

SACRIFICE

THE PARALYTIC LOWERED THROUGH THE ROOF

July 4, 2010
6th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision A

GOSPEL: Matthew 9:1-8
EPISTLE: Romans 12:6-15

Today's Gospel lesson is also used in the Orthodox lectionary for the second Sunday in Lent, but from the parallel reading in Mark 2. In the West, today's Gospel lesson is used either on the 19th Sunday after Trinity (from Matthew) or on the 7th Sunday after Epiphany (from Mark). Today's Epistle is used in the West either on the Second Sunday after Epiphany or on the 17th Sunday after Trinity.

BACKGROUND FOR THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

Paul wrote Romans from Corinth toward the end of his Third Missionary Journey. He had already written I and II Corinthians on his way to Corinth. Although Paul had not visited the Church in Rome yet when he wrote this letter, a number of the Seventy lesser Apostles were currently in Rome and had been sent there by Peter and Paul. For example, Priscilla and Aquila, whom Paul had met in Corinth on his Second Missionary Journey (Acts 18:1-2) and who Paul had left behind as bishop of Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19), were now in Rome and the Church was meeting in their house (Romans 16:3-5). Others of the Seventy that were now in Rome in about 55 AD (from Romans 16) are listed in Table I. Many had worked with Paul on his previous missionary journeys. Some were even Paul's blood relatives. Others had worked with Peter, Andrew and Philip. Thus, the Church in Rome in 55 AD was unusual as a Church with 18 Apostles living there.

In Romans 1:7, Paul addresses the Epistle to "all who are in Rome," that is, both Jew and Gentile. In Romans 2:17ff, Paul addressed some misguided Jews where he called them hypocrites. From the way Paul greeted the members of the Seventy (and others) in Romans 16, it seems pretty obvious that they agreed with what Paul was writing. The misguided Jews probably didn't. When Paul finally arrived in Rome in about 60-61 AD (Acts 28), he met with the Jewish leaders (Acts 28:17) and reasoned with them a long time (Acts 28:17-23). Some were persuaded, others weren't (Acts 28:24). They had wanted to talk to Paul himself since the Christians "had been spoken against everywhere" (Acts 28:22), mostly by Jewish leaders. As a result of this face-to-face meeting with Paul, the Jewish leaders in Rome had a great dispute among themselves (Acts 28:29). Thus, this Epistle to the Romans began a process that brought some of the Jews in Rome to the light while causing others to hate the light because their deeds were evil (John 3:19-21).

In Romans 11:11ff and other places, Paul addressed Gentiles in the Church at Rome. Thus, the Roman Church consisted of a mixed Jew-Gentile population.

From our viewpoint, we see Christians and Jews as distinct and separate groups. In 55 AD, the distinction was still very much blurred. Thus, on Paul's missionary journeys, he often stopped in at the local synagogue first when he came to another city.

BACKGROUND: OLD TESTAMENT SACRIFICE

Both the Jews and Gentiles in Rome knew about the Jewish sacrificial practices. Three times per year (Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles), the Jews in Rome were required by Mosaic Law to travel to Jerusalem and offer the required sacrifices. The Gentiles in Rome may have gone also if they had been Jewish proselytes.

The Mosaic Law specified a wide variety of sacrifices for various occasions and purposes. These are briefly summarized in Table II.

These sacrifices appear also in the New Testament in different form. For example, the sin offering and the trespass offering were accomplished once for all by our Lord Jesus (Hebrews 10:14, 18-22, 26). He is also a burnt offering (Ephesians 5:2) where the sweet-smelling aroma is the Hebrew term "*reyach niychoach*" associated with the whole burnt offering that is totally consumed by fire. But we do this also. In the verses preceding the Epistle lesson, Paul urges the Romans to "present their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God" (Romans 12:1). Paul, under house arrest in Rome, received gifts from Philippi (brought by Epaphroditus) that he referred to as a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice (Philippians 4:15-18). Paul referred to himself as a drink offering poured out on the sacrifice and the liturgy of the Faith (Philippians 2:17).

