

## An Age of Spirit or of Matter?

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**Gospel: Matthew 9:1-8 (AV):** *And he entered into a ship, and passed over, and came into his own city. And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This [man] blasphemeth. And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, [Thy] sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house. But when the multitudes saw [it], they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men.*

"For which is easier, to say,  
[Thy] sins be forgiven thee;  
or to say, Arise, and walk?"

Four men carried a crippled man on a bed and brought him to Jesus. It seems that the situation of this man was very very bad. He could not even speak a word or ask Jesus anything. In other words, he was in the worst possible human condition, closer to death than to life.

Seeing this, and comparing it to other miracles where Christ healed others in better physical shape, we expect Jesus to say to this crippled man nothing but "walk."

On the contrary, everyone was surprised that Jesus ignored the man's pitiful situation, saying to him, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee".

It is clear that neither the men carrying the cripple nor the crowd wanted this from Jesus. It is also clear that Jesus intended to say that.

He wanted to emphasize to everyone, that even in this extremely dangerous situation, the biggest danger is in having a crippled soul and not a crippled body. The most important is the soul. The body is the servant of the soul.

This is how God set up creation from the beginning. In Paradise man lived without pain and without suffering and all goods were in the service of his spiritual growth and perfection. He remained in this state as long as he continued on the path of spiritual perfection. This was the right condition of the body and soul, for this noble body was the right vessel for this spiritual life. But when man turned away from the heavenly path that was open to him, and changed the order of things, God allowed for pain and hunger, and for all these things that make us suffer every day. By this pain and suffering man, is led to spiritual perfection, whose gift is bodily perfection.

When the body is dispensed from suffering, it is the vessel of the perfect spiritual man. After the fall of man, this body (vessel of the spiritually perfect man)

became a state of hope, after having been a pledge in paradise. For the most important thing is spiritual perfection. As for matter and the body, they may be "vessels of honor or of shame".

The order of things as it was in the beginning held the superiority of the soul over matter, and put hormonal matter at the service of the soul. The order was clear and right.

That is why Jesus in front of this crippled man challenges strongly, and even violently, the rush of people to care for bodily needs, even in this situation where the bodily need is urgent. He strongly emphasized the superiority of the spiritual over the material, so he turned to the repentance of sins and the healing of the soul, at a time when the body needed healing so badly.

Our age very much needs to look into today's event and benefit from it. Our age needs to review the position of Christ and his challenge to materialism, while facing the decline of spirituality.

Our contemporary civilization is threatened with corruption. It is so fitting for the Christians to follow Christ's challenge. This challenge does not cancel the important need for material things, for this is blessed. However, it emphasizes the priority of the spiritual needs, since if we ask the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, everything else will be given and added to us.

A quick look at the most important sides of life, its evolution and its changing aims, assures us that "The salt is losing its flavor". The question is asked, "How then shall it be salted?"

Our civilization diminishes the value of work and the importance of trade in the name of profit. What is the reason behind choosing a trade? Its humanitarian reward or its material benefit, its service or its gain? What is noticeable is that gain is replacing service. Money makes everything move. Profit over love. For example one of the best and most noble professions is Education. Since Education is not well-paid in the first place, it is becoming the last work people choose. The value of teacher has diminished. The teacher was the educator and father. Today we notice the corruption of these values. Whoever takes up this work is often the person who was not successful in getting other kinds of work.

Education, if it has a creative and service-oriented purpose, is the noblest work for man, revealing the image of God in him. Today, however, man is often seen as being controlled by profit. Creation itself is now bought and controlled by money. Criminal currents buy creative powers. This is how strange our days have become! We have progressed in creating tools for torture much more than in creating medical tools. Our civilization is threatened by deceit.

Last but not least, words such as friendship, faithfulness, sacrifice, nationalism have all taken weak meanings, and sometimes have totally changed in meaning, being replaced by one word, profit.

Man is no more valuable in himself. He has become an individual in a society and a number in a group, bought and sold, without considering his unique human characteristics and the worth of his personality. He is often controlled by the power of darkness whose only measure is money. What is the value of the poor in our civilization? The answer is zero! What is the value of

the cripple or the sick? The answer is: we need to get rid of them.

There are many examples of the corruption of the salt. And like his Master, the Christian challenges this corruption. Moral perfection is not a hope realized in the after life. Spiritual perfection is a journey of challenges in the middle of the waves of corruption. We walk this journey with great effort, by vigils and prayers, step by step. The Christian is the light of the world and the salt of the earth. The currents of corruption are not the judges in this challenge, but the rivals. Even if the challenge is hard, the power of the Master is perfected in our weakness.

The Christian carries the Gospel as a salt to a world whose salt has been corrupted. He preaches the Divine Word to a world whose light is lost. He defines lowliness as highness and not owning as having in abundance. He returns things to the way they were originally. He makes the spirit victorious over matter in all places and at all times. The Christian is a strong hand moved by divine grace to build the age of the spirit with material tools.

Amen.