

## The resurrection of the paralysed man



I know that it is my fault that I am like this. I know that it is due to the stupidity and arrogance of the teenager I was, that my life was effectively ended the day I completely ignored the shouts of my friends and all the things my mother ever told me not to do, and jumped into the lake just there.

I jumped high off the stone and it felt like I was flying, just for an instant I knew how a bird felt, then I landed in the water and it was like I had hit hard bare earth. I fell through the water and my limbs were no longer mine, they would not move to raise me up to the air again. My eyes were open and through the blue of the water, I could see my friends on the shore laughing and pointing. Then they stopped laughing and they began running into the lake towards me. I had just reached the point when I knew I was going to have to take a breath, even if that breath was just water, when I was hauled up out of the water and I breathed again. My friends hauled me towards the shore shouting at me that I was a complete idiot. They stopped shouting when they tried to help me stand, and

I couldn't. Then and only then I became frightened. They looked at each other and someone ran off to find my mother.

I felt her flying down the track towards me. All I could see was the blue of the sky. I wondered where my body had gone. It was there, but I could no longer feel it. My mother, kneeling beside me, told me to stop playing around and get up. I could see that her face was white with fear. I just could not move. She told me later that she was pinching me and poking me, but I never knew. Dad came running as well. He picked me up and carried me home. I lay on my bed unable to move and people crowded into our house to come and look at me, to give mother and Dad advice. I was prayed over, lamented over, shouted at, cursed, told I was curse and that I was a curse on my family. The person who said that never darkened my mother's door again. And I just lay there.

My friends came and tried to cheer me up. Some days I would feel cheerful and could laugh and joke with them, but on other days it would be as if I was living at the bottom of a deep, dark chasm and I could barely see the light at all. On those days they would get nothing out of me, and so they would go away again. Nothing, but nothing stopped them from coming back again, day after day after day, and I was grateful, even though I didn't say it often enough to them.

Gradually over months and years, I noticed that there were changes in me. I began to accept that I was not going to get up and walk again. When I complained that all I could see was the inside of my parents house, my friends went away, and came back the next day with a portable bed for me. Four sticks joined with rope at the corners and some fabric sewn across it. They rolled and hauled me on to their creation and with one at each corner they carried me outside and put me in the sun. I had been indoors so long, that on that day, that when my mother returned and scolded them for leaving me out in the sun, I was a bright red colour. Apart from my face I felt nothing, but my mother covered me in oil to

stop me from peeling. Over the years they made adjustments to the portable bed. After the stitching gave way they got my sister to sew it back on. When the fabric eventually broke they worked for one of the fishermen and earned enough money to buy some goat skins. Those were a lot more comfortable. They made a piece to enable me to be propped up so that I could see more than just the sky and the occasional face hovering over me.

But my body began to change. I grew, because my body did not understand that I could do nothing with it, and I became the shell of a man. My limbs with nothing to do began to shrivel and shrink and where I had been able to lie straight and flat I now had to lie curled up, my limbs contorted and my bones visible beneath my skin.

Over all this was the humiliation. I ate and I drank to keep myself alive, and I wet myself and defecated and someone had to come along and clean me up. There have been many times over the years when I have wept at a gentle touch cleaning and turning me and preventing me from becoming a fly ridden mass.

Many times over the years I have become ill with a fever or worse and I have prayed to die, to leave this dreadful life that I have, but the prayers of my mother and father, of my friends have carried me through. At times I have felt so totally alone and in a place that no one else can understand. Why should they? They can go, they can see, they can do. They can walk in to the house and walk back again to their families, their wives, their children, their work. They might moan about all of those, but what would I not give to have even one day, one hour of their lives.

My consolation has been the Rabbi, who has come to me regularly and taught me to read. I might be cursed by Yahweh and condemned to this life of confinement, but at least I do know about Yahweh. I have learned much of Torah off by heart, along

with the writings of Wisdom and the Prophets. The genealogy of the Kings was the most difficult to remember. In the hours of blackness, sometimes the writings give me hope, sometimes it matches my moods so perfectly that I marvel at the wonder of words to paint pictures in the heart of things that are so beyond our understanding. When the black chasm opens up in me, there are days I can find words to build a ladder and climb up and out, but some days there are no words that can touch me. Then I am a man without hope, a man of desolation, and all for the sake of a child's arrogance.

Hope came for me in the shape of rumours and stories that I heard being told from house to house. Stories of a Rabbi with great healing powers. A Rabbi who talked about Yahweh as son talks about a father. How I longed to meet this Rabbi, to talk with him. My head knew Yahweh, but my heart did not. I could not imagine myself as a child of the Yahweh I knew about from the scriptures, But I wanted to know more. Maybe, just maybe, this Rabbi could heal me just enough to be able to, well, what I wanted most was not to be humiliated. How he could do that I had no idea.

