



“Our Greatest Need”

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What are your expectations and desires of Jesus Christ? Why did He come to earth? What was His life here all about? Was He a political revolutionary? Did He come to defeat the Roman Empire and restore sovereignty to the Jews? Some of His contemporaries thought so. Or did He come to work miracles and alleviate the suffering of the sick, the halt, and the blind? Did He come to bring peace between nations and usher in an age of utopia on earth? Did He come to ensure social justice and equality in the public sphere?

Jesus spent more than thirty years away from heaven ministering to man here on earth. All of the words and deeds of Jesus could not be contained in a book, but the Bible chronicles the high points of His life, especially the last three years, which constitute His personal ministry. It paints a sufficient portrait of Him to show us what His mission was, and when we read the gospels, we can see what impact His coming to earth was to have upon your life and mine today.

One of the many events that Matthew recorded in his account of the life of Christ is about the time He met a man who was in a dire condition and was rushed to Jesus for help.

Matthew 9:1-2 “And he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city (speaking of Capernaum, where Jesus lived at the time). And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed...”

Here was a man in a desperate and apparently hopeless situation. But, Jesus would change his life forever. If you don't remember the story, it may surprise you to find out what the greatest blessing he received from Jesus really was that day.

All of us have difficulties and challenges in life; some people especially so. There are those who are born into abject poverty, and what seems to be a hopeless, unending cycle from which they see little to no

hope of breaking free. Others live under political or societal oppression—discriminated against, mistreated, persecuted because of their national origin or the color of their skin. Some spend their lives suffering from incurable diseases, handicaps or deformities. Perhaps if they could ask Jesus for one thing, if they could pray but one prayer, they would come to His feet as it were to beg Him to help them. If Jesus were walking the earth in His flesh today, and you met Him as so many of the first century did, what would you ask Him? What would you hope He, in His great mercy and compassion, would grant unto you? What would be the great desire of your heart and the great blessing that He could dispense in your life? Our text today tells of a man who was in a very desperate situation and he and his friends very much wanted to see Jesus. Jesus had come back to the city of Capernaum, where He lived at the time, and His reputation of being a miracle-worker preceded Him.

In our text passage, the phrase “*sick of the palsy*” literally means he was *paralyzed*; he was a paralytic and had to be carried everywhere he went. His bed was just some sort of little pallet or mat and these four friends (as we read in the other gospel accounts) each must’ve grabbed up a corner and carried him to this house where Jesus was teaching at the time. It was packed full of people. The religious leaders had packed into this house to listen to Jesus—many of them skeptically—as He taught.

When the man and his friends arrived at the house, they couldn’t get inside. That might’ve discouraged some people. Some might’ve turned away, saying, *There’s no use trying to get in here. Even if we could get him inside to Jesus, He wouldn’t take the time to deal with this. Maybe we’ll try to find Him another time.* But not these men. They were determined to bring their friend to Jesus. So much so, that they climbed onto the rooftop and literally tore a hole in the roof to get him to Jesus. Houses and roofs were not then as they are now; this would’ve been a flat roof type of structure, and the roof was made of some tile work and some thatching. These men carried their friend on his pallet onto the roof of this house, and began peeling away the thatching and tiles until they had a hole big enough to let him down through.

You can imagine yourself down at the feet of Jesus in this room, elbow to elbow, with all of the other people, intently listening to every word He is saying. Perhaps something suddenly hits you on the shoulder or the top of your head. You look up and see daylight through the hole in the roof where these men have torn it apart. Then a great shadow as this pallet is let down through the opening, and he is let down right at the feet of the Master. Perhaps people step back and clear a place for this man to be let down before Him. Jesus could’ve rebuked him. I suppose He could’ve tried to ignore him, but He didn’t do that. He turned His attention to the man. And in that instant, Jesus changed his life. Jesus knew what faith had brought him there that day.

If you were one of those people sitting at Jesus’ feet and you witnessed all of this commotion and saw this man lowered down before Him, it being obvious what was wrong with him and how he was suffering, and you knew the reputation of Jesus as the miracle worker, what would you expect Jesus to say? What do you suppose would be the very first words He would utter to this man? Maybe something like, *Son, be of good cheer. Be encouraged. This is your great day. Get up and walk!* Jesus indeed healed him, but that’s not what He said to him first of all. That’s not the matter to which He first attended.

Matthew 9:2 “And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.”

Well, when Jesus said that, these religious leaders were overcome with righteous indignation and they began to think to themselves or perhaps mutter amongst themselves, *Did you hear what He just said?*

Can you believe what this Man just said?! What blasphemy! Doesn't He know that only God can forgive sins? That should've told them something about who Jesus was, but of course, it didn't. Jesus knew their hearts and what they were thinking and saying to each other.

Matthew 9:3-8 “And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house. But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men.”

This is a remarkable story! This man just got up, rolled up his mat, and with great joy and exuberance, he bounded for home after Jesus healed him! You can imagine, as he comes through the door of his dwelling, his family sees him standing aright with the use of his legs and arms and he can walk, run, and leap about—oh, how excited this man and his family must've been this day! But truly, what do you suppose the great relief of this man's heart was? What do you suppose was the greatest blessing and greatest joy that he received that day from Jesus? That he could walk?

Let me ask you this: what good would it have been for Jesus to restore the use of this man's limbs if He had left his soul condemned for eternal hell? That's really the question of the hour. It's the question that confronts each one of us. We all have our difficulties and challenges in life. What good is it if Jesus takes those away but leaves our greatest need unaddressed? There are a lot of people who are concerned about a lot of legitimate needs in their lives, but they are very oblivious or at the least negligent of the greatest need that exists in their lives.

