

Spiritual Paralysis

A Sermon by Rev. Derek Elphick

INTRODUCTION

We live in a world of "shoulds..."

I should fix the mower,
do the dishes,
exercise,
call that friend,
have so-and-so over for dinner,
speak to my boss about that problem...

The same is true of our lives on a deeper level:

I should read the Word more frequently,
I should apologize for what I said to my sister/daughter/son, _____ ,
I should pray to the Lord for help,
I should shun that selfish attitude/habit because it's hurting me
(and my family).
I should reach out to that friend in need

Part of the challenge with this world of "shoulds" is that we often *know already* what we need to do...

The solution to our inaction is hardly ever absent or difficult...

but for some reason we just can't make ourselves do it!

- it's almost like there's like a hidden force of inertia that is paralyzing us...
- that's working overtime to keep the status-quo

Added to this "stalemate" are the justifications we tell ourselves...

"I know I should do such-and-such but I'm not going to do it because...

- I tried it before
- They won't listen
- It's a waste of time
- I've got more important things to do
- This is who I am. I can't change.
- Everybody does it...

And so justifications, once deployed,

"absolve" us of doing what we know we should.

1. SPIRITUAL PARALYSIS DEFINED

Now, we're not *bad* people for procrastinating,
for putting things off,
for saying we're going to do something but not doing it...

This is part of being human...

- we have lots of good ideas and thoughts running through our heads (thanks to the Lord and His angels), and these become good intentions, but our good intentions don't always make it into the brave new world of actual deeds, of acts of service

And besides, we don't have enough time in the day to do *all* the things we think and intend...

That said, there is such a thing as spiritual paralysis and, as we'll see in a moment...

- it's a spiritual condition that severely hampers our ability to be useful
- & like the man with paralysis, we go in search of the Lord's help
- but we can't do this on our own - we need the help of our friends, the help of our community, to come before the Lord
- but once we find ourselves at the Lord's feet, forgiveness and healing take place, and amazing things happen as a result...

Spiritual paralysis is the inability to carry out our good intentions.

On a very basic level, it's a battle between our body & spirit...

As the Lord said to His disciples, *"the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak"* (Matthew 26:41).

Spiritual paralysis manifests itself in many different forms...

Examples:

Perfectionism - afraid to try something new, it won't be good enough

Escapism - avoidance of problems

Indecision - crippled by a choice

Fear of commitment - avoidance of responsibility

Old wounds - can't shake regrets, shame, annoyance, etc.

Apathy - feeling low, unmotivated

Critical, judgmental spirit - triggered by someone or something irks us

Impatient, angry thoughts - so angry simply can't let go

Whatever the form, one thing we know - we find ourselves stuck, our efforts to "move on" are crippled, our spirit feels locked in time, paralyzed.

It's incredibly frustrating - we feel so powerless...

And it's confusing...

We know right from wrong, the difference between good and evil...

Paul, in *Romans*, speaks to this struggle:

"I don't understand my own actions. In my mind I serve God. But there is another force at work in my life. I don't understand it. And while I want to do what is right, I don't do it. When I want to avoid what is wrong, I still do it. I am stretched between the two. Here is my intention. Here is my performance. God, who will deliver me?" (7:5).

2. A CLOSER LOOK AT SIN

The teachings of our church reveal what this other "force at work" is...

It is, of course, the presence of sin in the world and in our lives,

"sin" being the Biblical catchphrase for all the disorderly loves of self and world (see AC 4997)...

which *separate* us from God (see AC 7589).

Let's take a closer look at this word, sin, because it's the **first thing talked about in this healing miracle.**

The Lord says to the paralytic, "*Son, your sins are forgiven you.*"

We tend to think of "sin" in its narrowest, strictest definition...

namely as a *deliberate* act of evil in which someone consciously, brazenly breaks one of the 10 commandments, by lying or cheating or stealing and this is, of course, to sin...

But sin, according to the teachings of our church, carries a much *broader* definition too...

- "to sin" is to act against Divine order (AC 5076).
- sin is another word for evil, for anything that separates us from God, heaven, angels, each other
- and so "sin" is often synonymous with evil (see AC 2240, 4195, etc.)
- "*if you want to know what evil and consequently sin is, study the loves of self and the world...*" (AC 4497)

Now these broader definitions of "sin" are important and helpful because they get us closer to being able to identify the *cause*, the "culprit" if you will, of our own spiritual paralysis...

Am I being stubborn here?

Do I have revenge and contempt in my spirit?

Is it because my will is being thwarted?

(see TC 532, 533)

It's important to get into the practice of asking ourselves these types of questions because in the beginning we "*experience tremendous inner resistance*" to doing it (see TC 561).

3. FORGIVENESS

In our reading today we read that:

*Lip repentance does not cause sins to be forgiven; only repentance in life can lead to this. Being Mercy itself, the Lord is constantly forgiving a person's sins, but sins cling to us no matter how much we suppose them to have been forgiven, **nor are they removed except through a life in keeping with the commandments** (AC 8393).*

Only after receiving the Lord's forgiveness, "your sins are forgiven you," was the man released from his paralysis.

And yet, the full healing couldn't take effect until the man actually got up and walked off, much to the astonishment of everyone who was watching.

The same is true for us.

The Lord is constantly forgiving us anytime we stray from His path in thought or deed.

Think again of the different ways spiritual paralysis might manifest itself in you:

Perfectionism

Escapism
Indecision
Fear of commitment
Old wounds, regrets
Apathy
Critical, judgmental spirit
Impatient, angry thoughts

These are all evils, "sins" if you will, because they keep us separated from God, separated from a life of usefulness and joy!

So the man with paralysis is brought to the Lord on a stretcher/bed by his friends.

After discovering the door to the house is blocked, the men carry their friend up the outside stairs to the rooftop and lower him down to the Lord...

Our good intentions, this world of "shoulds" that we've been talking about today, are like the friends carrying us along and lowering us down to the feet of the Lord.

We want His help,

"When Jesus saw their (the friends) faith, He said to the paralytic, Son, your sins are forgiven you" (Mark 2:5).

This is the first step toward our release from spiritual paralysis...

- supporting each other in our journey of faith
- and accepting the Lord's forgiveness

4. HEALING

The next step is the one that causes "amazement" (v. 12).

It causes amazement because it involves getting up and walking, doing things we *literally* weren't able or willing to do before...

The walking part represents "a life in keeping with the commandments" (AC 8393).

No longer are we stuck in a world of "shoulds..."

We fix the mower,
do the dishes,
exercise,
call that friend,
have so-and-so over for dinner,
speak to our boss about that problem...

We decide that we *will*

Read the Word more frequently,
apologize for what we said to that loved one or friend
pray to the Lord for help,
I should shun that selfish attitude/habit because it's hurting me
(and my family).
I should reach out to that friend in need

These things happen because the Lord tells us to "*arise, take up your bed, and walk*" (v. 9).

Arise = see our thoughts and intentions in a new way

Take up your bed = take our system of thinking that we've relied on in the past, and take it in a new direction

Walk = to be able to "walk" again, walk with God, new kind of freedom

CONCLUSION

Spiritual paralysis, the inability to carry out our good intentions.

Crippling - we're being withheld from showing and receiving love

- we're being w/held from being useful, helpful

- engaged in the lives of the people around us

Can't "wish" spiritual change into existence...

Can't even force it into existence by sheer willpower...

Have to....

1. Seek out the Lord, with the support of friends
2. Receive His forgiveness (accept it)
3. Do the hardest part - get up and walk

To be freed of an evil that once paralyzed us.

***And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, 'We never saw anything like this.'* (Mark 2: 12).**

AMEN.