

The Priority of Life
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“Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take your bed and walk?’ But 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, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.’ And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, ‘We never saw anything like this!’” Mark 2:9-12

While I don’t remember the pastor himself, I remember his devotion well. I had just begun my service to our Lord and His people as a pastor myself and was attending a district youth ministry meeting in Orlando, Florida. The pastor giving the morning devotion at our meeting opened his devotion by asking us to take a few minutes to silently reflect on this question, “Who is the first person (apart from God Himself) that you’d like to see in heaven?”

At first, my mind raced to how amazing it will be to meet the Apostle Paul, or Mary Magdalene, or even Martin Luther. Fortunately, the pastor gave us time to truly reflect on the reality of eternal life and the resurrection, and the thought came clearly to me. I would first love to see my older brother, Mark. Mark had a rare, progressive disease which over the course of his life changed the very structure of his skeleton. It dawned on me that day that in the resurrection, it will be the first time that I reach out my hand and my brother will reach back with a hand free of the disease that caused him such pain and hardship in this fallen world.

Why is this true? Because our Lord has granted to both of us the greatest miracle of all, forgiveness! It’s what plays out in the life of the paralyzed man we encounter in Mark 2. As Jesus stands over this man lying on his mat, Jesus first meets his greatest need as He says to him, “My son, your sins are forgiven.” The crowd might have thought the greater miracle was that Jesus granted him physical healing, but that was the sign Jesus gave that He had authority to do the greater thing in granting forgiveness.

Let it sink in. Had Jesus only physically healed the man, his legs would have worked, but for how long? 30, 40 years? Then death would come and his legs would again no longer work. With Jesus’ gift of forgiveness, now there is the healing of that which separates from God who is our source of eternal life. Now, in Jesus’ return, the paralyzed man, along with all who receive Jesus’ forgiving grace, have bodies, alive, whole, no longer touched by sin and its effects. Forgiveness is also the greater miracle because it comes with the cost of Jesus’ own life on the cross, which is a far greater gift than even temporal release from physical limitations and diseases.

Mark did not find physical healing in this temporal world, but he knew Jesus' forgiveness and thus has life eternal, and had a life on earth, sanctified by that same grace. Do you suffer with a disease? Do you struggle with limitations in this fallen place? Do you love someone who has such hardships? Take heart! Receive the forgiveness Jesus won for us and announces to us in absolution, and freely share this gift with those you love. And know that because of His forgiving grace, one day Jesus will stand over our lifeless bodies and say something similar to what He said to the paralyzed man. "I say to you rise, and go home." And we will walk with full healing into His eternal home.