

The Deeper Problem (Mark 2:1-12)

Introduction: *Disappointed with the Lord?*

We pray, “O God, please deal with these circumstances. I want happiness.” He says, “There is something infinitely more important I want to deal with—not circumstances but sins. You want happiness. I want holiness, or to be clearer, happy holiness—since all the blessings in the whole world should not make even a paralytic as happy as to hear the words, “Your sins are forgiven you.” This is, I say, the real problem that Jesus came to solve. This is the deepest need that we have. No matter what has caused us to seek the Lord, this is what we find when we arrive. The power to heal the sick is not the supreme message of the Bible. The great ministry of Jesus to the world is not miraculous healing. Christ’s greatest gift, and that which is the most precious to us (whether we know it or not), is his power over sin, not his power over sickness.

1. What this shows us about ourselves and our priorities

“You see this poor man, unable to walk, and you immediately think of his tragic circumstances. You pity him because of the many things he cannot do. My heart goes out to him too. But it is essential that you understand that lame feet and useless legs are not this man’s or any man’s chief problem. The darkest shadow hanging over his life is not his paralysis, hard as that is to bear.” 100,000 years from now, looking back upon the few moments he lived in this world, what will that man think but that his paralysis was nothing compared to his sins. And he will shudder to think that had he been whole, had he been able to walk like most men, he might never have come to Jesus to receive what he really needed and what Jesus alone could give him: forgiveness, peace with God, and entrance into the eternal country.

2. What this shows us about Jesus and his work

Just as people don’t understand their greatest need, they also don’t understand Jesus’ greatest gift. The miracles are intended, not to show us that Jesus is primarily a need-meeter, but to confirm that Jesus is the sin forgiver. And as the people watched their neighbor, mat in hand, depart for home, the lesson came home to them. Disease is virtually nothing to the Son of God. Billions of stars and billions of galaxies were created through him simply by a word. But what did it cost him in order to be able to say, “Your sins are forgiven?” What is the healing the sick for him compared to the cross? This is the great gift of Christ to the world, “that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

Conclusion

1. *Since forgiveness is such an impossibly great thing, and yet available to those who will seek it from Jesus, surely this means that everyone ought to seek it.*

He says, “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.” These men tried the door and found it blocked but still were not deterred. Again, “The kingdom of heaven is forcefully advancing and forceful men lay hold of it.” And how often in the events of his life and in his parables does the Lord emphasize this matter of laying hold of God’s salvation.

2. *Forgiveness is such a great a thing, receiving it ought to make us truly happy and grateful.*

No matter what you came to Jesus seeking, I tell you that this is what you are always sure to find—forgiveness. Healing perhaps, but that’s not the real need you have. And that’s not the real problem Jesus came to solve. “You shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matt 1:21). “...eternal life ...” (John 17:2).

Boasting Only in the Cross (Galatians 6:11-18)

Introduction: *The offense of the cross*

Paul says that while the message of the cross was foolishness to the Gentiles, it was a stumbling block to the Jews. And over and over again through the ages the offense of the cross has surfaced, in the world and in the church. In his own hand, Paul summarizes his main argument: the choice is the cross of Christ or a failed principle of self-salvation. We’re given a glimpse of the history of God’s people through the ages, even to today.

1. Outward Flesh rather than Inward Spirit (v. 12-13a)

“As many as desire to make a good *showing* in the *flesh*, these would compel you to be circumcise ... that they may *boast* in your *flesh*” (Gal 6:12-13). Notice the repetition of the word *flesh*, and the emphasis on showing and boasting. This is deep at the heart of the problem in Galatia, and throughout history. “He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God” (Rom 2:28-29). However many great and spiritual truths and privileges these signs brought us, they were outward, physical acts. What is of central importance? “Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a *new creation*” (Gal 6:15). This is a central matter in the Bible: Is there a new heart and a new Spirit within? Is a man born again, born from above, born of the Spirit? Other things are just signs of this reality. Too often, the great majority people have debased Biblical religion into a superficial, outward show: These people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me” (Isa 29:13).

2. Our Works rather than Christ’s work (v. 13b-16)

The false teachers in Galatia had made another classic mistake, one repeated countless times by the majority of God’s people since at least Moses. Circumcision was not only an *outward* work, it was a *human* work. But if you’re to be saved by obeying the law, you can’t pick and choose what parts to keep—you’ve got to keep it all. Their only reason for circumcising is that they don’t want the persecution that comes from the cross, verse 12. Paul suffers persecution, 5:11, because of the cross, preaching that we are helpless, wicked sinners under the curse, and Christ became a curse for us on the tree (3:13). “If righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain” (Gal 2:21).

Conclusion: *Advantages and disadvantages to being justified by faith*

“Let it be counted folly, or frenzy, or fury, or whatsoever, it is our wisdom and our comfort. We care for no other knowledge in the world but this: “that man hath sinned and God hath suffered: that God hath made himself the sin of man, and that men are made the righteousness of God” (Richard Hooker).

Disadvantages of the doctrine

- (a) It is a spiritual mystery and does not easily submit to natural understanding.
- (b) Those who do not favor justification by faith far outnumber those who do.
- (c) People raise many practical arguments against it (e.g. it promotes sin, etc.).
- (d) It is contrary to the spirit of the day.

Advantages

- (a) It is a doctrine loved by the godly, and more and more the better we grasp it.
- (b) It is the only doctrine that meets the needs of an awakened conscience.
- (c) It brings right worship: “No man can stand before this holy Lord God, with any peace and comfort, unless he have God himself to stay upon” (Traill, *Justification*, p. 269).
- (d) It brings us comfort even in the hour of death.