

And They Sought to See Jesus Who He Was

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Of the Seventy

I witness that Jesus lives, that He knows us, and that He has the power to heal, to transform, and to forgive.

Brothers, sisters, and friends, in 2013 my wife, Laurel, and I were called to serve as mission leaders in the Czech/Slovak Mission. Our four children served with us.¹ We were blessed as a family with brilliant missionaries and by the remarkable Czech and Slovak Saints. We love them.

As our family entered the mission field, something Elder Joseph B. Wirthlin taught went with us. In a talk titled “The Great Commandment,” Elder Wirthlin asked, “Do you love the Lord?” His counsel to those of us who would answer yes was simple and profound: “Spend time with Him. Meditate on His words. Take His yoke upon you. Seek to understand and obey.”² Elder Wirthlin then promised transformative blessings to those willing to give time and place to Jesus Christ.³

We took Elder Wirthlin’s counsel and promise to heart. Together with our missionaries, we spent extended time with Jesus, studying Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John from the New Testament and 3 Nephi from the Book of Mormon. At the end of every missionary meeting, we found ourselves back in what we referred to as the “Five Gospels,”⁴ reading, discussing, considering, and learning about Jesus.

For me, for Laurel, and for our missionaries, spending time with Jesus in the scriptures changed everything. We gained a deeper appreciation for who He was and what was important to Him. Together we considered how He taught, what He taught, the ways He showed love, what He did to bless and serve, His miracles, how He responded to betrayal, what He did with difficult human emotions, His titles and names, how He listened, how He resolved conflict, the world He lived in, His parables, how He encouraged unity and kindness, His capacity to forgive and to heal, His sermons, His prayers, His atoning sacrifice, His Resurrection, His gospel.

We often felt like the “[short] of stature” Zacchaeus running to climb a sycamore tree as Jesus passed through Jericho because, as Luke described it, we “sought to see Jesus who he was.”⁵ It was not Jesus as we wanted or wished Him to be, but rather Jesus as He really was and is.⁶ Just as Elder Wirthlin had promised, we learned in a very real way that “the gospel of Jesus Christ is a gospel of transformation. It takes us as men and women of the earth and refines us into men and women for the eternities.”⁷

Those were special days. We came to believe that “with God nothing shall be impossible.”⁸ Sacred afternoons in Prague, Bratislava, or Brno, experiencing the power and reality of Jesus, continue to resonate in all of our lives.

We often studied Mark 2:1–12. The story there is compelling. I want to read part of it directly from Mark and then share it as I have come to understand it after comprehensive study and discussion with our missionaries and others.⁹

“And again [Jesus] entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house.

“And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them.

“And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four.

“And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay.

“When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.”

After an exchange with some in the crowd,¹⁰ Jesus looks at the man sick of palsy and heals him physically, saying:

“I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house.

“And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.”¹¹

Now the story as I have come to understand it: Early in His ministry, Jesus returned to Capernaum, a small fishing village located on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee.¹² He had recently performed a series of miracles by healing the sick and casting out evil spirits.¹³ Anxious to

hear and experience the man called Jesus, the villagers gathered at the home where He was rumored to be staying.¹⁴ As they did, Jesus began to teach.¹⁵

Homes at that time in Capernaum were flat-roofed, single-story dwellings, grouped together.¹⁶ The roof and walls were a mixture of stone, timber, clay, and thatch, accessed by a set of simple steps on the side of the home.¹⁷ The crowd grew quickly at the house, filled the room where Jesus was teaching, and spread out into the street.¹⁸

The story focuses on a man “sick of the palsy” and his four friends.¹⁹ Palsy is a form of paralysis, often accompanied by weakness and tremors.²⁰ I imagine one of the four saying to the others, “Jesus is in our village. We all know about the miracles He has performed and those He has healed. If we can just get our friend to Jesus, perhaps he too can be made whole.”

