

WHO IS BLOCKING YOUR ACCESS TO JESUS?

Today's Text: Mark 2: 1-12

Extracts:

And again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house. Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them. Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof, where He was. So, when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you" [Mk 2: 1-5]

Under the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, if the President is going to be away over an extended period of time, he is required to write a letter to the Senate to officially confirm handing over to the Vice-President. On 23 November 2009, President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua was admitted into a hospital in Saudi Arabia, where he was diagnosed with a heart problem called periarditis.¹ He did not send any letter to the Senate to officially hand over to the Vice-President, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. Every attempt to get one from him in Saudi Arabia failed because nobody, including State Governors, one of whom was his son-in-law, was allowed to see him. On 9 February 2010, the Senate had to pass a resolution, based on the doctrine of necessity, to empower the Vice-President to act as the President.

His wife and a political cabal were alleged to be responsible for blocking access to him. In like manner, there are some people who would love to have access to Jesus but they are being blocked by forces, such as fear, religion, family or pride. Two thousand years ago, a sick person wanted to see Jesus for healing but his way was blocked. Do you know what he did to break out of it to receive his healing? There are principles we can learn from his experience that will help us to deal with our own situation. This week's study promises to be an eye-opener for us all!

¹ Story based on the following sources: "Yar'Adua Illness Timeline," *BBC News*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/8573178.stm> , Thursday, 18 March 2010 and Reuben Abati , "Nigeria: The Cost Of Instability," http://www.nguardiannews.com/editorial_opinion/article02//indexn2_html?pdate=210310&ptitle=Nigeria , Sunday, March 21, 2010.

1. Background: The paralytic had to see Jesus!

In one of His most reassuring sermons, Jesus told His listeners, “Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls, for My yoke is easy and My burden is light” **[Matt. 11: 28-30]**. That call is certainly meant for us all. It is getting more and more scary to live from day to day in our modern world. Is it natural disasters? Numerous deadly earthquakes, floods or freezing weather in diverse places have been reported just this year alone. Is it man-made disasters? We have heard of suicide bombers, religious/ethnic massacres and drug-related killings almost on a routine basis. What of personal problems, such as unemployment, divorce, barrenness, illness and more? Governments are going broke. Banks are failing. Parents and others that we have relied on in times of emergency are going bankrupt. Doctors have given up on people that you know. Everywhere you turn, there is a cry for succour which, it appears, can only come from a higher authority. Jesus has offered Himself as one such hope, if not the only!

Yet, when we want to respond to His call to come to Him, we run into a number of roadblocks. Let us look at the situation that faced a very sick man who wanted very badly to see Jesus, and how he handled the blockage in his way for his own healing:

a) *A paralytic needed healing*

The fame of Jesus had spread throughout the entire region around Galilee **[Mk 1: 28]**. People had heard how “He healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out demons” **[v33]**. A paralytic (that is, a physically challenged person) also heard the good news that gave him hope. So four men (who could be family or friends) brought him on a bed so that he could see Jesus **[Mk 2: 2]**.

There is something that ails you right now that you cannot tell anybody. Perhaps you should go and see Jesus. The woman with an issue of blood had exhausted her resources on physicians for twelve years without any respite. Then, she decided to see Jesus because she knew that if only she could touch the hem of His garment, she would be made whole **[Matt. 9: 20-21; Lk 8: 43-44]**. Your marriage is on the verge of collapse due to financial difficulties or allegations of unfaithfulness or barrenness. Counselling with family, friends and professionals has failed. Go to Jesus. You have just been displaced from a home that you have occupied for several years because you can no longer pay your mortgage. Go to Jesus. You are running away from ethnic or religious persecution. Run to Jesus. You must see Him because He alone has answers and solutions to your problems.

b) *But the way to Jesus was blocked!*

When the four men brought the paralytic to Jesus, “they could not come near Him because of the crowd” [Mk 2: 4]. We may not have an idea how much distance those men had to travel on foot to bring the sick man to Jesus. Now, at the point where their hope should have risen, it was dampened because huge crowds had blocked their way. Most of them were also looking for healing from just that one person. Economics teaches us that when demand exceeds supply, price shoots up. The equivalent of price in this case was access to Jesus. With huge throngs of people milling around, it became almost impossible to reach him. Access became an expensive commodity.

