

Walk with Jesus: Jesus displays the power of God

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[0 : 00] Let's share our prayer together. Heavenly Father, we humbly bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your great glory our supreme concern.

! Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.! One in which we can identify with the characters. A story into which we can enter. We imagine ourselves perhaps as James Bond or Elizabeth Bennet or some other character in the book.

Funny how we never imagine ourselves as Moriarty or Cruella de Vil. Entering into the story is one of the most powerful ways to read the Bible.

One of the great challenges in Bible reading is to make ourselves slow down. We know the stories before we turn the page and get to them and so we tend to skim over the words.

We need to slow down. We've heard the story of the four friends bringing the man whose legs don't work to Jesus and lowering him through the roof.

[1 : 35] We've heard it before, some of us, since childhood. And so when we turn the page, we tend to skim over because we know what's going to happen.

Somehow we need to slow ourselves down and enter into the story. There are other things in stories than the plot.

What's going to happen is not the only important thing in any story. So this morning we're going to go through the story.

We're going to think about two different characters in the story. And we're going to place ourselves in their shoes. Or perhaps even upon their bed.

Now we're not going to imagine that we are Jesus. Rather, we're going to be more humble. We'll think about the four friends.

[2 : 40] And what it's like to carry someone and bring them to Jesus. But first of all, let's lie down on our bed. And imagine that we are the one being carried to Jesus.

We're not told how long this man has been unable to walk. It might have been from birth. It might have been a more recent injury or disease which has affected his legs.

But he is so unable to walk that he cannot make his own way to Jesus. Now we don't know if it was this man who persuaded his friends to carry him.

You know the kind of thing. I really want to go but I can't get there. I need your help. Will you help me? Will you help me? Please come and help me. We don't know if it was the four friends who persuaded the man.

We know it's difficult for you but we'll help. We'll come round in enough time. We'll get you all organised. Please let us carry you to Jesus. It's a difficult thing to accept help.

[4 : 01] Some of us are really not very good at that. It would be very difficult to be carried on your bed in public.

Down the street, round the corner, down the next street. Through a crowd. It's a difficult thing to be brought to someone you haven't met before.

And to depend upon them. Someone who you've only heard about in reports. It turns out there's quite a lot of trust involved.

In being the person lying on their bed in this story. And then it turns out it isn't easy to get close to Jesus.

Can't we imagine? It's one thing to let your four friends carry you along a level street.

[4 : 59] It's quite another thing to trust them to get you up on the roof. And then through the roof and lower you down into a crowded room. How do you think you would be feeling by the time your bed settles?

In the midst of the crowd. Before Jesus. A bit tired after the journey. A bit nervous and anxious about what's going to come next.

Will it all turn out to be a big let down? And somehow they're going to have to get into the crowd and carry you out. And carry you home again. And then imagine you're lying on your bed in the midst of this crowd.

Feeling nervous and anxious. And the first words you hear Jesus say to you have nothing at all to do with your legs. Man your sins are forgiven you.

But I didn't come here about my sins. I came here about my legs. Have you ever been to the doctors? You go in and the doctor asks you.

[6 : 11] What have you come here today? And you start talking about a pain. Maybe it's in your elbow or your arm or somewhere. And the next thing you know the doctor's looking at your back. Or he's looking at your legs.

Or he's asking about your ears. And you think but it's my arm that's the problem. We don't go to the doctor to treat our symptoms.

But to discover the underlying problems. The deep needs that are to be addressed. Now it isn't that the man's sins have caused the weakness in his legs.

By no means. It's more that Jesus looks at the man and sees right through to his deepest need. There's no benefit for the man or for us.

To have our legs working. Or our arms working. And still be trapped in our sins. I didn't come here about my sins.

[7 : 19] Perhaps we're lying in our bed thinking. I don't have any sins. We need the humility to admit. At least to ourselves.

At least admit it to Jesus. That we do have sinned. If we confess in our prayers and our hymns. That God is all knowing. Perhaps we need to stop singing about it. And believe it. If God already knows our sins. We might as well be honest about them.

And own up to him. And so imagine for a moment you're lying there. Your legs still don't work.

And Jesus doesn't appear to have noticed that. You're getting your head round all this talking about sins. And suddenly as though you weren't there at all.

[8 : 19] A theological discussion breaks out in the crowd. Well I definitely didn't get carried here. To listen to the Pharisees and Jesus holding a Bible study. Scribes and the Pharisees question saying.

Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone? This time the Pharisees are exactly right. They're spot on.

The only one who can forgive sins is God. Jesus is speaking to the man on his bed.

To build hope and faith. For the man on his bed. And also for the Pharisees who listen. And also for us who enter into the story.

Jesus said. Which is easier to say. Your sins are forgiven you. Or to say rise up and walk. They're both equally easy to say.

[9 : 26] If you can pronounce the words. And recognise the shape of the letters. And form it on your mouth. They're both equally easy to say. Your sins are forgiven you. Rise up and walk.

I did it again. It's not difficult to say these two things. Jesus is trying to make the point. That it's just as easy for him. To do both of them.

As it is for anyone to see them. So that you may know. The son of man has authority on earth. To forgive sins. He says to the paralysed man.

Rise. Pick up your bed. And walk home. Jesus wants the man. To get up from his bed. And to walk with Jesus.

Jesus wants the Pharisees. To leave behind their questioning. And walk with Jesus. As we enter into the story.

[10 : 26] Everything in this story. Is Jesus saying to us. Rise up. Walk with me. Why would anyone want to walk with Jesus?

Because Jesus is God. God with us. All the power of God. Present in our lives. For us and with us. Why else.

Would you choose. To walk with Jesus? Why would you choose. To walk with anyone else. When you can walk with God.

But the man on the bed. Imagine where the man on the bed. We're lying there. We could think. That's a great theological Bible study. That's just wonderful truth. But my legs still don't work.

Jesus fixes his legs. As a visual symbol of his power to forgive sins. A visual symbol of Jesus being God with us.

[11 : 37] A visual symbol of all the power of God. Being present in Jesus for us. Jesus fixes the man's legs.

To build up faith in him. To nurture hope in Jesus. The same Jesus who can fix legs. Is the same Jesus who can forgive sins.

The power of God is at work in Jesus. To meet your deepest needs and mine. In contrast to the questioning Pharisees.

Even though they're right about who can forgive sins. They're wrong about not recognizing Jesus as God. But in contrast to the Pharisees. The man on his bed hears Jesus speaking.

Recognizes that it's God speaking. Jesus does not speak. And does what he's told. Immediately he rose up before them. Picked up what he had been lying on.

[12 : 43] And went home glorifying God. Jesus does not speak. The powerful word of God to us. So that we have something to chat about.

Over coffee. Jesus speaks. So that we will obey. Jesus speaks. So that we will be renewed.

And transformed. And can get up. And walk with him. We are made new. By the powerful word of Jesus. How have you thought about yourself.

Coming to Jesus. Do you imagine that you're strong. That you're able to bring yourself to Jesus. Do you imagine that you have valuable abilities and gifts.

And that Jesus would be just lucky to have you on his side. Do you imagine that Jesus is just waiting for you to show up. So that you can question and correct everything he says.

[13 : 49] Because you know better than him after all. We need to enter into this story. And think of ourselves as poor and needy.

Without hope of self-help or self-improvement. We need to be brought to Jesus. Willing to submit to Jesus' word over us.

We are sinners. And we need Jesus to forgive our sin. We need the humility. To obey Jesus' word. We need to learn that Jesus is God. And grow in faith and trust in Jesus. So that we might grow in obedience to Jesus and his word. as he reaches deep within us and works renewal and transformation within us.

If only we lived in our lives what we sing in our hymns. What about those four friends?

[14 : 56] Have you ever read the story and put yourself in their place and thought about this as your life and your service in Jesus' mission?

What would encourage you to go to the trouble of carrying your friend to Jesus? What would enable you to bring your friend to Jesus?

Right at the beginning of the story the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal. The friends have heard about Jesus and his growing ministry.

That's why they bring their friend to Jesus. We read that Jesus looked up through the hole in the roof and he saw the four friends and Jesus saw their faith.

Not the faith of the man in the bed not the faith of the crowd around him but the faith of the four friends. It might be that their faith has grown because they've heard about what Jesus is doing.

[16 : 10] It might be their faith has grown because they've even been to listen to Jesus. It might be that they themselves have come to Jesus and had the experience of the forgiveness of their sins.

Your experience of God in your life grows your faith so that you might bring your friend to Jesus. That's the point of your faith. When you believe that Jesus is God and he has graciously been at work in your life you will want to bring your friend to Jesus.

