

12. Jesus Shared the Message of Forgiveness as He Met Physical Needs

One of the ways Christ shared the message of forgiveness was by meeting both physical and spiritual needs at the same time. Christ showed compassion as He met physical needs. However, His greater concern was to meet their spiritual needs. This was true whether He was healing a person of a physical problem or providing food to a large group of people.

In Mark 2:1-12, we see that four friends brought a paralyzed man to Christ. The first recorded thing Christ said to this man is given in Mark 2:5, which says, “When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven you.’” This would seem to indicate that this man might have been paralyzed because of his sin. Here, we see that Christ focused on the spiritual need of the man before beginning to deal with his physical need. As soon as Christ saw the faith of the man’s friends, Christ wanted him to experience forgiveness of sins.

Of course, the fact that Christ immediately forgave the sins of the man stirred up some opposition from the people, and they questioned in their hearts whether Christ had the right to forgive sins. Christ then showed that He had power to forgive sins by healing the man. Mark 2:9-11 says, “‘Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, “Your sins are forgiven you,” or to say, “Arise, take up your bed and walk”? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins’--He said to the paralytic, ‘I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.’” In these verses, we see that Christ began to show very early in His public ministry that He had a greater desire to forgive sins than to heal, although He also healed the man.

When Christ healed the man at the pool of Bethesda, Christ showed again that His greatest concern was to deal with the issue of sin, even though the man had been paralyzed for thirty-eight years. John 5:14 says, “Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, ‘See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.’” Christ had a great concern to help this man deal with the sin in his life and receive forgiveness.

There were also times when Christ healed a physical problem that was not the result of sin. One day, Christ, and the disciples, met a blind man. The disciples asked if the man had sinned, or if his parents had sinned. Christ made it very clear that the blindness was not a result of sin. John 9:3 says, “Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.’” However, Christ used that opportunity to meet the spiritual need of the man, as well as the physical need. John 9:35-38 says, “Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said to him, ‘Do you believe in the Son of God?’ He answered and said, ‘Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?’ And Jesus said to him, ‘You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you.’ Then he said, ‘Lord, I believe!’ And he worshiped Him.” Christ met his need for physical sight, and Christ also met his need for spiritual sight.

From these three illustrations, we see that Christ was always concerned to meet spiritual needs, even while He was meeting physical needs. Christ wanted people to experience forgiveness of sins and eternal life. One day, Christ met the physical need of five thousand people by providing them with a meal. When the crowd showed up the next day, Christ said they wanted another free

meal. John 6:26 says, “Jesus answered them and said, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.’” Christ made it very clear, in the following verses, that He was more concerned about their spiritual needs and He was not going to give them another free lunch the next day.

John 6:27-29 says, “‘Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.’ Then they said to Him, ‘What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?’ Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.’” Christ pointed out that the physical food would not last. Instead, Christ let the crowd know that what they needed was spiritual food that would give them everlasting life. Christ said the only way they could receive that spiritual food was to believe in Him.

In Luke 17:11-19, we read about Christ healing ten lepers. Nine were only healed physically, but one was healed both physically and spiritually. In Luke 17:14, we read, “So when He saw them, He said to them, ‘Go, show yourselves to the priests.’ And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed.” Here, we see that all ten were cleansed of their leprosy.

Then, in Luke 17:15-19, we read, “And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered and said, ‘Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?’ And He said to him, ‘Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well.’” Christ gave this man the assurance that his faith had met the spiritual need as well as the physical need.

We want to show developing spiritual leaders the importance of being concerned about meeting spiritual needs as well as physical needs. Christians do kind deeds to help others just because having Christ in their lives has given them a desire to do good. Through the years, Christians have often been the leaders in providing humanitarian aid in times of emergency. However, true Christian love will show that we are equally concerned about meeting spiritual needs while we meet physical needs. Christ used His deeds of physical kindness as opportunities to share with people how they could have forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Meeting physical needs meets a short-term need, while meeting spiritual needs meets an eternal need.

We also want to help developing leaders understand how to use the times Christ met physical needs to explain to people how Christ can meet their spiritual needs. An evangelistic Bible study can be a key way to help a person, or small group of people, come to an understanding of how Christ can meet their spiritual needs by sharing how Christ met spiritual needs as well as physical needs as He ministered to people. The book of John is an especially effective book for an evangelistic Bible study, because the first half of the book provides many illustrations of how Christ met spiritual needs while meeting physical needs.

John began the book by showing that Christ came from heaven to meet spiritual needs and help people become children of God. John the Baptist introduces Christ as the Lamb of God who came

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to take away the sin of the world. John the Baptist's focus on spiritual needs caused two of the men who were following him to begin following Christ. Chapter one concludes by showing that the fact that Christ meets spiritual needs is good news to be shared with both relatives and friends.

In the first miracle recorded in John, Christ met a physical need at a wedding. John 2:11 says that the miracle also met a spiritual need. That verse says, "This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him." In the same way, each of the miracles recorded in the book of John are designed to help people believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. John 20:30-31 says, "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."

The purpose of all of the miracles recorded in the book of John is to help people believe. That is why the book of John can be so effective in an evangelistic Bible study. One of the key things we can teach a developing spiritual leader is how to use the book of John for evangelistic Bible studies. Over and over there are opportunities to help people understand how to have forgiveness of sins, including each of the times when Christ met physical needs. In this way, we are equipping the developing leader to share the Gospel, and the message of forgiveness, in many different ways.

It is a great privilege to help developing leaders become like their Savior. This will happen as they learn many different ways to use physical needs to begin discussing spiritual needs with people. May the Lord richly bless you as you help developing leaders learn to share the message of forgiveness as they meet needs.