There are many things that could be blocking our access to Jesus right now. For example, it could be *self-inflicted*. We are just too proud and too full of ourselves to seek help from somebody else. Some people feel that it is beneath them to let others know that they need help. So, they keep things to themselves and drown their depression with alcohol and/or drugs. If they do not do something about it, that is, by seeking help from others, they may wind up committing suicide. Some people are too lazy to do something about their situation. They know that the handouts from siblings, parents or friends cannot sustain them. Yet, they are too lazy to move forward to find solutions. Some people refuse to read the Bible at all or on a sustained basis, even when they claim to be Christians of long standing. Therefore, because of their spiritual ignorance, they make themselves susceptible to spiritual manipulation by doctrines of men, usually to their detriment.

Sometimes, the blockage can come from our *fear of man*. For example, for fear of persecution, many people of other faiths are afraid to come to Jesus. The Jews were afraid to acknowledge Jesus as the expected Messiah for fear of the leaders of the synagogue [Jn 9: 22]. Some people are afraid that they could lose pecuniary gains, such as inheritance, employment or promotion, if they should go to or even acknowledge Jesus.

Sometimes, it is even the *assistants around your church leaders* that are blocking your desire to see Jesus. Just as the disciples rebuked children that were brought to Jesus that He might touch them [Lk 18: 15-17], so also do some people surrounding pastors and other church leaders prevent distressed members of the congregation from seeking and obtaining spiritual help. In some cases, such as sexual abuse of children by priests, which have been covered up by the church, many people have lost the zeal to see Jesus. Notwithstanding, you still need to see Jesus very very badly because your experience will be different and wholesome! What is holding you back?

c) *So, they broke through the roof!*

When the four men that brought the paralytic found that their passage had been blocked by huge crowds, “they uncovered the roof where He was [and] when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying” [Mk 2: 4]. Can you imagine that? The four men could not be blocked access to Jesus. They thought outside of the box, so to speak! The crowds might have blocked the ground but not the roof! They did not care how much damage they were doing to somebody else’s property. They would settle that later. For that moment, anything that could stop the paralytic from seeing Jesus had to be removed.

What risk are you ready to take to get out of your mess? Are you afraid that people will laugh at you if you should admit your weakness and seek help? Well, one day, it could get out of your control and they will laugh more when you are disgraced. Sooner or later, you may lose the economic advantages that have blocked you from coming to Jesus. Is that the time that you want to come, when your situation could have become much worse? Zacchaeus was a rich tax collector who ‘sought to see who Jesus was, but could not because of the crowd, for he was of short stature.’ So what did he do? He ‘ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for he was going to pass that way.’ Was he not the one that Jesus selected to host Him that day [Lk 19: 1-9]? Why should you accept any obstacle in your way?

d) *The paralytic received healing*

We are told that when *Jesus saw the faith* of the four men that had brought the paralytic to Him through the roof, He said to the sick man, “Son, your sins are forgiven you” [Mk 2: 5]. The man had not even opened his mouth, not to talk of confessing his sins. Yet, Jesus forgave him his sins to demonstrate to those around Him that the just should live by their faith [Hab. 2: 4; Rom. 1: 17]. Most times, Jesus told the people He had healed that it was their faith that made them whole [Matt. 9: 22, 29].

