

Take Up Your Bed

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There's a bit of difference between blindness and paralysis. When we are blind, we are bumping into things, or maybe we trip and fall because we can't see. With paralysis, though, it's not about bumping or falling, it's a lack of movement. We can see just fine, but we are stuck.

I can't help it. It's her fault. I inherited my temper from my father. In these simple one-liners ... some of which I myself have used ... there is an awareness of the problem, but there seems to be an inability or unwillingness to do something about it.

Often, when we are aware of problems that we have, the reasons that they exist are quite valid. I can't help it – well, we are technically powerless against the hells, and we can't change our loves. It's her fault – well, people around us are doing things all the time that affect us adversely. I inherited my temper from my father – well, spiritual inheritance from parents is a real thing, and if you knew my dad (just kidding dad).

At the end of our reading from Judges, we learned that the Israelites were greatly distressed because they were being attacked by the surrounding peoples.

What are some of the things that make you “greatly distressed”. What seems to upset you or make you sad? A difficult relationship? The unfairness of the world? A friend's ideology? People in general? Taxes? Bills? There are all sorts of things that seem to upset us in this world causing us great distress.

At the beginning of the reading from Judges, we learned about the enemies that the Israelites left in the land, despite God telling them to drive them all out. Those enemies, who either didn't seem so bad at first, or just seemed like too much trouble to get rid of, eventually start attacking them, and they intermarry with them, and the Israelites start worshipping their gods instead of Jehovah.

Essentially, the Children of Israel have created the situation of their own suffering. By disregarding the Lord's instructions and then by abandoning the Lord, the people have effectively disposed of their roadmap to happiness and the very Source of happiness Himself.

You may have heard something like this expression before: “You lie in the bed you made.” Through life choices, we create situations for ourselves that we then have to live with immediately or years down the road. Sometimes the situations are external in nature: the friends that we keep, how we treat people around us, the place that we choose to live for a job or a better life, the types of qualities we look for or ignore in a spouse, the amount of time we spend with our kids and how much of that time is spent on a phone.

Other choices are more internal in nature, like when we choose to make the world and material things more important than the neighbor, or when we allow false gods to influence our sense of right vs. wrong and be our source of happiness. Also, when we choose to use spiritual concepts as tools of judgment instead of tools of self-improvement. All of these choices will impact the nature of our life, and then we will eventually live with the consequences of those choices. Eventually, we lie in the bed we made.

With that said, our life situation isn't as simple as just being made up of our own life choices. It's also made of other people's choices that impact us. And sometimes the impact it has on us is paralysis. And with this in mind, we'll look at our story from Matthew.

In our story from Matthew this morning, the man was paralyzed, so he couldn't move. Some people brought him to Jesus on some sort of bed.

When we are spiritually paralyzed, there's something that keeps us from moving toward heaven and becoming an angel. It could be ideas or even life situations that are holding us back and paralyzing us. What's the problem with spiritual paralysis? It can lead to *life* experiences that are similar to *bodily* paralysis: you feel like you aren't getting anywhere in your spiritual life. You feel helpless, like life is happening around you. You see other people making progress but you aren't. You feel hopeless because there doesn't seem to be a cure for this paralysis. You may wonder what it might mean for the rest of your life stuck like this. Happiness seems out of reach. You may feel this way generally about your life, or you may feel this way about specific areas of life, like your relationships, your marriage, your own self-respect, your relationship with God, etc.

In our story, the paralytic man is brought to Jesus, and the first thing Jesus does is He forgives his sins. Then at the end, Jesus tells him to take up his bed and go to his house.

And when it comes to our healing, the first order of business is internal, and it's something that the Lord does. And yet, despite it being the Lord's action, we still need to take part. Internally, on the inside, we have to want the Lord, we have to recognize the need for Him in our life. God is knocking and you've got to let Him in. You have to want a better life and be willing to do something about it.

This means no more excuses. You aren't blind to what you need, you are paralyzed by lame reasonings that hold you back from attaining it. Now there's a difference between reasons and excuses: reasons might explain why things are a certain way; excuses, though, are fabrications for why we can't move forward or fix it. A reason for being angry could be that so-and-so did this thing to us; it becomes an excuse when we fail to take responsibility for our anger and ask the Lord to help us change it. A reason that we don't pray or read the Word daily is that we just have a lot going on and blah, blah, blah, but it becomes an excuse when we fail to put effort into amending our daily schedule to make time for important things. In summary of this talk about excuses: don't let your reasons become excuses. Excuses are paralyzing.

