

PARK ROAD BAPTIST CHURCH, PETERBOROUGH

Sunday 20th September 2020

Theme: Questions Jesus asked

Bible Readings: Luke 5 v 17-26

The story is told of an 8-year old girl who went to her dad who was working out in the garden, and asked him the question that many parents fear: "Dad, what is sex?". The father was surprised that she should ask such a question but he decided that she was old enough and so proceeded to tell her all about the "birds and the bees". When he had finished explaining things the father asked his daughter "Why did you ask me that question?". The little girl replied "Mum told me to tell you that your dinner would be ready in just a couple of secs".

The father had completely misunderstood the reason for his daughter's question and it is only too easy for us to misunderstand other people's questions as well.

Today we are continuing our series about the "Questions Jesus asked" and some of these questions were misunderstood by the people of his day.

We were reminded of this last week when (in the first of this series) we were reminded that even Mary and Joseph did not understand some of the questions that Jesus asked them – "They did not understand what he was saying to them" Luke 2 v 50

Our bible passage for this week from Luke 5 contains two specific questions from Jesus:

- In verse 22 - Why are you thinking these things in your hearts?
- In verse 23 - Which is easier to say "Your sins are forgiven" or to say "Get up and walk"?

In this passage we find Jesus at a house in Capernaum where he is teaching and instructing the people. The house was crowded because news about the teaching and miracles of Jesus had spread far and wide – there were Pharisees and teachers of the law in the house as well as ordinary people like you and me.

A quick initial reading of the passage makes it appear to be just another one of the healing miracles of Jesus but there is something deeper going on here – as we will find out – because, in the background, a power struggle is taking place between Jesus and the Pharisees - so let's look at this in a bit more detail,

In verse 17 Luke informs us that from the beginning of the meeting "the power of the Lord was present for him (Jesus) to heal the sick".

No-one appears to have come forward for healing until part-way through the meeting when suddenly a group of men arrived carrying their paralysed friend on a mat. They couldn't get into the house because of the large crowd and so they went up on to the roof where they tore off some of the tiles and then lowered their paralysed friend down to the floor until he was right in front of Jesus.

The first thing that Jesus said to the paralysed man was "Friend your sins are forgiven". We might wonder why Jesus said this first but we need to remember that, in the culture of that time, sin and suffering were inextricably linked in people's minds. The people believed that, if a person was inflicted with suffering or disability, it was because they or their parents had done something wrong. We find evidence of this in John 9 v 2 where a man who had been blind from birth is brought to Jesus and the disciples asked him "Rabbi, who sinned this man or his parents that he was born blind?".

Returning to Luke 5 - Once the paralysed man knew that his sins were forgiven, it opened up the possibility in his mind that he could also be cured.

As soon as Jesus told the paralysed man that his sins were forgiven, the Pharisees and teachers of the law began to think to themselves "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" but Jesus knew what they were thinking and he asks them the two questions that are our theme for today (in verses 22 & 23).

Jesus then told the people that he was going to perform a miracle so "that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, I tell you to get up, take your mat and go home". Immediately the man stood up in front of everyone, took up his mat and went home praising God. Everyone else was also amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said "We have seen remarkable things today".

The Pharisees thought the paralysed man was disabled because he had sinned but now, even by their own arguments and assumptions, the healing of the paralysed man proved that Jesus had the power to forgive sins. Sadly, the Pharisees did not see this as proof that Jesus was God in human form but instead accused him of blasphemy.

What can we learn for this passage? – I think there at least four important lessons:

We sometimes need to take the initiative

The group of men in the story put their faith into action by taking the initiative and carrying their paralysed friend to meet Jesus and, as a result, he received both physical and spiritual healing.

There are still occasions today when we, as Christians, need to take the initiative. We should be on the look-out for opportunities to introduce others to Jesus because, like the paralysed man, people are still in need of the healing and the forgiveness of Jesus.

Many of us came to faith because someone took the initiative and introduced us to Jesus – it might have been a parent, a friend, a pastor, a Sunday School teacher – but, whoever it was, we should thank God for them.

The bible reminds us that we need to put our faith into action (Faith without deeds is dead - James 2 v 26) – one way we can do this is by being ready to take the initiative.

The paralysed man was entirely helpless on his own but he had some very good friends who brought him to Jesus. That's what friends do – they care for one another and want the best for each other. Do you (or do I) need to take the initiative with some of the people we know and introduce them to Jesus?

We need to persist in our faith

The house in which Jesus was teaching was full because of the large crowd and there was no easy way to get the paralysed man to Jesus but his friends were persistent and weren't ready to give up easily. Their persistence led them to that unorthodox entry through the house roof.

When faced with difficult situations we are often tempted to give-up but one of the lessons of this story is that we need to have the faith to persist despite the hardships and difficulties.

One way to persevere is to continue praying – or to P.U.S.H. (Pray Until Something Happens). Jesus emphasised the importance of persistent prayer in the parable about the widow and the unjust judge (which you can read in Luke 18 v 1-8).

The Lord will provide a way for those who are persistent.

We need to accept the forgiveness of Jesus

The Pharisees were right to believe that only God can forgive sins but they were unable to believe that Jesus could provide that forgiveness. They were familiar with all the Old Testament teachings such as Isaiah 43 v 25 where God says “I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions for my sake, and remembers your sins no more”.

Sadly, the Pharisees failed to recognise that Jesus is the son of God and that he has the same authority to forgive sins as God the Father.

Many people today accept Jesus as a great teacher, a miracle worker and an altogether good person, but the important question to ask them is “Do you believe that Jesus is God?”

The apostle Paul reminds us in the letter to the Romans that we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3 v 23) and that the penalty for sin is death (Romans 6 v 23), but he then goes on to tell us that we can avoid that punishment “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10 v 9)

When he was brought to Jesus the paralysed man probably thought that his greatest need was physical healing but Jesus gave him much more than that – Jesus forgave his sins and set him on the pathway to heaven.

The good news is that Jesus still offers forgiveness and healing to all those who come to him in repentance and faith.

We need a faith that obeys

Jesus said to the paralysed man “Take up your mat and go home”. The man was not 100% sure that he had been healed but he had the faith to obey Jesus. Immediately he stood up in front of the crowd, took up the mat he had been lying on and went home praising God. The paralysed man had not said anything until this point in the story but we now hear his first words and these are words of praise and thanks to God for his forgiveness and healing.

The miracle of healing was not fully complete until the paralysed man obeyed the words of Jesus to stand up and go home.

The paralysed man had the faith to obey Jesus – we are also called to “Trust and obey” (Ann Butler reminded us of this in her recent excellent article in the Corona Chronicles).

Conclusion

In conclusion let’s remind ourselves of the four important themes that come out of today’s bible passage:

1. We sometimes need to take the initiative - Are there any situations or people in our life where we need to take the initiative and bring them to Jesus?
2. We need to be persistent - Are there any things that we have been praying about for a long time and have nearly given-up on getting an answer? - we need to be persistent and persevere (P.U.S.H.)
3. We need to accept God’s forgiveness - Are we still carrying the heavy weight of our sin and guilt? – we need to come to Jesus in repentance and faith - He is God and He has the power to forgive.
4. We need to obey Jesus - Is God asking us to do something special in His service? – we need to listen to His voice, and then obey, stand-up and follow Him.