So they each take a corner of their friend’s mat or bed and begin carrying him through the crooked, narrow, unpaved streets of Capernaum.²¹ Muscles aching, they turn the last corner only to find that the crowd or, as the scripture calls it, the “press” of people gathered to listen is so great that getting to Jesus is impossible.²² With love and faith, the four do not give up. Rather, they scramble up the steps onto the flat roof, carefully lift their friend and his bed up with them, break open the roof over the room where Jesus is teaching, and let their friend down.²³

Consider that in the middle of what must have been a serious teaching moment, Jesus hears a scratching noise, looks up, and sees a growing hole in the ceiling as dust and thatch fall into the room. A paralyzed man on a bed is then lowered to the floor. Remarkably, Jesus discerns that this is not an interruption but rather something that matters. He looks at the man on the bed, publicly forgives his sins, and physically heals him.²⁴

With that telling of Mark 2 in mind, several important truths become clear about Jesus as the Christ. First, when we try to help someone we love come unto Christ, we can do so with confidence that He has the capacity to lift the burden of sin and to forgive. Second, when we bring physical, emotional, or other illnesses to Christ, we can do so knowing He has the power to heal and comfort. Third, when we make effort like the four to bring others to Christ, we can do so with certainty that He sees our true intentions and will appropriately honor them.

Remember, Jesus’s teaching was disrupted by the appearance of a hole in the roof. Rather than chastise or dismiss the four who made the hole for interrupting, the scripture tells us that “Jesus *saw* their faith.”²⁵

Those who witnessed the miracle then “marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power [to] men.”²⁶

Brothers and sisters, let me close with two additional observations. Whether as missionaries, ministers, Relief Society presidents, bishops, teachers, parents, siblings, or friends, we are all engaged as Latter-day Saint disciples in the work of bringing others to Christ. Thus, the qualities exhibited by the four friends are worth considering and emulating.²⁷ They are bold, adaptive, resilient, creative, versatile, hopeful, determined, faithful, optimistic, humble, and enduring.

Additionally, the four emphasize the spiritual importance of community and fellowship.²⁸ In order to bring their friend to Christ, each of the four must carry their corner. If one lets go, things get more difficult. If two give up, the task effectively becomes impossible. Each of us has a role to play in the kingdom of God.²⁹ As we fill that role and do our part, we carry our corner. Whether in Argentina or Vietnam, Accra or Brisbane, a branch or a ward, a family or a missionary companionship, we each have a corner to carry. As we do, and if we will, the Lord blesses us all. As He saw *their* faith, so will He see *ours* and bless us as a people.

At different times I have carried the corner of a bed, and at other times I have been the one carried. Part of the power of this remarkable story of Jesus is that it reminds us just how much we need each other, as brothers and sisters, in order to come unto Christ and be transformed.

These are a few of the things I have learned from spending time with Jesus in Mark 2.

“May God grant that we may be able to [carry our corner], that we may not shirk, that we may not fear, but that we may be strong in our faith, and determined in our work, to accomplish the purposes of the Lord.”³⁰

I witness that Jesus lives, that He knows us, and that He has the power to heal, to transform, and to forgive. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Evie, Wilson, Hyrum, and George.
2. Joseph B. Wirthlin, “The Great Commandment,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2007, 30.
3. The blessings identified by Elder Wirthlin include an increased capacity for love, a willingness to be obedient and responsive to God’s commandments, a desire to serve others, and a disposition to do good continually.
4. “The Gospels ... are a fourfold presentation under the names of four different evangelists or Gospel writers of the life and

of four different evangelists or Gospel writers of the life and teaching of Jesus, and of his suffering, death and resurrection” (Anders Bergquist, “Bible,” in John Bowden, ed., *Encyclopedia of Christianity* [2005], 141). The Bible Dictionary adds that “the word *gospel* means ‘good news.’ The good news is that Jesus Christ has made a perfect atonement for mankind that will redeem all mankind. ... The records of His mortal life and the events pertaining to His ministry are called the Gospels” (Bible Dictionary, “Gospels”). 3 Nephi, recorded by Nephi, the grandson of Helaman, contains a record of the appearance and teaching of the resurrected Jesus Christ in the Americas just after His Crucifixion and therefore may also be referred to as a “Gospel.” The Gospels are particularly compelling because they record events and circumstances in which Jesus Himself actively teaches and participates. They are a critical starting point for understanding Jesus as the Christ, our relationship to Him, and His gospel.

