

Home Study

Mark's Epiphany



THURSDAY, JANUARY 14, 2021

INTRODUCTION

Has there ever been a time in your life when a friend (or friends) really helped you out when you were in a tough spot? Our very best friends don't just say nice things about us, or think well of us. Sometimes friendship has to be put into action, and that's when true friendships are forged.

Take a moment to think about some of the true friends that God has placed into your life. Thank God for the blessing of friends!

TODAY'S READING

Mark shares a new healing miracle story with us today. Jesus, of course, is the central figure in the story. He's the miracle man, the healer, the possessor of power and authority in both the physical and spiritual realms. But, in this story, other characters should catch our attention, too.

Open up your Bible and read Mark 2:1-12, as Mark tells us about the healing of a paralyzed man. As you're reading, pay attention to the actions of the man's four friends. Also note anything that particularly catches you by surprise, or that stands out in the story.

Next, before zooming in on some of the noteworthy details of the story, ask yourself this important question. "With which person in the story can I most easily identify?" Is it the paralytic? Or one of the friends? Or can you picture yourself questioning Jesus' motives, like the teachers of the law did? Or is it easiest to see yourself as one of the bystanders in the crowd?

In verse 1, Mark tells us that Jesus had returned to Capernaum, the town where he cast out the evil spirit from the man in the synagogue. A huge crowd quickly gathered. Read again verse 2, and picture the scene described in verse 2, with the jammed house.

Mark tells us that Jesus was "preaching the word" to the crowd. Do you imagine they were all quiet and attentive? If Jesus preached the sermon next Sunday at Hope, would it likely be crowded? Would you be able to hear a pin drop while he preached?

Read again verse 4. In the quiet of the teaching time, suddenly strange noises are heard from above. What did the people in the crowd think? What did Jesus think? What did the owner of the house think?

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What do you think moved those four friends to put a hole in the roof and lower their friend down to Jesus? Do you imagine there was much conversation prior to taking this drastic action? Any hesitation? Any humor?

Read verse 5 carefully. Jesus spoke words of forgiveness to the paralyzed man, but only after he sees whose faith?

These four friends aren't named, or given any direct credit. But we should all learn a lesson about friendship from them. Has God ever given you an opportunity to put your faith into action like that?

Why do you think Jesus talked first to the paralyzed man about forgiveness of sins, instead of healing him right away? This seems to be another instance of Jesus demonstrating spiritual authority, doesn't it?

Sitting among the crowd in the house were some religious leaders of the Jews. They heard Jesus proclaim forgiveness of sins to the paralytic man, and they were shocked. They definitely (and correctly) believed that only God has the authority to truly forgive anyone's sins. So they immediately (and incorrectly) concluded that Jesus was a blasphemer – that is, a person falsely claiming to be divine.

Mark tells the story beautifully. Read verse 8 again, about how Jesus read their scandalized thoughts.

What do you think lies behind Jesus' question to the religious leaders in verse 9? Is he trying to trap them? Confuse them? Or help them think through the possibility that he just might actually be truly God? This was the first encounter that Mark records between Jesus and the religious officials, but there would be many more. Read John 9 for a similar account.

Imagine some kind of a scene, similar to this story, taking place in our church some weekend. What might we say about it? "Wow, that was cool!" "Who's going to pay for the roof repairs?" "How dare they pull off a stunt like that?" "This would never have happened in my old church!" Would anyone's feathers get ruffled? Would any of us react the way the religious officials did, with suspicion and alarm?

Read verse 10 again. Is Jesus talking exclusively to the religious leaders? Or is he making a point for the benefit of all of the crowd present?

Many Bible scholars and commentators talk about how we are all pretty much like the paralyzed man, when it comes to sin in our lives. How does sin paralyze us, and prevent us from being able to do the things God created us to do? Who is our only hope for healing?

Think back to those four friends, who were such a crucial part of this story. Is there someone you know who really needs your help? Has God put someone in your life who needs an encounter with Jesus Christ -- the healer, the forgiver, the life-restorer? What can you do to help?

PRAYER

Dear Jesus, make me/us bold to help others: friends, family, and maybe even strangers. Give me/us opportunities to put faith into action, to show Christian love, to bring others to know you better. Thank you, Lord, for the healing you have given me/us, and for taking away my/our sins forever. Help me/us to live a grateful, joyful life, in response to your love. Amen.