This is not inconsistent with the Old Testament either. The Lord had said, "The sacrifice of praise will glorify Me; and that is the way wherein I will show to him the salvation of God" (Psalm 50:23 LXX). David said, "I will praise the Name of God with song and shall magnify Him with thanksgiving. And it will please the Lord better than an ox or a young bull with horns and hoofs" (Psalm 69:30-31). "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise" (Psalm 51:17). Asaph, David's musician, psalm writer and prophecy (1 Chronicles 16:7, 25:2) wrote: "Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving and pay your vows to the Most High" (Psalm 50:14).

Paul also referred to himself as a liturgist (minister) of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles sacrificing (ministering) the Gospel of God that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable...(Romans 15:16). The word "offering" is the Greek word *prosphora* which came to be the word used for the bread of the Lord's Supper. Greek words referring to sacrifice are:

<i>Prosphora</i>	gift or sacrifice
<i>thusia</i>	victims or act of immolation
<i>holokautoma</i>	whole burnt offering

From the Greek word *holokautoma* comes the Latin word *holocaustum* and the English word holocaust.

After his Third Missionary Journey, Paul arrived in Jerusalem and was purified according to the Laws involving a Nazarite (Acts 21:15-26). Later Paul testified before the governor Felix (Acts 24:17), that he came to Jerusalem bringing alms (Greek: *eleemosune* = mercies) and offerings (Greek: *prosphora*). The alms were an offering from the Churches in Achaia, Macedonia and Galatia for the Church in Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-27; 2 Corinthians 8:1-4; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4). Paul explained to the Romans (Romans 15:27) that this was part of the liturgic (Greek: *leitourgeo*) work of the Church to do so. After all, the Lord had said, "I desire mercy (Greek: *eleos* = mercy) and not sacrifice (Greek: *thusia*) The Lord was not saying that He didn't desire sacrifice, but that mercy is the most important ingredient for sacrifice. The writer of Hebrews says it very well, "Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His Name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices (Greek *thusia*) God is well pleased." In these two sentences are references to the thank offering (giving thanks to His Name) which is a peace offering, and to the Wave Offering of the First-fruits (the fruit of our lips).

In the Orthodox Liturgy, the words sacrifice, offering and gifts, are used at least fifteen times. For example, prior to the Anaphora, we say, "An offering of peace! A sacrifice of praise!" This is akin to the Old Testament peace offering. During the Anaphora we quote from the Scriptures about the Lord's Body and Blood (1 Corinthians 11:23-26) and say, "...we offer You Your Own, from what is Your Own, for everyone and for everything" (1 Chronicles 29:10-14). This is akin to the Old Testament meal offering and drink offering. Four times we say, "we offer You this spiritual and unbloody worship..." because worship and sacrifice go together. At the beginning of the communion just before the Lord's Prayer, we ask, "that our God receive (the gifts) on His holy, most heavenly and ideal altar as a perfume of spiritual sweetness..." This is akin to the Burnt Offering. Shortly thereafter, the gifts are elevated and the priest says, "The holy gifts for holy people!" This elevation is akin to the Heave Offering. Earlier in the Liturgy at the Entrance with the Gospel, we ask the Lord to "forgive us every transgression, whether voluntary or involuntary. Sanctify our souls and bodies, grant that we may worship You in holiness all the days of our life..." This is akin to the Sin Offering which preceded the others to sanctify the Old Testament believers from unintentional sin.

Saturday evening Great Vespers prepares us for this in the same way Moses prepared the people at Mt. Sinai to hear the Lord speak from the top of Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:1-15). We refer to this in Great Vespers with the Words, "He looks on the earth and it trembles; He touches the hills and they smoke!" This is what happened when the Lord spoke from Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:16-20).

One part of the Mosaic Law given on Mt. Sinai was the Morning and Evening Continual Burnt Offering (Exodus 29:38-46). Matins and Vespers represent this today. For example, at Great Vespers we say, "Let my prayer arise in Your sight as incense, and let the lifting up of my hands be an evening sacrifice."

Following Great Vespers, there is a time for confession individually before a priest for those who wish to do so. This is akin to the Trespass Offering to free us from the guilt of known sins.

Thus, the Orthodox Liturgy, which had as its source the First Century synagogue worship, contains references to most of the Old Testament sacrifices, but in a different form. This is what today's Epistle lesson speaks concerning.