5. See Luke 19:1–4; see also Jacob 4:13 (explaining that the Spirit “speaketh of things as they really are, and of things as they really will be”) and Doctrine and Covenants 93:24 (defining truth as “knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come”).
6. President J. Reuben Clark similarly encouraged the study of “the life of the Savior as an actual personality.” He invited others to be in the scriptural accounts of Jesus Christ’s life, to try and “go along with the Savior, live with him, let him be an actual man, half divine, of course, but nevertheless moving as a man moved in those days.” He furthermore promised that such an effort “will give you such a view of him, such an intimacy with him as I think you can get in no other way. ... Learn what he did, what he thought, what he taught. Do as he did. Live as he lived, so far as we can. He was the perfect man” (*Behold the Lamb of God* [1962], 8, 11). For insight regarding the value and reasons for studying Jesus in the context of history, see N. T. Wright and Michael F. Bird, *The New Testament in Its World* (2019), 172–87.
7. Joseph B. Wirthlin, “The Great Commandment,” 30.
8. Luke 1:37.
9. In addition to regular and extended discussion of Mark 2:1–12 with the missionaries of the Czech/Slovak Mission, I am also grateful for lessons learned considering this text with the young men and women of the Salt Lake Highland Stake missionary preparation class and the leaders and members of

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10. See Mark 2:6–10.
11. Mark 2:11–12.
12. See Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, eds., *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (1993), 104; James Martin, *Jesus: A Pilgrimage* (2014), 183–84.
13. See Mark 1:21–45.
14. See Mark 2:1–2.
15. See Mark 2:2.
16. See Metzger and Coogan, *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, 104; William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark* (2001), 53.
17. See Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, 53; see also Martin, *Jesus: A Pilgrimage*, 184.
18. See Mark 2:2, 4; see also Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, 52–53. Barclay explains that “life in Palestine was very public. In the morning the door of the house was opened and anyone who wished might come out and in. The door was never shut unless someone deliberately wished for privacy; an open door meant an open invitation for all to come in. In the humbler [homes] such as [the one identified in Mark 2] must have been, there was no entrance hall; the door opened directly ... to the street. So, in no time, a crowd had filled the house to capacity and jammed the pavement round the door; and they were all eagerly listening to what Jesus had to say.”
19. Mark 2:3.
20. See *Medical Dictionary of Health Terms*, “palsy,” health.harvard.edu.
21. See Martin, *Jesus: A Pilgrimage*, 184.
22. Mark 2:4.
23. See Mark 2:4; see also Julie M. Smith, *The Gospel according to Mark* (2018), 155–71.
24. See Mark 2:5–12.
25. Mark 2:5; emphasis added.
26. Matthew 9:8; see also Mark 2:12; Luke 5:26.
27. Doctrine and Covenants 62:3 explains that the Lord’s servants are “blessed. for the testimony which ve have borne

... and your sins are forgiven you.”

28. See M. Russell Ballard, “Hope in Christ,” *Liahona*, May 2021, 55–56. President Ballard notes that a “sense of belonging” is important to both physical and spiritual health, and he observes that “every member in our quorums, organizations, wards, and stakes has God-given gifts and talents that can help build up His kingdom now.” See also David F. Holland, *Moroni: A Brief Theological Introduction* (2020), 61–65. Holland discusses Moroni 6 and the ways in which participation and fellowship in a faith community help facilitate the kind of personal spiritual experience that binds us more closely to heaven.
29. See Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Lift Where You Stand,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2008, 56. Elder Uchtdorf explains that “none of us can or should move the Lord’s work alone. But if we all stand close together in the place the Lord has appointed and lift where we stand, nothing can keep this divine work from moving upward and forward.” See also Chi Hong (Sam) Wong, “Rescue in Unity,” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, Nov. 2014, 15. Elder Wong references Mark 2:1–5 and teaches that “in order to assist the Savior, we have to work together in unity and in harmony. Everyone, every position, and every calling is important.”
30. Oscar W. McConkie, in Conference Report, Oct. 1952, 57.