

A Different Point of View!

Mark 2:1-5 tells about the unorthodox efforts of four unnamed heroes who used faith and works to get a hurting friend to Jesus. Hearing that Jesus was in a house in Capernaum, four men sought to bring a paralytic to Jesus on a bed. Finding the house full of people and their way to Jesus blocked, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their faith He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you."

This incident reminds us that faith brings a different point of view in getting lost people to Jesus. Four men who believed Jesus could make a profound difference in the life of their paralyzed friend refused to give up when they found the way to Jesus crowded and impossible to pass. What to do? Faithless, negative thinking would have said nothing could be done and there were simply too many obstacles. But one of them lifted his eyes and expressed a different point of view: "We can get on top of the house, tear the roof off and lower him down to Jesus." Faith helped them have a different point of view! As a result the paralyzed man went home with a newly healed body and a freshly cleansed soul.

Many Christians could use a different point of view. The devil has convinced some in the church that our job as Christians is to come, sit and listen. But the proper evangelistic mentality is summed up in the words of Acts 5:20 - "Go ... stand ... speak." Some insist nobody they know is interested in God, but Jesus calls us to a different point of view. He says "the harvest truly is plentiful" and "lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest" (Matthew 9:37, John 4:35). Could it be many people are being kept from getting to Jesus because negative, faithless thinking is keeping us from getting to them? Faith can help us uncover the roof and see past what we alone can do to what we can do with God's help. Has faith changed your point of view?

- by Dan Gulley

Closet Convictions

John 12:42-43 says: "*Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.*" From its beginning, the cause of Christ has suffered because of disciples with closet convictions; the kind of men who know and believe the truth but will not stand up for it. Consider, for example, these influential rulers of our text. Potentially, their worth to the cause of their unconfessed Christ was immeasurable; effectively, however, they contributed absolutely nothing. Worse, their influence remained where they did, as must always be the case. What a testimonial to the tremendous swaying power of cowardice and pride! It keeps them among those whom they oppose and puts them in opposition to their own faith and convictions. "But after all", they may have reasoned, "we do have our standing in the community to think about." And, besides, how could we ever explain to our friends of the synagogue circle about what we really believe? Why, what would they think?" So goes people-pleasing religion.

And so it is with the people-pleasers in religion --- in their "synagogues" of compromise and out of God's kingdom. But most of them do not see their "going along" as being all that serious, let alone as jeopardizing salvation. For example, it is not unusual to meet denominationalists who freely admit certain unscriptural practices espoused by their church, but will not speak out against them. They know and believe certain Bible truths, but will not practice them, for fear....? Now, what is the essential difference between these and the elders of our text? Is it less honorable to deny Christ than His word? The false idea that men can honor Christ while ignoring, perverting and desecrating His doctrine is of the devil! "*He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him-- the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day*" (John 12:48). Man's part in gaining a right standing with God lies in his knowing, believing, and obeying of gospel truth (John 6:45; 8:32; Mark 16:16; Romans 6:17; James 1:21-22). Every right relationship with God is a truth determined relationship! All that God requires of man and all that man can ever do to please and glorify God is made known in His word (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 John 9). He who shuns it, compromises it, or adds to it reflects on the God who gave it (1

Thessalonians 4:13), whether Jew, denominationalist or Christian.

In recent years, many members of the church of Christ have “awakened” to find themselves in “synagogues” of liberalism. They share the dilemma of the rulers to some extent. “Shall we speak out and risk being put out --- or shall we go along to get along?” May God help them to see the seriousness and importance of standing up for the Lord by standing for His truth. To continue **“going along”** is to continue violating conscience and fellowshiping error. Friend, your influence is where you are. Demonstrate your allegiance to Christ and His truth while you can! Stand!

- by Dan Shipley

Forgiveness (5th in a series)

We have been taught to forgive others *“just as God in Christ also hath forgiven you”* (Eph. 4:32), and so we have been looking at the specifics of God’s forgiveness. We’ve observed that He is ready, even anxious to forgive, but His forgiveness is granted when we meet the conditions set forth in Scripture. Once He forgives, the forgiveness is absolute and permanent. In all of these things, we should imitate our God. Furthermore . . .

It is simply amazing that God is willing to forgive us over and over – even when the same offenses are repeated again and again. The apostle John wrote, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Note that these words were penned to those who were already Christians – those who had already been forgiven by God – yet the promise is that he will forgive even more. This ongoing willingness of God to extend additional forgiveness is incredible. And, we have been taught to do the same. When Peter asked Jesus, “how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?”, he probably thought he was being generous when he suggested “till seven times?” But Jesus said “I say not unto thee, until seven times: but, until seventy times seven” (Matthew 18:21-22). This is surely a hard thing, but God extends that sort of forgiveness to us, and we should to one another.

It is clear that our Father never grows bitter against us and never ‘nurses a grudge’, and neither can we. Grudge holding is a sin (James 5:9), and we have been ordered to rid ourselves of bitterness (Ephesians 4:31). There is no room for these things in the heart of one who seeks to forgive like God does.

(concluded next week)

- by Greg Gwin