

# The Sick of the Palsy

by Joseph Parker

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*Joseph Parker's sermon 'The Sick of the Palsy' explores the profound relationship between faith, sin, and healing through the lens of Jesus' teachings and actions.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 139:1, Matthew 9:1-8, Mark 2:5, Mark 2:10-11, Romans 2:4, Hebrews 4:12, James 2:26

**Topics:** "Heart Reflection", "Jesus Presence"

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## Description

Joseph Parker preaches about the importance of understanding the deeper context of Bible verses, emphasizing the need to pay attention to the whole story and not just isolated texts. He highlights how Jesus never leaves a human heart willingly, but is often driven out by rejection or sin. Parker challenges listeners to reflect on how they treat Jesus in their lives and to honestly search their hearts for any hindrances to His presence.

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## Transcript

AND HE ENTERED into a ship and passed over and came into his own city." That does not tell us half the truth. A reference to this verse will show you the necessity of reading the Scriptures through, and of paying attention not to the text only, but to the context. Anybody would think, from reading this first verse, that Jesus had, upon His own will and motion, returned into His own city: we should have no hesitation in coming to the conclusion that Jesus did this because He wanted to do it or had willed so to do. Is there not a cause? Refer to the verse which concludes the previous chapter if you would find the key of the verse which opens the ninth chapter. "Behold the whole city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts, and he entered into a ship and passed over." Now the whole case is before you. You thought He came away spontaneously, whereas the fact is He was driven out. He never leaves the human heart of His own will; He never said to any one of you, "I have been here long enough, I must now leave you to yourself."

But you tell me that Jesus Christ is no longer with you, you say you sigh to think of happier days, you recall the hour when Jesus Christ was the only guest of your heart, and now you mourn that He is no longer present in the sanctuary of your consciousness and your love. He never left of His own accord. I cannot allow your mourning to go without one or two sharp and piercing inquiries. How did you treat Him--did His presence become a shadow in the life--was His interference burdensome--did He dash some cups of pleasure from your hands--did He call you to sacrifices which were too painful for your love? Search yourselves and see. I never knew Him to leave a human heart because He was tired of it, weary

because He had expended His love upon it-but I have known Him whipped out, scourged away, entreated to go, banished.

"And he entered into a ship and passed over and came into his own city." How He looked as He did so! No picture can ever tell us how the eyes fell upon the dust in shame for those who had desired His banishment. How His heart quivered under a new and sharp pain as He realized that He was indeed despised and rejected of men! How He felt as His good deeds became the occasion of a desire on the part of those who had seen them to send Him away from their coasts! This is a mystery on which there is no light. Do not imagine that you began the story with the first verse of the ninth chapter. It is true that Jesus entered into a ship and passed over, but it is also true that the people besought Him that He would depart out of their coasts. So when my heart is empty of His presence and I wonder whither He has gone, I will revive my recollection, I will command my memory to be faithful and to tell me the white truth, the candid fact, and when it speaks it will shame me with the intolerable reminiscence that I besought Him to go. Let us be honest, or we shall never be healed; let us face the stem, fierce facts of life, or we shall make no progress in purity or in spiritual knowledge.

"And behold they brought unto him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed, and Jesus, seeing their faith." Is it possible for faith to be greater than the palsy? Are such miracles wrought in the consciousness of man? Does the soul ever rise in its original majesty and put the body down? Sometimes. Is it possible for the will to be so inflamed and inspired to rise above the palsy and to say, "I am master!" I like such flashes of the divinity that is within us. We are too easily cowed; our physician complain that our will does not cooperate with their endeavors, so that we too easily go down. There is something in us that can conquer the palsy. I cannot gather together all the subtle influences which make up the present economy of things, but again and again in the history of others, and now and then in my own history, I have seen such a rising up of the inner nature as has said to the body, "I am master." I magnify these occasional revelations of the latent force of a kind of suppressed divinity, until I see death dead, the grave filled up, and the whole universe full of life.

Magnify all the best hints of your nature; be ready to accept suggestions of new power; never take the little and dwindling view of your life. If now and then your heart leap up like sparks of fire in prayer seize every one of them. That is where your grandeur is; that is your true self Caught in some mean conception, conscious of some unworthy fancy-know that that is the leper that has to be healed. Caught in some rapture of worship, some sweet desire for heaven-know that that is the angel that is in you, and that by and by nothing shall be left in you but the angel, the true spirit, conqueror through Him who wrought its redemption.

