

Back in Capernaum - Mark 2:1-12

by Travis Dean

April 24, 2010

Our story today finds Jesus back in Capernaum. It wasn't that long ago that He left this place due in part to an unhealthy popularity. It might seem a little strange that He is back so soon. It reminds me of when I was a student at Southern Adventist University. I had made a personal vow to never move back to Collegedale after graduating. Don't get me wrong. It's a very nice town. Lots of really nice people are there. Some of the most honorable Seventh day Adventists live there. It's a great place for your children's education. There is Adventist education from daycare up through master's degree programs. In spite of all these great benefits I felt suffocated by all the Adventists. I grew up in an area where there were only a few. While I was marketing my carpentry business door-to-door, I couldn't believe how many Adventists I met. And so, this environment induced me to make a vow to never return to live in Collegedale. For about 5 years I remained true to my vow. The time came, though, when I had to decide between Cesilia and my vow. As you can tell, I chose Cesilia. It was one of the best decisions I've ever made. I ended up living in Collegedale for 5 years, and believe I am a better person for it. In fact, the process we're using to go through the book of Mark I actually became acquainted with while in Collegedale. We'll find out in our story today that it was also a blessing for Jesus to go back to Capernaum.

We'll begin with a summary: *Returning to Capernaum, Jesus began teaching in Simon's house. The people crowded in and around the house in order to hear Him. Meanwhile, four men opened up the roof and lowered a paralyzed man down to Jesus. When Jesus told the man his sins were forgiven, the scribes were offended. Jesus demonstrated His authority to forgive sins by empowering the paralyzed man to get up. When the people saw him walk out carrying his bed, they were amazed and glorified God.*

Let's consider now what Jesus experienced in our story. First, He experienced a call to return. This call brought Him back to Capernaum. It also brought him back to Simon's house. Mark just says He was "in the house". In other words He was in the same house as when He was in Capernaum last time. This statement could also be translated "at home". Simon's house was Jesus' home away from home. Jesus' call to return also brought Him back to a place of popularity. Mark says "Immediately, many gathered together." Jesus' popularity doesn't seem to have abated any since He was there last time. Second, Jesus experienced a disturbance. While Jesus is teaching the people, someone starts tearing the roof apart. Luke says in his gospel account that they removed "the tiling" (Luke 5:19). This was a type of clay pottery. It probably wasn't very solid, consisting of only clay and water. Its removal certainly could have caused some debris down below. After the dust clears, a man is lowered on a "bed". This certainly wasn't a bed like we think of today with a frame, mattress, and a box spring. It was probably more like a quilt or a mat. It was used for sleeping, eating, sitting, and in times of sickness. Jesus shows no signs of being irritated by this disturbance. Mark tells us what impressed Jesus about this incident. Mark says "Jesus saw their faith". Behind the disturbance He saw a faith that impressed Him.

Third, Jesus experiences in our story forgiving an offense. He addresses the man as "Son". This word actually means "child". But in a direct address it is translated "My son". What a picture this gives us! It resembles the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15. Jesus tells the paralytic his sins are forgiven. The word "sins" is from a word meaning "to miss the mark". Jesus is referring to the man's mistakes and failures. He is referring to all the things this man has done that have not met God's standards. He says his sins are "forgiven". This word is often translated "to be gone" or "to leave". Jesus is telling the paralytic that his failures have been thrown away. They are gone. These words are Jesus' first words to this man. He immediately gets to the point. He addresses what has separated this man from God. Jesus' words show that He is anxious for reconciliation. He assures the paralytic that all the things that have brought separation between them are now gone.

Fourth, Jesus experiences an offended response. Not everyone is happy with Jesus' words. Mark highlights "the scribes". According to Luke these are the "teachers of the law" (Luke 5:17). They are the experts when it comes to interpreting God's Word. We might refer to them today as theologians. They refer to Jesus as "this man". More literally, they were saying "this one". It is a term showing some contempt. In essence they are saying of Jesus, "You are slandering God's name. You've overstepped your bounds. Who are you to forgive this man's sins?" Mark says Jesus "immediately" perceived "in His spirit" what they were thinking. They hadn't actually spoken out loud. I imagine they had poker faces. Mark says they thought these things "in their hearts" and "within themselves". I believe Mark refers to Jesus' immediate perception as a sign of His divinity. But the scribes are not convinced, which leads us to Jesus' final experience: giving proof of His authority. Jesus answered their criticism by saying, "So that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" – He said to the paralytic, "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house" (Mark 1:10, 11). Mark says the paralytic "immediately" arose. This not only proved Jesus' divinity, it proved His authority to forgive sins. It also completed the paralytic's healing. He has been healed inside and out.

So, what about the paralytic? You might wonder what a paralytic is. It refers to someone who is "weak" or "disabled". He was most likely paralyzed, not from an injury, but from a disease. Well, first of all, the paralytic in our story experiences help. Mark says he was carried by four men. It shows him being completely dependent. He can't go anywhere without his friends' help. He is probably feeling a sense of urgency. Jesus left last time without forewarning. Who knows how long He will be here this time? Well, second of all the paralytic experiences barriers to Jesus. His experience is similar to that of Zacchaeus. A large crowd prevented him from coming to Jesus. It seemed that he and his friends were too late. They had come as quickly as they could, but it hadn't been quick enough. The house was surrounded by people. There didn't seem any way to get to Jesus, who was inside the house.

