paul considered earthly things as “rubbish”. He eagerly gave them up that he might gain Christ and receive his eternal reward in heaven (Phil. 3:8).

But let us probe more deeply into the difference between physical healing and spiritual healing.

Jesus said: **“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father”** (Jn. 14:13).

WHAT ARE THESE “GREATER THINGS” THAT JESUS PROMISED?

To answer this question involves eternity! Yes! We can pray to heal the sick as Jesus did, but this is not the “greater thing” Jesus made possible by going to the Father. While Jesus was on earth He could forgive sins but no one else could. Not one of the apostles, or anyone else, could promise the forgiveness of sins.

When Jesus went to the Father, however, He made it possible for His apostles to offer the forgiveness of sins to all who would repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38). That promise of forgiven sins is now available for everyone. Today, because Jesus went to the Father: **“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved”** (Rom. 10:13).

DO YOU BELIEVE THIS!

IF YOU DO BELIEVE IT, HOW CAN WE TELL?

WHAT ARE YOU “DOING” TO DEMONSTRATE YOUR FAITH?

MAY GOD HELP US TO DEMONSTRATE OUR FAITH BY WHAT WE DO, AND NOT JUST BY WHAT WE SAY!

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