It is an inevitable consequence of faith in your life. You will want to bring others to Jesus so that faith can grow in their lives.

You just cannot keep faith in Jesus to yourself. Your experience of Jesus your experience of the blessing of God in your life that is what you long for others to share and experience in their life.

[17 : 26] Your faith which grows through the work of Jesus in your life is what strengthens you to bring your friend to him. These four friends are a team.

They are all in this together. It's not difficult to imagine what would happen if one of them took the day off. That corner of the bed would droop over and their friend would fall out on the floor.

I suspect there are many of us who are afraid to live by faith. We are afraid to step out and serve Jesus and see our faith at work in our lives.

In part we are afraid because we think we are going to have to do it on our own. But when Jesus calls you he calls you to walk with him and you find out you are walking together with everyone else whom Jesus has called.

Disciples of Jesus are never on their own. If you want to live by faith in Jesus if you want to exercise the faith that is growing in your life find a friend and together you can both encourage each other to live by the faith that is growing in you.

[18 : 57] Jesus has given us to one another a gift of his love. Jesus has given us to be a community together a family who will support and encourage one another.

We don't try any work for Jesus on our own. You will always serve Jesus better in fellowship with others.

Think once think twice think team. If you are planning to go on your own you can always chicken out at the last minute and nobody will notice.

But if you have made a commitment to a friend you are more likely to turn up and join in. When you get anxious about serving Jesus about living by faith if you have the courage to share that with a friend they can pray with you they can encourage you they can go with you that together you might walk with Jesus.

We are all in this together. we are not alone. These four friends keep going not so much to the end of the road as the top of the roof.

[20 : 22] I wonder if you imagine yourselves being the four friends and think for a moment at how many points in the story would it have been both reasonable and easy to give up.

this fellow is a bit heavy lying on this bed. Oh we have got to go down two streets and round a corner and up a bit of a hill. It is going to be hard keeping him safe on that bed.

Oh no look at the crowd we are never going to get anywhere near Jesus here. We will never get him up on the roof and if we do we are likely to drop him through the hole in the roof.

Discouragements are all around. Walking with Jesus is about keeping on walking with Jesus. About not giving up.

Shortly we are going to share together Chagoria Lunch. For more than 30 years now our congregation has been supporting Chagoria Hospital and having Chagoria Lunches.

[21 : 33] How many times over those 30 years do you think it would have been easy to give up? How many times do you think oh we could change and support this or support that or do something different?

But we have been strengthened to carry on. About 10 years ago after having done Impact on Thursday Nights for 10 years with what seemed like a good going group.

One year turned up and for a whole year Gordon only had 4 or 5 young people come along. Don't you think it would have been easy to give up with only 4 or 5? But now we have got 40 or 50 coming because Gordon didn't give up and kept going.

Giving up is easy. I know it's easy because anyone can do it. Keeping going is hard. Sometimes keeping going is a real slog.

But you see if we give up serving by faith we are giving up walking with Jesus. Today is not the end of the road.

[22 : 56] Do not presume to judge how far you've come on the journey or how difficult it is to keep going today. Just keep walking with Jesus. Keep walking with Jesus into tomorrow and every tomorrow and see how far Jesus will lead you.

There is a place for you in every story of Jesus. Jesus. You might be the one who is being carried to Jesus today.

Well submit to that. Let others carry you and bring you to the presence of Jesus. Listen to Jesus' words of power spoken over you and rise and step into all that Jesus calls you to.

you. You might today be carrying your friend to Jesus or perhaps you might be wishing that you could do that, longing that you could do that.

The faith that Jesus is growing in you is top quality faith. The best faith that you could get, live by that faith. the company of disciples Jesus has placed you in are here to be on your side.

[24 : 21] Ask for help. Be part of the family. Support and encourage others and let them support and encourage you.

It is Jesus who has strengthened you to walk with him today and tomorrow. So trust in him and keep going.

Just keep putting one foot in front of the other. Jesus' story is also your story. You belong in Jesus' story.

Walk with Jesus. Walk into his story today and every day until he comes again. Let's pray together. speak Lord. We are listening. We long to hear your words of power spoken over us.

[25 : 24] May your spirit set our faith on fire that when we hear you speaking we will rise and walk with Jesus. Grow us into a community of faith that we will support and encourage one another that we will walk together with Jesus and with one another.

Speak Lord. We long to hear and to walk with you for your glory. Amen.