"And Jesus, seeing their faith-." That was just like Him. He always sees the best of us; He never takes other than the greatest view of our lives and their endeavors. "And Jesus, seeing their faith." Shall we amend the text? "And Jesus, seeing their-sectarianism." That would fill up a line better than faith; it is a longer word; it has more syllables in it; it fills the mouth better shall we put it in? "And Jesus, seeing their -denominationalism." There is a word that would almost make a line by itself. That word ought to have something in it; polysyllables ought not to be empty. "And Jesus, seeing their-Congregationalism, their attachment to Episcopalianism, their deep love of Roman Catholicism." I fancy we cannot amend the text. We can take out the little word faith and put in the long words I have named; these would not be amendments, they would be spoliations; they would be blasphemies; they would belittle the occasion; they would taint it with a human touch. Let the word faith stand; it is universal; it is a cord that stretches itself around the starlit horizon; it touches those of you who belong to no sect, the dumb, the groping, the

wondering, as well as the clear minded and the positive as to religious principle and conviction.

Jesus Christ always startled His hearers by seeing something greater in them than they had ever seen in themselves, and always seemed to credit His patients with their own cure. He said, 'Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole.' He gave the woman to feel as if she had all the time been her own healer. And the broad and everlasting meaning of that assurance is that you and I have it in us at this moment to get the healing that we need. The Physician is here; His prescription is written in syllables clear as stars, and in lines open as the heavens. What He waits for is our faith. "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief " "Lord, increase our faith." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." "Be it unto thee according to thy faith." "Believest thou that I am able to do this?" There is something then for us to do. Find it out and do it, and God will be faithful to His Word.

"And Jesus, seeing their faith, said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee." But this was a question of the palsy. the man had not come as a religious inquirer, had he? I was not aware that Jesus was sitting down somewhere for the purpose of holding religious conversation with people. This man is sick of the palsy; he cannot move a limb; it requires four people to carry him; and Jesus Christ gives a religious turn to the event. We want this sick man healed; we do not want to hear anything about sins; we are not religious inquirers, we are afflicted men. How we do belittle everything we touch! If we pluck a flower it dies. Jesus Christ said, "All these afflictions have a common root: sin is the explanation of every scab on that leper's brow; and look at the trembling in that paralytic; sin drove the sight from those eyes, and the hearing from those ears, and the strength from those ankle bones. This is the accursed work of sin." He is a fundamental Teacher; He does not treat symptoms; He treats the central and vital cause which expresses itself in symptoms so patent and so distressing.

This is the great lesson which the world is so unwilling to receive. Give us acts of Parliament, give us better houses for this class and for that class,, give us better drainage and larger gardens and better ventilation, and we shall cobble the world up to stand on its rickety legs ten years longer. All these things are in themselves right enough; no sane man has one word to speak against them. If they be brought in, however, as causative, they must be rejected, they are collateral, they . are cooperative, they are helpful, and in that sense they are necessary, but the world's stream will never be pure until the world's fountain has been cleansed. We think we can cure the world by officialism and by small sanitary pedantries, by congresses and conferences-all these things have their place and their use, but until we get at the root and core and center and heart we are as men who are throwing buckets into empty wells and drawing them up again. The world will not believe this, so the world has not yet risen and taken up its bed and walked.

"And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth." There again is the belittling which man does in all his interpretations. Oh, if the sermon could be equal to the text - in all cases, what preaching we should have and what hearing Christ said, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." The scribes said, "This man blasphemeth." We always drag down what we touch; the day of rapture is gone, the sacred hour of enthusiasm has withdrawn itself because we have besought it to depart. Men never speak in fire now: we have fallen upon an age of prudence, and word measurement, and we are tricksters in the uses of syllables and in the adaptations of phrases, and never get beyond the poor range of little speech, or utter as with the heart those sentences which are revelations. We like to hear the little mincing voice that dare not utter one word louder than another; we like to hear the multiplication tables repeated every Sunday from the first line to the last; we like to keep within statistical proofs and references that have been scheduled and that can be verified. The great prophet of fire, Elijah, is gone were he to come

again we would take him by the throat and thrust him into the dungeon.

The scribes were right from their own point of view. It would have been blasphemy in any one of them to have spoken a noble word about anybody. There are some throats that were never made to emit one noble sound. There are men to whom prayers are lies, and revelations are delusions, and prophecies are but the witnesses of the weakness of their speakers. A man cannot hear above his own level. "He that hath ears to hear let him hear." Every dog has ears-yes, but not to hear. Men carry the standard of judgment within them; from the little man the little judgment, from the great man the noble criticism, from the divinest, the divinest love. It is better to fall into the hands of God than into the hands of men.

"And Jesus, knowing their thoughts-." See how He never relinquishes the spiritual line in all this incident. Jesus seeing their faith-that was a spiritual perception: Jesus seeing their thoughts-there is the same power of working mental miracles. He reads our minds; there is no curtain made yet by human hands, how cunning soever, that can shut out those eyes. He understands every pulsation of the heart, He reads every motion of the will, all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth-sometimes the universe seems to me to be all eyes; I am surrounded by eyes of fire. All speech seems to sum itself into one pregnant sentence"Thou God seest me."