EPISTLE LESSON – Romans 12:1-15

To understand the Epistle lesson, we need to begin with Romans 12:1. Paul said the following to the Romans, “I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable worship.” The word reasonable is hard to translate exactly. In Greek it is *logikos* which is the adjective form of the Greek word *logos* meaning “The Word!” (John 1:1-14), thus meaning “worship of the Word.” The reasonable worship is worshipping the Word. The mechanism Paul refers to here, the “living sacrifice”, is the whole Burnt Offering.

John Chrysostom wrote, “And how is the body to become a sacrifice? Let the eye look upon no evil thing and it has become a sacrifice. Let the tongue speak nothing filthy and it has become an offering. Let your hand do no lawless deed and it has become a whole burnt offering. Or rather this is not enough; we must have good works also. Let the hand do alms, the mouth bless them that cross one, and the hearing find leisure evermore in the reading of Scripture. For sacrifice allows no unclean thing: sacrifice is a first-fruit of the other actions. Let us then from our hands and feet and mouth and all other members, yield a first-fruit unto God.”

“Since then (the sacrifice) is both to be presented (i.e. as for a king's use) and is a sacrifice, rid it of every spot, since if it has a spot, it will no longer be a sacrifice. For neither can the eye that looks lecherously be sacrificed, nor the hand be presented that is grasping and rapacious, nor the feet that go lame and go to play-houses, nor the belly that is the slave of self-indulgence and kindles lust after pleasures nor the heart that has rage in it and harlots' love, nor the tongue that utters filthy things. Hence we must spy out the spots on our body upon every side. For if they that offered the sacrifices of old were bid to look on every side and were not permitted to offer an animal that was deformed or injured or sick (Leviticus 22:22-24); much more must we, who offer not senseless animals but ourselves, exhibit more strictness and be pure in all respects. Then we also may be able to say as did Paul, ‘I am already being poured out as a drink offering and the time of my departure is at hand’” (2 Timothy 4:6).

Chrysostom encouraged everyone to “become the priest of your own body and of the virtue of your soul; as, for example, when you offer soberness, when you give alms, when you offer goodness and forbearance. For in doing this, you offer a reasonable worship” (Homily XX on Romans 12).

From Table II, the meaning of the Whole Burnt Offering is an entire surrender to God and an ascending like smoke. We are to be totally consumed. Much of the Epistle text consists in examples of how one can be the priest of his own body:

- Prophesying (v.76)
- Deaconing (v.7)
- Teaching (v.7)
- Exhorting (v.8)
- Leading with diligence (v.8)
- Showing mercy with cheerfulness (v.8)

- Showing love without hypocrisy (v.9)
- Abhorring evil; clinging to what is good (v.9)
- Being kindly affectionate to one another (v.10)
- In honor, giving preference to one another (v.10)
- Being fervent in spirit, not lagging in diligence, to serve the Lord (v.11)
- Rejoicing in hope (v.12)
- Being patient in tribulation (v.12)
- Continuing steadfast in prayer (v.12)
- Distributing to the needs of the saints (v.13)
- Given to hospitality (v.13)
- Blessing those who curse us (v.14)
- Rejoicing with those who rejoice; weeping with those who weep (v.15)

In introducing all these examples, Paul said, “Through the Grace given to me” (v.3). Whereas before he said, “By the *mercies* of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice” (v.1), here he mentions *Grace*, in order that we “not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think” (vv.3, 16). Chrysostom spoke of lowliness of mind as being the mother of Good deeds (Ibid.) for we are members one of another and we are all connected in one body (vv.4-5). Paul was very aware that the gifts he had been given were of Grace and regarded himself as the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15) since he had persecuted the Church before his conversion (1 Timothy 1:13, Acts 8:3).

Sacrifice in our day has even been institutionalized. Consider the origin of the Red Cross, most hospitals and many charitable organizations, many of these institutions owe their origin to the efforts of the people of God toward good deeds.

