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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity

October 10, 2021

Text: Matthew 9:1–9

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Some people brought their paralyzed friend to Jesus. Mark's gospel tells us that they tore off the thatched roof and lowered their friend down into the house where Jesus was teaching. It's abundantly obvious what they want Jesus to do: heal their friend. They've gone to extraordinary lengths to bring their paralyzed friend into Jesus' presence. The crowd blocked them from entering through the door. So they literally tore off the roof to get to Jesus. This man needs to be healed of his paralysis.

But Jesus doesn't do the obvious thing. Vs. 2b records our Lord's unexpected response to the paralyzed man and the brave, determined actions of his friends: Jesus said, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven." What are we to make of our Lord's care for this man? Did Jesus do the right, necessary thing or things for this man? We are all Christians here; men, women, and children who confess Jesus to be our Lord and Savior, the God whom we adore and worship in body and soul. Because of these commitments, we must answer the question, "Did Jesus do the right thing or things for this paralyzed man?" with a resounding yes.

But I suspect we fall for a very natural temptation. That temptation is thinking the physical needs of the person are really more important than his spiritual needs. That his need for health, life, family, friends, food and home are more important and supersede his need for a right relationship with God. After all, his friends brought the man to Jesus to heal his physical infirmity.

I described placing one's physical needs above spiritual needs as being a very natural temptation. What I mean is that we see and experience our physical needs. The natural sciences have largely quantified many, maybe even most of our physical needs. Each individual is different and so there is room for some variety. Consider how much food we human beings need. Generally about 2,000 calories per day that come from various kinds or types of food: protein, carbohydrates, fat, sugar, and so forth. We need water, about 8 glasses per day to stave off dehydration. Depending upon our age, we need 6 to 10 hours of sleep every day. Prescribed medications and treatments are

based, in large part, upon measurable, quantifiable criteria such as height, weight, age, blood pressure, blood panels, numerous scans and x-rays, and so forth. All these are good gifts of God.

For comparison, let's consider our spiritual needs. They are much harder to quantify. How many minutes should we pray every day to maintain a healthy life? The Lord's Prayer, the most comprehensive, perfect prayer, can be prayed in less than 30 seconds. At a bare minimum, we ought to pray the Lord's Prayer daily. The Lord Jesus did use the word daily within the prayer itself, "Give us this day our daily bread..." In days of old, Christians used to exalt the sweet hour of prayer, based upon our Lord's question to His sleeping disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mark 14:37b–38). Is 30 seconds of prayer enough, especially since the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak? Or do we need one hour? The composer of Psalm 119 writes that seven times a day I praise you for your righteous rules (119:164). King David wrote, in Psalm 55:17, that he prayed three times a day, evening, morning, and at noon. Daniel prayed three times a day regularly. That's what got him cast into the lions' den (Daniel 6).

How much of the Scriptures must we know in order to have a rich, deep, meaningful relationship with God? In the Old Testament, God commanded husbands and father to teach God's Word "diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise" (Deut. 6:7). Later, in Deuteronomy 32:46–47, the Lord said, "Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children...For it is no empty word for you, but your very life..." Note that Moses says two things here: all of God's Word is to be learned and those words are your very life. So, how much of the Bible should we know? How much teaching covers when you rise, when you lie down, and when you walk by the way? On top of that, God's Word is "your very life." How much of God's Word do you need when it's your very life?

In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus said those who abide in His word are truly His disciples (John 8:31). And in John 14:15 Jesus said, "If you love me you will keep my commandments." Our love for Jesus is measured by our living in God's Word and by keeping Christ's commands. How do you measure and quantify those things? The Lord Jesus commanded us to observe His Supper often so that we can receive often His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. Since the days of the apostles, the Church has offered weekly worship services of preaching, the reading of God's Word,

prayer, song and hymns, and the Lord's Supper so that God's people can abide in Christ's Word, talk about it to their children through the week, and demonstrate their love for Jesus to one another and before the world. And the Church has offered public prayer services through the week. Matins and Vespers, morning and evening prayer. Even before the Bible was readily available through inexpensive printing – a privilege we have had for only about 500 years, note: most Christians, roughly 1,500 years worth of Christianity, have not had the Scriptures so easily available – the Church developed her liturgies so that important segments of Scripture could be easily memorized through music and repetition. The psalms were set to music and hymns were written so that even the most illiterate person could learn God's Word by heart. Catechisms were written and memorized.