Do not lightly pass over these words, for they open the great sphere of the mental miracles performed by Jesus Christ. We are accustomed to read about His physical miracles and to doubt them. Any scribe can doubt. It is no great thing to doubt. The doubter never did anything for the world; the doubter never put one stone upon another. The world is indebted to its faith for its life and for its progress. Jesus not only cured the palsy, He read thoughts: already He begins to forecast the day when physical miracles shall depart, and the miracles that shall astound shall be heart-readings, and heart-companionships and spiritual revelations, and moral opportunities and destinies. We live in that dispensation now; miracles of an ordinary and outward kind have all gone, but the miracles of the Holy Spirit are being performed every day.

"For whether is easier-." It would appear-for I regard this statement as elliptical-that some thought had occurred to the mind of the scribes that it was easy enough to say, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," but the thing to do was to cure the man of the palsy. It was easy to talk blasphemies, but what about performing the cure? There was a kind of self-gratulation as they suggested that Jesus Christ had taken the easy course of talking blasphemies and letting the substantial thing that was to be done alone, so He says, "Whether is easier to say, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee,' or to say 'Rise and walk?'" The scribes committed the mistake which the whole world has ever since been repeating. Where is there a man who does not think of every intellectual effort as quite easy? It is very difficult for a man to walk upon a tight rope across a river-that is something amazing-worth a shilling to look at. But for any man to preach-why, of course that is easy enough, any fool can do that; everybody knows that anybody can preach a sermon! To suggest a thought, to flash an idea upon the intellectual horizon-any man in a family who is good for nothing else can do that.

We always send the imbeciles into the church. To go into the army requires a man, and to go into the navy requires a kind of man and a half, and to go into the law requires a good many men, but to go into the church-why, the soft sap of a family will go into the church. This is possible-possible in relation to all the communions into which the great Christian church is broken up. There are no doubt soft men and imbecile men in every pulpit in Christendom-that is to say in every section of the church in Christendom-but do not

understand that the intellectual is always so easy. It is sometimes hard work, even to preach. There are those who think the spiritual worthless. It is easy to give advice; nothing could be easier than to address oneself to spiritual necessities, and such service is worthless. Whoever thinks of paying a schoolmaster or a preacher?

There are those who think of religion as merely sentimental, as having no practical value in it; yet there is not a man among us who does not owe his social status to religion. You would never have had the customers that flock around your counter but for religion; you would never have got your debts collected but for religion; you would never have been saved from the gutter and the workhouse if an angel of religion had not come after you and brought you in. Religion is not a colored cloud, an evaporating sentiment, it is a most practical factor in the creation and redemption and sanctification of human life.

"And when the multitude saw it, they marveled and glorified God." Trust to the great broad human instincts, and do not ask the scribes what they think. Take your case to the scribes and say, "Gentlemen, what is your learned opinion about this man's cure?" and they, having rolled themselves around and around in the thickest bandages of the reddest tape, begin to consider. I have faith in broad human instincts: I will not altogether withdraw from our proverbial sayings - *Vox populi vox Dei* - I know the crowd has been wrong, I know the mob has been out of the way again and again (I am not speaking of mere crowds or mere mobs: I am speaking of the average human instinct all over our civilization), yet it answers the true voice in the long run, it knows the right man, it knows the right cures, it knows the right books. That human instinct is the next best thing for our guidance to divine inspiration. Make friends of the people, and let little cliques and coteries rot in their own isolation.

Observe the course which Jesus Christ takes, "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins. Arise, take up thy bed and go unto thine house." We must sometimes prove our religion by our philanthropy. Sometimes a man can understand a loaf when he cannot master an argument; sometimes a man can understand a kind action done to his physical necessities when he cannot comprehend or apply the utility of a spiritual suggestion; you do not relinquish the ground that the spiritual is higher than the material when you accommodate yourself to the man's weakness and say to him in effect, "You cannot understand this spiritual argument, therefore I will come down to your ground and do what you can understand." Thus the church must often prove its religion by its philanthropy. The world cannot understand our creed, but the world can understand our collection. There are masses of men in London today who could really not understand what I am endeavoring to expound; it is beneath them, or above them, or beyond them, but they will be perfectly able to ascertain what we have done for cases of necessity that may now be appealing to our liberality.

This is God's method of proving His own kingdom and claim. "The goodness of God," the apostle says, "should lead us to repentance." Every good gift given to the body and given to society is an angel that should lead us in a religious direction. God says to us every day, "That ye may know how to care for your souls, I will show you how to care for your bodies." Now what has He done for the body? Look at that lamp He has lighted, now shining as the southern zenith; look at the meadows He has spread and the gardens He has drawn around our habitations; look at the loving air, the hospitable summer, the abundant autumn, the restful sleep of the winter-and if He has done so much for the body, He says, "But that ye may know what I would do for your mind, for your soul, for your higher faculties, I give you these witnesses, that you can lay your hand upon and examine for yourselves."

It is an argument I cannot refute, it is an appeal I would gladly obey.

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