TABLE I
The Seventy in Rome in 55 AD (From Romans 16)

Member of 70	Native To	With Paul on Missionary Journey	Later Bishop of	Comments
Rufus*	Cyrene	1, 2	Thebes	Martyred with Ignatius
Aristobulus	Cyprus	1	Britain	Barnabas' brother, Peter's father-in-law
Andronicus	Tarsus(?)	2	Pannonia	Paul's relative
Herodion	Tarsus(?)	2	NeoParthia & Patras	Paul's relative, traveled with Peter
Urbanus	?	2	Macedonia & Tarsus	Traveled with Andrew
Aquila & Priscilla	Pontus	2, 3, 4, 5	Ephesus	
Epaenetus	Achaia	2	Carthage & Spain	Traveled with Peter
Amplias	?	2	Lydda	Traveled with Andrew
Apelles	?	2	Heraklion in Bithynia	
Stachys	?	2	Byzantium	Traveled with Andrew
Hermas	Greece		Dalmatia	Wrote "The Shepherd"; in Rome late 1 st Century
Asyncritus	?		Hyrkania	
Hermes	?		Philippopolis	
Narcissus	?		Athens	Ordained by Philip
Olympas	?	2	Philippi	Martyred with Peter
Patrobas	?		Neapolis	
Philologus & Julia	?		Synope	
Phelgon	?		Marathon	

*Probably came to Antioch with his father Simon of Cyrene, who helped start the Church in Antioch.

TABLE II
Old Testament Sacrifices

Type of Sacrifice	Hebrew Word	Strong's Ref. #	Meaning	Occasions For Use
Sin offering	Chatta'th-An offense	2403	Unintentional sin: general forgiveness	All major festivals; consecration of priests; sins of ignorance; cleansing from defilement
Trespass offering	'asham=a fault or guilt	817	Guilt & damage of sin	Sins connected to holy things; fraud; rape; purification of lepers; defiled Nazarite
Burnt offering	Olah=ascending	5930	Entire surrender to God & ascending like smoke	Every morning & evening; all major festivals; consecration; purification; breach of vow; freewill; Gentiles could bring only this sacrifice
Peace offering 3 types: (1) Thank (2) Vow (3) Freewill	Zebah shelamim=a sacrifice of requital	2077+800 2	Divine fellowship & communion	Inaugurations; anointings; Pentecost; festivals; vows or freewill; gratitude
Meal offering* or drink offering	Minekhah=apportion nesek=libation	4503 5262	(1) Recognition of God's bounty (2) Good works	Always with burnt offerings, never with sin offerings; never by themselves; Temple Shewbread; First-fruits of Passover; 2 loaves at Pentecost; daily by High Priest
Heave offering or Wave offering	Terumah=lifted up, raised Tenuphah=undulation	8641 8573	A method of presentation to the Lord	Heave offering: lifted up to the Lord; Wave offering: hands of priest and offerer together waved offering before Lord.

*Meal offering included flour or grain, oil, salt, incense and no leaven.

Why Offer Sacrifice?

Old Testament animal sacrifice represented atonement by substitution, called propitiation (Romans 3:25, Hebrews 2:17, 1 John 2:2), and all sacrifice anticipated the work of Christ. As people offered animal sacrifices in faith, they were forgiven (Leviticus 4:20ff, 5:10ff, 6:7, Numbers 15:25-28) and blessed (Leviticus 9:22-23, Numbers 6:22-26, Deuteronomy 21:5, 28:2-6), because they pointed forward to the work of Christ. Few people knew what the sacrifices meant, because the mystery of the Lord's Incarnation had not been revealed yet (Romans 16:25-26, Colossians 1:26-27, Ephesians 3:5-9). Even Satan didn't understand this mystery (1 Corinthians 2:7). Now that Christ's sacrifice has been made, we look backward to His one sacrifice, and animal sacrifices have been replaced with different forms of sacrifice, done in spirit and truth (John 4:23). "Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His Name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Hebrews 13:15-16).

All sacrifice is an expression of love. The Mosaic Law can be summarized as love for God and love for neighbor, where the two go hand in hand, such that without both, one has neither (1 John 4:20). For more details on this, see the articles "The Mosaic Law", p. xxx, and "The Ten Commandments", p. xxx. God expressed love for His people by the many provisions He made for them (Deuteronomy 7:8-10), and Christ's sacrifice of Himself on the Cross was the ultimate expression of the love of God for man (1 John 4:10, John 15:13). On the other hand, the offering of animal sacrifices under the Mosaic Law was one way that men could express love for and devotion to God (Psalm 50:23). The animal sacrifices, which were required to be in Jerusalem, pointed to Christ offering Himself in Jerusalem (Matthew 23:37-38), where the Lord's Name was established (Deuteronomy. 12:5).