All such efforts were done because of the Biblical conviction that God's Word is our very life. Mankind must have a certain number of calories and servings of water and medicine and sleep and so forth. But mankind must have God's Word and the Sacraments.

Now we're back to our original question. Did Jesus do the right thing by taking care of the paralyzed man's need for forgiveness first, before He healed him physically? Of course Jesus always did and does the right things for His beloved people. But we Christians need to heed and understand what Jesus did for this man. Even though the paralyzed man's friends tore open the roof in order to secure his physical healing, the Lord Jesus saw that he needed spiritual healing as well as (not instead of) physical healing. Jesus provides for all of this man's needs: physical and spiritual. And both needs were provided by the grace of Christ's powerful word.

In sermon from previous weeks, I have emphasized that we human beings are both body and soul. Both natures must be cared for appropriately. Because sin has corrupted our human nature, both body and soul, and because we live in a fallen world, and because the devil continues to tempt us to sin and unbelief, our (i.e., I am referring to humanity in general) dominant mindset is to think almost exclusively about our physical needs. Insufficient attention is given to our spiritual needs. We Christians must resist this general mindset through repentance and faith. That was part of the reason why I went through all those Bible passages describing the need for prayer and God's Word. Prayer, learning and meditating on God's Word, public worship including preaching and the frequent reception of the Lord's Supper, are not nice options. They are absolutely essential. They are our life, as Moses and Jesus

taught us. Without them, we die. Even as we die without sufficient food, water, clothing, house, home, medical care, etc.

When Jesus forgives a paralyzed man first, before healing his physical paralysis, the Lord Jesus is reminding us that man must also have, as a first priority, the wholesome, life-giving Word of God. We must have the Gospel of Christ, the forgiveness of sin and the renewal of life in the Spirit of Christ. I have said these kinds of things in previous sermons. Today's text gives further witness to who we are as men and women with bodies and souls.

For the remaining few moments of this sermon, I want to add yet one new idea to this topic. Yes. We must support our physical bodies. And we must care for our souls. We must not pit them against each other. But the priority must be given to our spiritual need. The Lord Jesus asked this question in the gospels, "What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul" (Mark 8:36)?

But here's the new wrinkle to all this. Both our spiritual and physical needs are provided by God's Word. We Christians tend to think about God's Word taking care of our spiritual needs: forgiveness, the Holy Spirit, and so forth. But our physical needs are also provided by God's Word. The bread that you eat, the medicines you take, the homes you live in, the clothes that cover you, the air you breathe, the relationship you have, all of it is provided by God's Word.

From the first chapters of Genesis, we know that God created the universe by the power of His Word. God said, Let there be ... and it happened. That creative word continues to this very moment and will continue into eternity. The author of Hebrews began his epistle with these words:

¹Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ²but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, *through whom also he created the world*. ³He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and *he upholds the universe by the word of his power...*" (Heb. 1:1 – 3a).

God the Father created the world through His Son. And the Son upholds the universe through His Word. As Jesus, the incarnate Son through the Father created the world and by whose word the universe continues to exist, spoke the word of forgiveness to the paralyzed man so He spoke the word providing for his physical healing. Dear

people of God, you live by God's Word, physically and spiritually. To separate our lives into this area being my spiritual life lived by God's Word, the Bible, and this area is my physical life lived by man's word is false. This is why the Bible describes God's people praying so frequently and giving such attention to learning and mediating on God's Word. Our entire life, all of our relationships, our hopes for present and eternal joy, fellowship with God and man, all of them and everything is dependent upon God and His Word of power and grace.

The Lord Jesus has authority both to forgive our sins and provide for every spiritual need. And He has the power to provide for our physical existence. We were created by Him and for Him. His Word is life, and joy, peace, forgiveness, love, and victory. Praise be to Christ ...

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.