From that story, we can conclude that *until you take the step of faith to break off what blocks your ability to reach Jesus, nothing will happen*. You can fast from today to eternity. You can attend every revival service around you. As long as you remain bound by chains of Satan, manifesting as lust of the flesh, lust of the eye and pride of life [1 Jn 2:16], you cannot access Jesus. As long as you are pushed away by throngs of sycophancy and hypocrisy in your place of worship, you cannot reach Jesus. Therefore, you must get yourself out of bondage and move forward to Him. *You cannot get there by denomination or congregation, by church rank or length of service in the vineyard. It takes a personal relationship with Him to get there.*

2. How to remove the blockages in your way

You will recall that in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus took Peter, James and John away from the other disciples to come and watch with Him as He began His passion [Matt. 26: 36-37]. He left them and went a little farther to pray. When He came back, they were fast asleep. Jesus was apparently surprised for He said, “What? Could you not watch one hour with Me? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” [vv. 38-41]. A few hours later, when the enemies came for Jesus, “all the disciples forsook Him and fled” [v. 56], and Peter who was bold enough to follow from a distance denied Him three times [vv. 58, 69-75]! Therefore, if we can deal with our weaknesses, especially of the flesh, we can remove the blockages in our way to gaining access to Jesus. Here are a few suggestions:

a) *Take a firm stand!*

Many of us want to eat our cake and still have it. We call ourselves Christians but behave like unbelievers. We lie, steal and cheat. We indulge in sexual immorality even when we wear the longest robes and biggest crosses on our chests! In the name of being politically correct, we encourage others with our acquiescence of error and sin. The truth is that you cannot serve God and mammon *at the same time*. Jesus told the church of the Laodiceans, “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were hot or cold. So then, because you are lukewarm, ... I will vomit you out of My mouth” [Rev. 3: 14-16]..

You will be discouraged by the throngs of discouragement in front of you., such as the misbehaviour of church leaders and others that you look up to for spiritual guidance. You will be tempted to think that you still have time because you are young. Peers will push you to believe that you are too young to settle down, that you need to play the field and acquire ‘necessary’ experience! How are you sure that you have control over your life or future? You must take a stand one way or the other. Either you want to come to Jesus or you are not interested. Period! Once you take a stand to come to Christ, you will have the will to remove anything that is blocking your access to Him.

b) *Seek help, if necessary*

Just as infants need their mothers’ milk to nurture them until they can eat solid food, so it is for young believers to find reliable spiritual mentors and trusted leaders who can bring them to the true knowledge of Christ.. For example, it was Barnabas who took the new convert, Paul, from Damascus to Jerusalem where he introduced him to the apostles and spoke highly of

his testimony concerning Jesus [Acts 9: 27]. In turn, Paul mentored Timothy [2 Tim. 1: 5-6].

Go to the Bible, the word of God, and soak yourself with as much of its contents as possible. One poster that I have in my office says, “Read the Bible everyday; it will scare the hell out of you!”

c) *Be ready for the challenges that will follow*

Satan will not give you up when you are trying to come to Christ. He will through his messengers harass you with persecution and disappointments. You could lose your wealth or job as soon as you decide to come straight. Even the church bureaucracy surrounding water baptism can take so long as to discourage you! How about cold shoulders from close family members?

Be encouraged by Paul’s example who suffered untold hardships and persecutions after he had given his life to Christ. [2 Cor. 11: 24-33] .But he was not discouraged because, having learned to be content no matter his state, he could do all things through Christ who strengthened him [Phil. 4: 11-13].

3. Conclusion: Happily, it is Jesus who will find you!

After Philip had met Jesus, he wanted his friend, Nathanael to also come and meet Him. However, he was skeptical because he did not believe that anything good could come out of Nazareth. But, as soon as Jesus saw him, He spoke familiarly to him, saying, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!” Surprised, Nathanael asked Jesus, “How do You know me?” He replied, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” Shocked, Nathanael declared, “Rabbi! You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” [Jn 1: 45-48]. Jesus saw Nathanael before he could access the Lord. That is the privilege that He wants to also extend to you.

Right now, you may still be wrestling with the decision to accept Jesus as your personal Lord and Saviour. Cheer up because He has already seen you, under the barren fig tree of economic hardship or on your lonely bed of ill health. You may be crippled by self-doubts or shame but keep moving towards Jesus. Remember that He chose you [Jn 15: 16]. That is why God is going to make everything work for you to access Him.

Only you can block your access to Jesus!