Not anyone could bring an animal sacrifice as an acceptable offering to the Lord. A prerequisite was the elimination of all defilement (Leviticus 13:46, Numbers 5:3, 31:19, Deuteronomy 23:10-14). For example, Cain's sacrifice was not acceptable because of the defilement of his sin (Genesis 4:3-10). Even if both the Publican and the Pharisee brought an animal sacrifice, the Pharisee would not have been accepted due to his defilement from the sin of pride (Luke 18:10-14).

The Lord had said on several occasions, "I desire mercy not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6, Matthew 9:13, 12:7). If sacrifice expresses love for God, then mercy expresses love for one's neighbor. For sacrifice to be acceptable before God, mercy must be present also (1 John 4:20). The Lord was not saying that He does not desire any sacrifice at any time, but that it is offensive to Him if it comes from an unmerciful heart (Isaiah 1:11-17, Amos 5:21-24), for mercy is an important ingredient for sacrifice.

Peter called us "living stones, a spiritual house, a royal priesthood, who offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). He continued: we are a "chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people" (1 Peter 1:9-10). Each believer is the priest in charge of the temple of his own body, which is a Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:15-20). Tertullian stated, "Are not even we laymen priests? It is written, 'A kingdom also, and priests to His God and Father, hath He made us' (Revelation 1:6). Where there is no ecclesiastical Order, you offer, and baptize, and are priest, alone for yourself. But where three are, a church is, albeit they are laymen. For each individual lives by his own faith,

nor is there exception of persons with God; since it is not hearers of the law who are justified by the Lord, but doers (Romans 2:10-16). Therefore, if you have the *right* of a priest in your own person, in cases of necessity, it behooves you to have likewise the *discipline* of a priest whenever it may be necessary to have the right of a priest” (On Chastity IV, v, 7). Paul wrote, “I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable worship” (Romans 12:1). This is like the Whole Burnt Offering: an entire surrender to God and an ascending like smoke. We are to be totally consumed with the love of God. Paul then went on to give details on how one can be the priest of his own body (Romans 12:2-21).

THE PARALYTIC LOWERED THROUGH THE ROOF

July 4, 2010
6th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision A1

INTRODUCTION TO GOSPEL LESSON

Today's Gospel lesson is also used for the Second Sunday in Lent and is read there from Mark 2. In Mark's account, the paralytic was brought to Jesus by opening the roof under which Jesus was teaching; Matthew doesn't mention this. Matthew's account simply states, "They brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed" (v.2), but doesn't say how he was brought.

FIRST CENTURY PALESTINE HOUSE CONSTRUCTION

To understand the mechanics of today's Gospel lesson, (that is, how a paralytic on a bed could be lowered through the roof) we need to understand how houses were constructed in First Century Palestine. Most houses were constructed out of sun-dried brick and were one-story dwellings. The walls were whitewashed inside and outside with lime or gypsum. Windows were small and few, had no glass, and were covered with a latticework that could be opened – probably like simple venetian blinds. Most houses had at least one courtyard on the interior, where windows usually opened to the courtyard. Well-to-do houses may have had several courtyards.

Roofs of houses were generally flat. For most houses, roofing consisted of boughs on top of rafters and covered with stomped dirt. A better class of houses had roofs of clay tile and stone. These were obviously more water-tight during heavy rains. In the parallel account (from Luke 5:20) we find that the house in the Gospel lesson had a clay tile roof. This better class of houses also had a railing around the edge to prevent accidental falls.

Roofs were not delicate areas like today; they were a part of the living quarters where people lived and moved about. There was generally a stairway to the roof from the courtyard and also a stairway to the roof from outside the house. In Matthew 24:17 where Jesus warns him who is on the housetop not to go down to take anything out of the house, but to flee quickly, the implication is to use the outside stairway, not the inside stairway.

Some uses of the roof area mentioned in the Scriptures are shown in Table 1:

GOSPEL LESSON – Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26

The setting is Capernaum (i.e. His own city, v.1) in Galilee, near Jesus' hometown of Nazareth. The house in which Jesus was speaking belonged to someone who was well-to-do as indicated by the reference to a tiled roof (Luke 5:19). Thus, the house was fairly large with a large courtyard. Sometimes the courtyards had a roof, so Jesus may have been speaking in a roofed courtyard.

