

THE MAN WHO IS GOD #2

Pastor Jeff Wood

March 19, 2017

What Advent is to Christmas, Lent is to Easter. What studying up on a place you're going for a vacation, getting the vaccinations, packing the bag, is to that trip, Lent is to Easter. It's a time of preparation. Some people give up chocolate and others take on devotional booklets. We're taking on sermons about Jesus from the Gospel of Luke, looking at how he presents Jesus as the Man Who Is God.

His unit was assigned to the 77th Infantry Division, which, in the infamous Battle of Okinawa, was tasked with ascending and securing the Maeda Escarpment ("Hacksaw Ridge"). Both sides faced heavy and terrible losses. At one point, the Americans are driven back down the ridge by the Japanese with American dead and wounded left on the escarpment. Desmond Doss, a pacifist combat medic, heard the wounded's cries and singlehandedly through the night carried and lowered 75 men to safety. The film *Hacksaw Ridge* tells his story. The night of that story involved the carried and the carrier. In the story we go to now, there are those two, the carried and the carriers, and three more, the critics, the Christ, and the crowd. Each one asks a question of us, of you and me. We pray.

We read.

Luke 5:17ff One day Jesus was teaching, and Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there. They had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick. 18 Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and

tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. 19 When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. 20 When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." 21 The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" 22 Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? 23 Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? 24 But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." 25 Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. 26 Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."

From chapter four's beginning to chapter five we have about a year of Jesus' ministry transpired. He has healed the many in chapter four and in chapter five he heals individuals.

There are five characters in this story – the carried, the carriers, the critics, the crowd, and the Christ. Each one asks a question of us and the story in whole presents Jesus as the Man Who Was God.

The carried. He's the man on the stretcher. He is paralyzed. We don't know how or how long or how much. We only know that some percentage of him doesn't work. His body is not the way it *should* be.

The physical condition, we might be grateful for, in that it graphically puts our nose into an assessment by all of us of how much of life is not the way it should be. From eco-disasters to child abuse to addiction disorders to Alzheimer's to you and I not doing the good we want while doing the bad we don't want, life is not how it should be or could be.

I was once broadsided by a car running a red light. I was knocked unconscious. I had no ability to take care of myself and at that point I needed and was cared for by the paramedics.

The main knowledge of the man on the litter is that he in himself can't ... can't especially walk and for that kind of movement is at the mercy of others. It may be bitter knowledge, but it is the spiritual question for us – do you know that you are in a condition that will power cannot remedy, that you must rely on the mercy of The Other, Jesus Christ?¹

The carriers. They were able-bodied but they were paralyzed in the sense that they could not make their friend whole. So while they had power to move themselves, they did not have power to cure their friend.

But I must say that with the power they did have, they were tenacious. They first hoist their friend a distance. Then they find the first entry crowded, the second crowded, and maybe the third and fourth. Did that stop them? No, up to the roof and digging down through

¹ The life cycle seems to present this – dependent on mercy of others at the beginning and with diminishing capacities in aging, the same lesson at the end. Why is it that way? To teach us the truth – we need outside help.

it. They probably fought through, not only the building materials, but the consternation of those upon whom the debris was falling! Yet they kept coming.

They ask us the question; do you believe Jesus can make a difference in another person's life?

A week ago a man told me he went into a doctor's office unable to do stairs and when he came out he could. Then he handed me the doctor's business card. He believed in that doctor such that he gave me his name. He didn't take me by the hand to that doctor, but he encouraged me to see him. He actually believed the doctor made a difference and then quite naturally, in a way, took me to him.

It can be hard to invite another to Christ by, let's say, inviting them to church. The carriers experienced that, but they kept up the effort, and so should we.

The text mentions, fascinatingly, Jesus saw *their* faith. He notices faith (that's one thing) and what he notices could be taken to be *the group's* faith (that's the second thing). My faith impacts yours, and yours his, and his hers, and together we encourage ourselves with, "God has real help to give." This story is a picture of the church ... bringing people in and us together, helping one another lean on God.

The critics. There was a knock at my door and the man there said he was from the FBI. That had my attention. He was doing a background check on one of my sons for a job he was applying for. My son was in Texas and I was in Florida. The FBI was from Washington. Actually, they had an office in Orlando the man was from. Still, it all indicated seriousness.

We're told two things about the Pharisees and teachers. One is that they were from Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem. That all indicated seriousness.

The second thing we're told is that they were sitting. Sitting is the teaching position. We have the Chair of Applied Science at MIT which conveys the same idea. Jesus would be sitting as a teacher, and they were sitting as teachers. You've heard of a *stand* off? This is a *sit* off.

In contrast to the carried and carriers who came and literally lowered themselves before Jesus, these "important" Pharisees and teachers came and would not. One group squared off with Jesus and the other surrendered to Jesus.

For every person there will come a question of the authority of Jesus over them. It is like with the Bible when the shift takes place from you read the Bible to when the Bible reads you. Have you yielded, in your spirit, to Jesus Christ?

The Christ. We can fault the critics. They were straining a gnat related to Jesus, while missing the camel of him amazingly healing a man who was paralyzed. But they did have a valid point and kept their eye on something we might overlook.

Jesus said to fear not the one who can take the body but then can do nothing else. Instead fear the one who can take the body and then also the soul. Jesus and the Pharisees go to the soul, to sin ... to that which is behind the flesh. Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven." The Pharisees asked, "What's he doing forgiving sins?!?"

The point is, and I think Jesus and the Pharisees agree on this, is that if I had a car stolen and wrecked, and the man who did it was in court being tried, and someone else entered the courtroom and forgave him for stealing my car, we'd say, "That's not your right." Yet that's what Jesus was doing.

Crazy it was, unless, unless ... Jesus himself is the one against whom sins are committed.

Do you know Jesus, not as a good man, but as a man who sanely asserted that he was God himself?²

The Crowd. The crowd in this story is so thick that the windows and doors were blocked. That's why the paralytic was eventually lowered through the roof. So there were some at the edges of the crowd who, from their vantage point, only saw a paralytic lying on a litter go in through the roof to have later a healed man carrying a litter come out through the front door.

It's like the silly story of a hick who had never seen an elevator before. Not comprehending it whatsoever, all he saw was that an old woman went in and a few minutes later a young woman came out. He turned to his son and said, "Go fetch Mom!" Or she can see a young man get out and she says, "Go fetch Pa!"

The crowd ... they were filled with awe and praise.

We want to see the world changed. We may not know all the details of what happens ... or why or how ...

² Let's point out also that the healing took place as both Jesus making a command for the paralytic to get up and as the paralytic responding to the command and getting up. Jesus expects us to do something.

but this story tells us that people, when engaging Jesus, come out different than they went in. We and the whole world need this. Here's the question: Will you hop in and savor and enjoy Jesus as the one who can make life better?

Desmond Doss carried 75 men from death to life and became the first conscientious objector ever to be awarded the Medal of Honor. On another hill faraway, a long time ago, Jesus carried to the world from death to life and to him goes all the honor of all the ages. Do you know you need him? Will you bring others to him? Will you yield your spirit to him? Will you see him and praise him as the Man Who is God?

If you would like to talk with someone about this message or your spiritual life, or to have someone pray with you, the pastors and elders of the church would welcome your call.

pastorjeffwood@gmail.com www.welovefirst.org
www.facebook.com/welovefirstsebastian