Hope came to me through my friends, who not for the first time bullied me into doing something I was not fully prepared for. They had obviously thought about how they might get me to this Rabbi, the only real hope they had ever heard of to cure me. I could see that they wanted me healed as much as I did, maybe even more. I saw for the first time that they blamed themselves for not stopping me from jumping. I wondered how much they had done for me was out of guilt, not the pity I thought was there. So they picked me up and carried me through the town. I saw houses and people I had not seen in years. I was seen by people who only knew of my existence. But we could not get near the house where the Rabbi was speaking. Everyone, it seemed wanted to be there and to hear what he had to say, and the street outside the house was packed.

My friends put me down and had a whispered discussion. Eventually someone came up with the absolutely stupid idea of lowering me down through the roof. I protested vehemently, but to no avail. Someone went and found some ropes from a nearby fishing boat, which they forced me to hang on to as they hauled me up the stairs at the side of the house. How I did not fall off at that point I will never know. Then they started to attack the roof with stones and a metal hook which must have come from the fishing boat. I could hear nothing to begin with, but as pieces of ceiling must have begun falling, I began to hear angry noises from below. Soon someone thought to come and look on the roof to see what was going on. One friend held them off, as the others redoubled their efforts. I could hear raised voices and more people coming out to see what was going on. Then before I knew it, my bed had been tied to the ropes and I was being lowered through a hole in the roof. It wasn't quite big enough, so I had to go through at an angle, I held on tightly with my hands to stop myself from falling off. As I was lowered I could see the concentration on my friends faces, then just as I got to the bottom the ropes followed me down, and I could hear shouting and fighting on the roof.

The place where I landed was quiet. When I turned my gaze from the roof, I could see a whole lot of legs and feet standing some distance away. I looked up and saw bodies with hands and arms brushing dirt and dust out of hair and clothing, and then a circle of faces looking at me, mostly with astonishment. There was a movement and one man stood up and moved closer. He looked down at me and up at the hole in the ceiling. As he looked up, the face of one of my friends appeared briefly in the hole. 'Heal him, please' he yelled down, before a hand hauled on his clothing and he disappeared from view again. The man looked down at me and a big smile lit his face.

'You have some very good friends, it seems' he said.

I looked at him,

'Yes, I do'.

He turned and had a word with someone standing nearby, and they began to push their way out of the crowded room.

The man came and squatted down next to me.

‘I am Jesus bar Joseph, a Rabbi. Tell me,’ he said ‘What is it that you want from me?’

‘Do I have to say in front of all these people?’

He looked around and the people began to move back, just a little. He bent his head down to me, and I talked. I have no idea how long I talked, but everything came out in a great rush, all the black chasms and the envy and the self recrimination, until I felt cleansed and light. Then there was a movement in the crowd, and my friends were pushed through to face the Rabbi, who stood up to look at them. Their clothes were torn, and their fists and faces bloody. They had obviously been in a fight, but they looked stoic, as if this was what they had needed to do, for me. Rabbi Jesus looked at them and back down at me, then he held out his hand to me.

‘Get up, your sins are forgiven. Pick up your bed and walk,’ he said.

His hand in mine was warm. The warmth seemed to flow from him into me, and I could feel myself being filled with warmth and something, I don’t know what. And I could feel, yes I could feel my body, then my legs. And my brain asked my legs to move and they did slowly and carefully with long forgotten movements. I could feel muscles again, and a tingling that was not unpleasant, but was to me a reminder of a time when I would sit for hours with my legs crossed, talking and laughing with my friends. When I came to get up my legs would not really work, and I would wobble like a toddler. Now I pushed myself up with my arms, and my legs moved, my legs moved, to push me up to stand and I stood.

I wobbled, and my friends dashed forwards to hold me up, as they have held me up all these years. And we just stood there together,

stood there together, holding each other up as we had done as boys, so many years before, and I wept. With tears of joy for my future and for the all the pain of the things I had lost. I began to shout praises to Yahweh in thanks for all the things I would now be able to do; to walk, to live, to run, to love. I turned to Rabbi Jesus, but I could find no words to express what he had just done for me. He just smiled and pointed to the bed cluttering the floor. I bent and picked it up and surrounded by my friends, I walked out to the biggest feast I had ever seen in the town, as everyone rejoiced with me and gave thanks for my deliverance from my sins. Tomorrow will be a new day, the first day of the rest of my life. Tomorrow I will be back to listen to Rabbi Jesus and learn.