Table 1
Uses of the Roof Area in Scripture

Use of Roof	Reference
Private discussions	1 Samuel 9:25
Sleeping, especially in hot summers	1 Samuel 9:26
Construction of Booths during the Feast of Tabernacles	Nehemiah 8:16
Watching for the approach of an enemy	Isaiah 22:1
Waiting for good tidings	2 Samuel 18:24, 33
Making announcements	Matthew 10:27; Luke 12:3
Lamentation	Isaiah 15:3; Jeremiah 48:38
Home altars for family idols	2 Kings 23:12; Jeremiah 19:13; Zephaniah 1:5
Harem of Absalom's concubines	2 Samuel 16:21-22

Many people crowded into the house. If Jesus was speaking in the courtyard, people probably crowded into each room to listen through the windows that opened onto the courtyard. Thus all access to Jesus was cut off by crowds. If Jesus was speaking in a covered courtyard, the inside stairway was probably blocked. However, the outside stairway was not blocked since this was far away from the action.

The time of year was Autumn of the first year of Jesus' public ministry. Some of the twelve have been called, but not all. In the verses following today's Gospel lesson, Matthew, the tax collector, was called as an Apostle.

The enterprising four men carrying the paralytic (vv.3-4) could easily tell where Jesus was speaking. As a man who could preach outdoors to large audiences (e.g. 5000 men plus women and children, Luke 9:11, 14; Matthew 14:21), Jesus' voice could easily be heard through the roof. So they removed the tiles above Him, and let the paralytic down by ropes attached to the four corners of his stretcher-like pallet.

This was a very bold move. The owner of the house was likely present, but nowhere is there mentioned any objection to people tearing up his house. It's possible that the paralytic may have been related to the owner of the house.

Jesus' first reaction was to forgive the sins of the Paralytic. This implies that the Paralytic and the four men carrying him were rather devout. "When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the Paralytic: 'Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you'" (v.2).

We might compare this Paralytic to the Paralytic lying by the Pool of Bethesda (John 5). This paralytic had a number of people to help him; the other had no one (John 5:7). This Paralytic and his helpers exhibited faith worthy of the Lord's commendation, the other had some problem with sin that had caused his condition (John 5:14). For more details concerning the Paralytic by the Pool of Bethesda, see the Gospel lesson for the 3rd Sunday of Pascha.

In comparing these two paralytics, one is struck with the sacrifice and dedication of the four men who carried the paralytic of today's Gospel lesson. Besides carrying him to Jesus and opening up the roof – not an easy task – they probably had to care for the man on a daily basis

also. This is a very good illustration of the teaching of the Epistle lesson. And it is interesting to note that Jesus forgave the Paralytic his sins at least partly in response to the faith of the four men that carried him.

John Chrysostom stated¹ that in most cases, it is the faith of the person healed that is the most instrumental factor in the healing. There are some cases where the person healed is too sick or too darkened to have faith. But in examining the circumstances of the Paralytic in this account, we see that he exhibits considerable faith.

“There are some who say that the paralytic was healed merely because those who brought him believed; but this is not the fact. ‘When Jesus saw their faith’ (Matthew 9:2) refers not merely to those who brought the man but also to the man who was brought. ‘Is not one man healed’, you say, ‘because another has believed?’ For my part I do not think so unless owing to immaturity of age or excessive infirmity he is in some way incapable of believing. How about the case of the woman of Canaan; the mother believed but the daughter was cured? And how was it that the servant of the centurion who believed rose from the sick bed and was preserved? Because the sick persons themselves were not able to believe!”

“Hear then what the woman of Canaan says: ‘My daughter is grievously vexed with a demon’ (Matthew 15:22-28, Mark 7:25-30). How could she believe whose mind was darkened and possessed by a demon, and was never able to control herself? As in the case of the woman of Canaan so also in the case of the centurion; his servant lay sick in the house, not knowing Christ, nor who He was. How was he to believe in one who was unknown to him, and of whom he had never obtained any experience?”

