

## Encounter with Jesus – The Paralysed Man

In these services we are looking at people who have had an encounter with Jesus and the effect the encounter had on them. We have looked at several people who met Jesus physically during his ministry, through others after his death and in the Old Testament. Last time we looked at the Ethiopian Eunuch who met Jesus through Phillip the Evangelist. Tonight we are looking at an Encounter with Jesus through some friends. Hilary is going to read us his story.

Luke 5:17-26

### Who was the Paralysed Man?

Again we don't know his name or any details of his family, nor how he came to be a paralytic, just that some men (presumably family or friends) tried to carry him to Jesus, who was teaching in a house in Capernaum (Mark's account), effectively his home town. Luke tells us Pharisees and teachers of the Law had come from "every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem", so his ministry was obviously causing something of a stir in the region. The Pharisees seem to have been located mainly in Jerusalem and Judea and they looked down on Galileans – when Nicodemus tried to defend Jesus before the Sanhedrin they responded "Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee." The Galileans mentioned therefore probably consisted mainly of the other group Luke mentions, the teachers of the law. All Galilean villages would have had scribes trained in Jewish law, who could execute legal documents and train children in the law of Moses. Both Mark and Luke tell us that there was a crowd surrounding the house so they could not get in. People would have been listening to Jesus through the doors and windows.

### How did he encounter Jesus?

The average Capernaum home would probably have only allowed about fifty people standing (the width of the largest excavated homes there is eighteen feet), so the crowd was probably not as big as we might think given Mark and Luke's descriptions. You could gain access to the flat roof by an outside staircase, so the men could reach it despite the crowd. The roof of a single-story Palestinian home was sturdy enough to walk on but was normally made of branches and rushes laid over the roof's beams and covered with dried mud; therefore you could dig through it which is what Mark describes. Luke changes this Palestinian roof structure to the flat roof of interlocking tiles more familiar to his own readers (Greeks and Romans), as preachers today change details when retelling bible stories to make them relevant to their listeners. He says they "lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus." The paralytic's mat would have been the mat on which he always lay and was carried around on. So this encounter was initiated by the man and his friends.

### What happened during the encounter?

Both Mark and Luke say "When Jesus saw their faith" – he responded to the effort they had made to bring the man to him despite all the difficulties, and presumably the man himself must have believed Jesus could heal him. Jesus doesn't ask the man what he wants, as he does on other occasions, but deals with the key issue for him – forgiveness of sins. At the time people associated illness or disability with sin, either by the person or their parents, so Jesus may well have known that the man believed that and needed to be told his sins were forgiven. Whatever his motive it immediately caused resentment amongst the Pharisees and teachers of the Law.

Sins were to be atoned for by offerings in the temple. Judaism stated that only God could forgive sins, but most Jews accepted that some of God's representatives, i.e. priests or prophets, could speak on God's behalf; but Jesus was not a priest, no one had offered sacrifice, and the teachers of the Law had heard no basis for the pronouncement of forgiveness, not even a clear indication of repentance on the man's part. Technically, "blasphemy" involved pronouncing the divine name or perhaps inviting people to follow other gods; less technically, it

had to involve at least dishonouring God. Strictly speaking, therefore, these legal experts are mistaken in interpreting Jesus' words as blasphemy, even by their own rules. The punishment for blasphemy was death, usually by stoning, e.g. Stephen in Acts.

Jesus then reveals he knows what they are thinking and to demonstrate he has the authority to forgive sins he does something they would recognise as more difficult by commanding the man to get up, pick up his mat and go home – which he does praising God.

#### What effect did the encounter have on the Paralysed Man and the crowd?

The immediate reaction was one of amazement and giving praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today." The now not paralysed man walks home to start a new life praising God and presumably his friends or relatives join him in celebrating and praising God for a miracle. We have to presume the phrase "everyone" included the Pharisees and teachers of the Law, who could not dispute that Jesus had performed a miracle in front of them.

Because supernatural knowledge was especially attributed to prophets, Jesus' hearers would probably view him here as a prophet, not just a teacher. Most Jewish teachers believed that "prophets" in the Old Testament sense had ceased, but most of the people were happy to entertain new prophetic figures, many of whom they saw as foretelling the restoration of the kingdom or the end of time. Josephus, a Roman historian, tells us that Jesus was one of many prophets operating in Judea at the time, most of them false prophets claiming to work miracles but actually failing to work them. Some of Jesus' critics may have placed him in this category, but His act in front of these witnesses should have challenged them to rethink their case. Some Jewish teachers accepted miracles as verification that a teacher was truly God's representative; others did not regard miracles as sufficient proof if they disagreed with the teacher's interpretation of Scripture. On another occasion when Jesus drove out a demon the Pharisees said he was going it by Beelzebub, because they were not prepared to accept he was doing it by God's authority. So Jesus is laying down a challenge to the Pharisees and teachers of the Law who were there, saying **"But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins."** – in other words "I have full authority from God to teach, heal, prophesy and act on His behalf."

Discussion – There are two questions for us here which I would like you to discuss in your groups and we'll then have a short feedback from each group:

Would we have the faith of the paralysed man or his friends to go to Jesus and seek healing if he was in town? If so why aren't we seeing such healings taking place as they did in Acts?

If we saw someone we disagreed with performing such miracles would we be prepared to acknowledge they were working with God's authority and support them?