Third, in our story today the paralytic experiences determination. Jesus, considering their actions, spoke of "their faith". This shows that their actions were a group effort. The paralytic and his friends all refused to give up. Somehow the paralytic's friends found the stairs that went up the side of the house. They carried him up the stairs to the roof top. And here they remove final barrier – the roof itself. What determination! Fourth, this paralytic experiences forgiveness. Jesus' words to him, "Your sins are forgiven", answered the burden of his heart. At last he was at peace with God. His struggle was over. An overwhelming feeling flooded over him that everything was ok now between him and God. I imagine he had been waiting for this a long time. He had probably dreamed of this moment for several years, hoping it would come before he died from his disease.

Last of all, the paralytic experienced physical healing. Jesus commanded him, "Arise, take up your bed and go to your house." As he responds to Jesus' command, he is healed. His muscles respond to the act of his will. He is now completely healed, inside and out. It's like taking your car through a car wash. Several times this winter we took out vehicles to the car wash. We wanted to keep the salt from causing rust. But as many times as we got them washed on the outside, we have yet to clean them on the inside. Most people in Simon's house that day were clean on the outside. They were physically healthy. But they left without being cleaned on the inside. The paralytic, however, left clean on the inside and outside. Jesus told him to go to his house. What a reunion that must have been when he told his family the good news! They might not have even recognized him.

So how does this story reveal Jesus as our example of a healthy and dangerous Christian? First of all, I believe Jesus shows us what a healthy and dangerous Christian looks like in that He was willing to go back. He didn't live by the saying, "Been there done that". Or "Got the T shirt. Not doing that again". He followed His Father's agenda. Just because His Father had told Him to leave Capernaum a few weeks ago, didn't inhibit Him from going back. I believe a healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who only makes one vow: to follow wherever God leads. This is in contrast to the worldview in the construction world. I can't remember how many times I heard people complain about the homeowner or builder. "They keep changing things. We already framed the roof, and now they want dormers built into it. We already framed the bathroom and now they want it larger." I believe it is natural for us to seek for a routine. We often look for patterns on how God works and leads in our lives. But I believe a healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who seeks to follow wherever God leads. Even if it's back to Colgedale or Capernaum.

I believe Jesus is also revealed in this story as an example of a healthy and dangerous Christian in that He was ready to forgive. When this paralytic plopped down in front of Him with those pleading eyes, He didn't say, "I'm not over it yet. I need more time. You really hurt my feelings this time." He didn't yell at him, "Don't you know why you're in this mess!" I think Jesus was thinking, "It's about time. I've been waiting for you to come." He didn't think about His own feelings. His greatest desire was to be reconciled to His lost and diseased son. I believe a healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who seeks reconciliation. Turn with me to Matthew 11:28-30. I believe part of the burden that Jesus asks us to carry is the burden for reconciliation with those who have offended us or who have been offended by us. In Romans 9:1-5 Paul shares how he had great sorrow and continual grief in his heart for the Jews who had not accepted Jesus as the Messiah. Their salvation was a burden on his heart. Even though they hated him and were trying to end his life, the burden of his heart was that they might accept the gospel of Jesus Christ. I believe a healthy and dangerous Christian carries a burden in their heart for those are at odds with them. They long to be reconciled with their brothers and sisters in the Lord. And they'll do whatever it takes to bring about that reconciliation.

Last of all I believe Jesus is revealed in this story as an example of a healthy and dangerous Christian in that His actions awakened praise to God. Mark says that when the people saw the paralytic walk out of the house that day carrying his own bed, they "glorified God". A more literal translation might be they esteemed God as glorious. They said, "God, You are awesome! We have never seen anything like this!" I believe a healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who knows where their abilities stop and where God's begins. You may have heard of the story in Acts 3. Peter and John are going to the temple to pray. A lame man is at the gate of the temple. He asks Peter and John for some money. Peter replies by saying, "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" The man is instantly healed. And this creates quite a stir. People come running, amazed at what has happened. But notice the words of Peter in verse 12, "Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?" He then tells them about Jesus Christ and how it is through faith in His name that this man has been healed. A healthy and dangerous Christian knows who they are. They know where their abilities end and where God's begins. When someone says, "Wow, you are really on top of it! You've got it all together", a healthy and dangerous Christian knows better. And when someone says, "Wow, the Holy Spirit was here! God is awesome in this place!" a healthy and dangerous Christian stands in awe and worships.

Can you imagine hearing those words, "Your sins are forgiven"? These words fulfilled every longing in the paralytic's heart. And these words are for us. Mark has recorded these words of Jesus so that we might hear them today. We might not be paralyzed but our past is filled with bad choices and failures. We've done things we know God doesn't approve of. These things can drag us down. Whenever we think about God or talk to Him these things haunt us. They don't have to any more. Jesus' words are for us. "Your sins are forgiven". "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins" (1 John 1:9). Jesus is here today to forgive. Don't leave today with your past haunting you. "Your sins are forgiven". They're gone. God has thrown them on His Son who put them in the grave. You can leave here today at peace with God. There is nothing like knowing that everything between you and God is ok. "Your sins are forgiven".