Continuing with the healing that Jesus performed on the paralytic, He said to the man, "Arise, take up your bed and go to your house." Your bed is your external life, the situation you live in, and it also includes your senses and ideas that you hold in your memory. Essentially, it's everything about the way you interact with the external world, from where your body goes to what you learn with all your senses. This bed of external experiences that we lie on is also where we can be asleep to more important things, and when we experience paralysis, it's where we stay without ever getting up to move around. Taking up our bed and walking means a change in that external situation that is keeping us trapped in that paralysis. If work keeps you from caring for your family, then change that situation. If your friends inspire you to drink more than you ought to, then change your friends. If staying up late means you're on the computer looking at things that heaven-bound people wouldn't watch, then stop staying up late or throw away your computer. If it's hard to keep yourself accountable, then find someone to help keep you accountable. Take. Up. Your. Bed.

We just talked about excuses: things that get in the way, and we offer rationalizations for leaving them there. But there are other things that can paralyze a person that are valid because they can upend a person's life. Many of these are valid reasons for why our life is a certain way because they can feel very much outside of our control. Just a couple examples of these paralyzing situations might be a marriage that ended without their consent, or various types of abuses that nobody and especially no kid in the world should have to suffer. But people do suffer, don't they? Jesus didn't hide that fact: *In this world, you will have suffering.*

The only thing that helps us through that is the fact that there is an all-loving God who wishes nothing more than to hold us to His bosom to comfort us on the other side of that suffering. The Lord has overcome the world. The Lord doesn't want our circumstances—whether they are self-created that cause our own suffering, or whether they are hellish things that happen to us—He doesn't want any of those circumstances to paralyze us from moving toward the peace and joy that He wants to give us. But I want to tell you that God did not create you in this world with absolutely no control over your circumstances and over your life. Difficult does not mean impossible. And if something impossible were to arise, we are in luck that, with God, nothing is impossible.

So, what if we are already paralyzed? And how do we avoid further paralysis? Remember, paralysis is something that holds you back from heavenly happiness. It's something that keeps you from relationship with the Lord and from healthy relationships with other people. They often look like excuses, but they might be other life-altering events that happened outside of our control. Let the Lord forgive your sins, that is, if you are allowing excuses to get in the way, then ask the Lord to get them out of the way, and allow yourself to believe in a better life for which the Lord has not abandoned you.

Then, take up your bed and go to your house. Set yourself up for spiritual success in this natural world. Surround yourself with people who support a better version of you—not one that is stuck and paralyzed.

Also, did you notice in the story that people brought the paralytic to the Lord? Do you have friends and community around you like that? If not, then it's time to meet some.

And finally, maybe you can be one of those people that helps the paralytic. I don't mean that you need to drag your neighbor to church, but here are some ways that might help someone experiencing paralysis. Be affirmative for them: someone who is paralyzed has probably lost hope, so hope for them. Remind them that it's never too late as long as there's breath in their lungs. Also, remind them that they are not powerless because the Lord is their power. Also, it doesn't hurt to invite them to church, right? It could look like this: "Hey, wanna grab some coffee on Sunday after church? I could either pick you up afterward, or we could go to church together and then right out to coffee." And finally, a little listening and a lot of patience goes a long way. It probably took them a long time to get where they are, and it'll probably take them more than a few seconds to get out of that paralyzed state. Listen with love, and be patient with their suffering.

Jesus said, "Be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you. Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house."

Amen.

Readings

Judges 1,2 (portions)

Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth Shean and its villages, And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites [g]under tribute, but did not completely drive them out.

Nor did Ephraim; nor did Zebulun; nor did Asher; nor did Naphtali.

Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals; and they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them.

So He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. Wherever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for calamity, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn to them. And they were greatly distressed.

Matthew 9:2-7

Then they brought to Jesus a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you.”

And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, “This Man blasphemes!”

But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Arise and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins”—then He said to the paralytic, “Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.” And he arose and departed to his house.

Divine Love and Wisdom 396. Love for ourselves and love for the world are of service to our spiritual loves the way foundations are of service to houses. It is love for ourselves and love for the world that prompt us to care about our bodies, to want nourishment, clothing, and housing, to take care of our homes, to look for jobs in order to be useful, to be granted respect due to the worth of our responsibilities so that people heed us, and even to find delight and recreation in worldly pleasures. All of these activities, however, should be for the sake of usefulness. They bring us into a state of serving the Lord and the neighbor. In contrast, when there is no love for serving the Lord and the neighbor, when there is nothing but love for using the world to suit ourselves, then the love becomes hellish instead of heavenly.

Arcana Coelestia 10236 [2] Strictly speaking, the level of the senses forming the last and lowest of the natural degree is called the flesh and perishes when a person dies, thus that which has enabled the person to function in the world, namely the senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. It may be recognized that the senses exist on the ground-level so to speak of a person's life. [Also] an external aspect of the senses, is the deposit in the human memory of impressions received from the world, consisting solely of worldly, bodily, earthly images.