“In the case of the paralytic, we must consider the manner of his approach to Christ. They let the man down through the roof; but consider how great a matter it is for a sick man to have the fortitude to undergo this. Invalids are often so faint-hearted and difficult to please as often to decline the treatment administered to them on their sick bed, and to prefer bearing their pain to undergoing the annoyance caused by the remedies. But this man had the fortitude to go outside the house, and to be carried into the midst of the market place, and to exhibit himself in the presence of a crowd. Often sick folk prefer to die under their disorder rather than disclose their personal calamities. This sick man, however, did not act thus, but when he saw that the place of assembly was filled, the approaches blocked, the haven of refuge obstructed, he submitted to be let down through the roof. ‘For he also that seeks finds, and to him that knocks, it shall be opened’ (Matthew 7:8). The man did not say to his friends, ‘What is the meaning of this? Why make this fuss? Let us wait until the house is cleared and the assembly is dissolved. The crowds will withdraw and we shall then be able to approach him privately and confer about these matters. Why should you expose my misfortunes in the midst of all the spectators?’ That man said none of these things either to himself or to his bearers, but regarded it as an honor to have so many persons made witnesses of his cure. We can discern his faith also from the words of Christ. After he had been let down and presented, Christ said to him, ‘Son, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven’ (Matthew 9:2). And when he

¹ John Chrysostom, Homily on the Paralytic Let Down Through the Roof, 5.

heard these words he was not indignant, he did not complain, he did not say to the physician, ‘What do you mean by this? I came to be healed of one thing and you heal another! He neither spoke nor thought any of these things, but waited, allowing the physician to adopt the method of healing which He desired. For this reason also Christ did not go to him, but waited for him to come, that He might exhibit his faith to everyone.”

Scribes and Pharisees (Luke 5:21) were present when Jesus forgave the Paralytic – one of them may have owned the house – and immediately began reasoning in their minds that this was blasphemy. Only God can forgive sins and even then, not without the shedding of blood in an animal sacrifice.

John Chrysostom remarked how Jesus signified in all ways that He is equal in honor with Him that begat Him. He taught as one having authority, and not as the Scribes (Matthew 7:29, 8:3). He only had to speak the word for someone to be healed (Matthew 8:8). Even the winds and the sea obeyed Him (Matthew 8:27). The demons acknowledged Him as God and He cast them out with great authority (Matthew 8:29-32).

To illustrate this here, Jesus made use of the envy of His enemies to manifest the miracle, yet with great gentleness. He did three things that only God can do: First, He forgave the sins of the Paralytic (v.2). Secondly He read the thoughts of the Scribes. “But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, ‘Why do you think evil in your hearts?’” (v.4). And third, to prove that this was God and that He had the authority to forgive sins, He said, “Which is easier to say, ‘your sins are forgiven’, or to say, ‘arise and walk’”? Jesus continued, just to dispel any doubts, “But that you (the Scribes and Pharisees) may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins” – then He said to the paralytic – “Arise, take up your bed and go to your house” (v.6).

The reaction of the crowd was one of marvel; they “glorified God who had given such power to men” (v.8). Mark adds the words of the crowd, “We never saw anything like this!” (Mark 2:12).

Unfortunately, Jesus’ warm reception in Capernaum was short-lived. A few months later, Jesus rebuked the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum because they didn’t repent (Matthew 11:20-24). Perhaps this was because of the Scribes and Pharisees who were present. Later Jesus accused the Scribes and Pharisees of shutting up the Kingdom of Heaven against men (Matthew 23:13). They didn’t enter themselves and by their undercutting and false teaching, didn’t allow some of those who were entering to go in. This can be compared to the parable of the Sower where some seed fell on the wayside and some fell on rocky ground (Matthew 13:18-21). The Scribes and Pharisees snatched the Word away before the people understood it (i.e. the wayside); or if the people did understand it, the Pharisees threatened to put them out of the Synagogue (John 9:34-35) if they continued (i.e., the rocky ground).

Thus we have a major contrasting situation: The Paralytic and his friends were exhibiting the true sacrifice that is well-pleasing to God: caring for one another as members of the Kingdom of God. Yet the Scribes and Pharisees, who sat in Moses’ seat (Matthew 23:2) judging the Twelve Tribes of Israel and who were in charge of the sacrificial system that was intended to teach people about the mercy of God, were instead stone-walling it.