I submit to you that the greatest joy in this man's heart this day was that Jesus told him, “*Your sins be forgiven you.*” It's very possible this man was paralyzed because of sinful living. We don't know that, but of course sometimes the consequences of our sins are meted out in our bodies. Nonetheless, Jesus looked down at this man and saw his true plight and his greatest need and took care of that first. Why? First of all, because it was the man's greatest need. Secondly, Jesus was teaching an important lesson to all of those gathered that day.

Matthew 9:6 “But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.”

Jesus is saying, *I'm going to prove to you that I am indeed the Son of God by performing this miracle.* Friend, that is the reason behind the miracles of Jesus. That's why He did what He did. Did He care about this man's physical plight? Yes, of course He did. Did He have compassion on him and his suffering? Obviously, He did. But first and foremost, Jesus applied the greatest need the man had in his life, and the miracle simply proved that Jesus had the power to heal his soul.

Now, a lot of people today think that Jesus merely came to earth to work miracles. Or to make the world a better place. But I want you to understand this: miracles are not the gospel. Rather, miracles were for the purpose of vindicating the gospel. People misunderstand the purpose of miracles. Jesus worked many miracles while He was here on the earth, including this one. His apostles were empowered to perform miracles as well, but the miracles were not and are not the gospel; they are proof and vindication of the gospel. They prove that the message being preached by Jesus and His apostles came

from heaven. Today, a preacher proves that he is preaching the truth not by performing a miracle, but by the proof of the scriptures, which were revealed, written down, and authenticated by the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit at the time that God was speaking.

The age of men possessing such power ceased with the revelation of Christ and His truth being completed. When the last word of the New Testament was written down by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, then the age of men performing miracles was coming to a close (**I Corinthians 13:8-13**).

I have a good friend and fellow gospel preacher who was recently in Malaysia doing mission work preaching the gospel. He encountered a man who refused to believe that the age of miracles has long since ceased and he was very passionate and emotional about the matter. He was distraught about the proposition that the Bible teaches that miracles were for a time, in order to confirm the word and that that miraculous age had ceased. He told my friend, *“If there are no miracles today, then I don’t have any reason to be a Christian.”* Think about what he was saying! My friend’s response was, *“Oh, no! If I live the rest of my life crippled or paralyzed, I would live it as a Christian because Jesus has blessed me with the greatest blessing I could’ve ever received, and that is the forgiveness of my sins and the promise of eternal life!”*

In **Luke 10**, Jesus sent out the seventy with the power to cast out evil spirits. Demons were allowed to possess people in that day, in order that the power of Jesus and His apostles could be displayed over Satan and the forces of darkness. It was a visible display of the triumph of heaven over hell. These seventy went out on their limited commission and they came back astounded and thrilled.

Luke 10:17-18 *“And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.”*

That simply refers to the fact that He saw Satan lose his power, fall from his throne as it were, as these miracles were performed and the power of God was shown over the power of the devil.

Luke 10:19-20 *“Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.”*

Their power was only to prove that Christ had sent them. They, like many who claim to possess such power today, were all caught up in this power that Jesus had personally bestowed. He told them not to rejoice in what they were able to do, rather what God had done for them. That is, that their names were written in heaven. Isaac Watts put it this way in his classic and timeless hymn:

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all!*

“When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” (1707)

Friend, Jesus was born by miracle, He performed miracles, He was raised from His own death by miracle, He went back to heaven in a miraculous fashion, He poured out the spirit of God upon His apostles when

He appointed them to make known the gospel scheme of redemption for all people of all time by writing down and leaving us the word of God... and He did so, you see, that He might fill our greatest need. What is YOUR greatest need today? Healing? No. God, by His providence and by His sovereign will, answers prayers that are offered for the sick, surely we believe that. But healing is not your greatest need. Even if men had the power to miraculously heal today as the apostles long ago did, that still wouldn't be your greatest need. Money is not your greatest need either. The greatest need of the world today is not economic prosperity. Neither is it national security, world peace, nuclear disarmament or the end of war and strife. It's not the eradication of poverty or disease, and it's not social justice reform, as so many religious leaders would lead you to believe today. The world's greatest need is what Jesus came to give when He willingly spread out His arms upon Calvary's cross and died. Our greatest need is salvation from sin and a restored relationship with God the heavenly Father. If you miss that, you'll miss everything.

Jesus isn't walking the earth as He walked the streets of Palestine 2,000 years ago speaking to people and forgiving their sins. Rather, He came and provided a plan for your salvation. He told His apostles this after His death and resurrection:

Mark 16:15-16 "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

He IS ready to meet that need today. He never promised to remove our suffering in this life. You may recall that Paul begged the Lord to remove what he called his *"thorn in the flesh."* In fact, he begged the Lord three times to take away his affliction, but God refused. And Paul was at peace with that because he knew that God had given him the greatest gift that he could ever give, and he possessed the greatest treasure that any man could hold, and that is the pearl of great price: the Lord Jesus Christ and the salvation that he came to earth to bring!

Have you reached out to Jesus as He has reached out to you? He is ready to fill your greatest need. It is but a step away, the step of obedience to the gospel. Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God? Are you willing to commit your life to Him in repentance? To turn from your sin? To gladly confess Him before others and be baptized in water for the remission of your sins?

Acts 2:38 "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

Friend, you don't need a miracle in your life; you need salvation. And Jesus offers it to you this very day.

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