

A Way When There Is No Way



Gary Wilkerson April 20, 2020

Pick Up Your Beggar's Mat. It's Your Message to the World!

How do you move forward when your circumstances say, "No way"? What do you do when your family is falling apart, you're struggling financially, you're discouraged and your heart overflows with pain? Is there a way forward when you can't see a way?

Mark 2 shows us there is. When things seem impossible and we lose all hope of going on, Jesus faithfully makes a way where there is no way.

The town of Capernaum was a hub for the Lord's early ministry. Nearby, he called his very first disciples, the brothers Peter and Andrew and the brothers James and John. They left their fisherman's nets and followed Jesus into Capernaum where he performed miracles, setting the town abuzz.

First, Jesus was confronted by a demon-possessed man. He cast the spirit out of the man, delivering him instantly (*Mark 1:21-28, ESV*). Next, Christ led his new disciples straight to the home of Peter's mother-in-law, who lay suffering with a fever. Jesus took her by the hand, and she rose up from her bed fully healed enough to make a meal for them (*1:29-31*).

What a succession of powerful events! Not surprisingly, Jesus was besieged by people in desperate need: "the whole city was gathered together at the door" (*1:33*). Jesus healed the diseased and demon-possessed, and people emerged rejoicing, freed from all kinds of afflictions (*1:34*).

The next day, Christ set out for other towns in the region, preaching and working miracles of healing and deliverance. Not long after he returned to Capernaum, the people rushed to him again. "And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them" (*2:1-2*). The first time Jesus was there was miraculous. I'm sure his return raised expectations of more to come.

A paralyzed man who missed the first round of miracles may have feared he would miss this one too. He was so physically disabled that he had to be carried to the meeting "by four men. And when they could not get near (Jesus) because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay" (*Mark 2:3-4*).

This paralyzed man was someone who seemed like he had been passed over by God's blessings. He may have seen some friends healed the first time Jesus came. Now, with Jesus' return, he probably saw many more rushing past him to be healed. Nobody could blame him for thinking, "I keep missing out. God's blessings seem meant for others but not for me. I missed my miracle the first time, and I can't see any way to get to Jesus for my miracle this time."

A lot of Christians have this mindset about their lives. They think they've expected too much from a marriage that's no longer loving, that they're hindered by never-ending financial problems, that their physical limitations render them useless to God. They feel like they've missed out on their miracle.

Yet these Christians have never stopped believing they matter to God. Hungering for more, they're stuck like the paralyzed man, convinced, "Nothing changes, no matter how much I pray. This is my lot in life."

Thank God, the paralyzed man's friends believed differently. I picture them saying to him, "We're taking you to the revival meeting. You're going to be touched by the Messiah!" The man probably still had doubts once they arrived because the meeting was packed with the crowd spilling out the door, yet his friends still believed. They sensed there was a way when there seemed to be no way.

Sometimes we need someone to help make a way when we can see no way.

When it comes to our walk with Jesus, most of us think, "It's all up to me." But when life has us feeling stuck, sometimes a word of faith or a generous gesture from a friend can supply the ray of hope we need. You may feel paralyzed, frozen, unable to move forward, wondering, "When will the deliverance I need ever come?" A friend's faith can lift your head just enough to help you see the way out of discouragement.

When it looked like the meeting door was closed to the paralyzed man, his friends acted in outlandish faith. They removed the roof above Jesus and let the paralyzed man down through the hole.

Jesus was moved by the group's faith. "And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven'" (2:5). What an unusual thing for Jesus to do. He didn't heal the paralyzed man but instead forgave his sin. I believe Christ did this for a very important reason.

Often the Lord makes a way *in* us before he makes a way *for* us.

We want revival, healing and miracles. That isn't always the work that Jesus chooses to do first in us. Sometimes he works on our inside before he works on our outside. In doing this, he prepares our hearts for deliverance. You see, when we're stuck, our only thought is "I just want to walk again." Jesus' thought is "I want you to live." We think, "I want to run." Jesus' thought is "I want you to be whole in body, soul and spirit."

If we get our external healing without an inner work first, then, when the next storm comes, we may not feel like walking anymore. When Jesus does an inner work, though, something changes in us so that when our next storm comes, we hold on to him in faith. We don't get stuck again in despair or helplessness because our faith no longer depends on circumstances but rather on him. Our hearts and minds are held aloft by biblical hope.

Others can get you in, but they can't get you up.

Once the man was forgiven, Jesus called his faith to action. He commanded the man, "I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home" (*Mark 2:11*). The man couldn't rely on his friends to do this. Their faith could bring him near to Jesus, but to respond to Christ's command, he had to move in faith.

Jesus tells each of us to get up, to rise in faith from whatever grips us: addiction, hopelessness, troubled thoughts. To do that, we can't rest on our friends' faith, and we can't listen to our own doubts. When he tells us to rise, he's saying, "Stand, because God's power is about to move through you."

When we respond, we'll get the same reaction the paralyzed man did. "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!'" (2:12).

Once we stand upright, Jesus tells us, "Now, pick up your mat."

"I say to you...pick up your bed" (*Mark 2:11*). Why would Jesus tell the man to take his smelly old mat with him? The guy probably wanted nothing to do with it. It represented every frustrating inability. "I don't ever want to look at this mat again," he may have thought. "It reminds me of my paralysis and failure and despair. I'd rather burn it!"

Your mat is your message.

Imagine the guy carrying his mat out of the crowded meeting. Many present had questioned Jesus' authority, and now they were being swiped by the old mat as the healed man passed through the crowd. The mat was no longer a sick-bed but rather a miracle testimony. Jesus knew his route home would take the man through the streets where he begged every day. Everyone could see firsthand his transformation. They would see the wonder-working power of Jesus' gospel.

So, what do you think it was like when the man reached home? I see him walking through the front door with wonder, something he'd never been able to do. His mother might have been cleaning his room, expecting his friends to carry him in at any moment. But the footsteps she heard that day sounded different. Turning, she saw her son and fell to her knees in amazement.

"Mama, thank you for taking care of me," the man said. "You don't have to do that anymore. I've been healed, freed, made whole by Jesus. I don't need this mat, but I'm keeping it as a testament to his power. I'll use it to tell the world about Jesus and what he has done."

Quite simply, the mat was the man's testimony. If someone ever asked him about it, he would have this message: "For decades I cried myself to sleep because I was paralyzed. I didn't have the life I knew God promised. Now when I look at this mat, I think, 'Look at what Jesus has done for me. He forgave me, cleansed me, healed me, made me whole, freed me, delivered me. Now he has called me, chosen me and given me authority in his kingdom.'"

Your mat may be a lifeless marriage, a prodigal child, a sense of helplessness over your situation. Jesus is telling you to pick up your mat now "and go home" (*Mark 2:11*).

Friend, that dream you've had—the life you know God has called you to—doesn't have to lie stinking like a mat of despair. You don't have to wonder, "Will my healing ever come?" If your mind is depressed, your emotions depleted, turn to a friend and ask them to pray. Tell them, "I really need your faith now." Your joint prayers will remind you of Jesus and restore your hope. Soon you'll hear the Lord saying to you, "Get up," and you'll know he has made a way where there was none.

You'll pick up your old mat and walk home, telling everyone on the way, "I was frozen, stuck and paralyzed. Now I'm walking in faith again. Only the Lord makes a way where there wasn't one!" Hallelujah.

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