

Respected Achen, parents, and my dear friends. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:

What is the purpose of miracles? What do they say about us? About our faith? What do they say about Christ and his ministry? Throughout this Lenten season, we analyze the nature and meaning of the miracles Jesus performed during his ministry, leading to the greatest and most profound miracle of all, his resurrection from the cross. The ministry of Jesus Christ is characterized by its profound simplicity. It was created and molded specifically for the common people of ancient times, most of whom were illiterate and silenced. The people that Jesus impacted with his words and signs were people who had been oppressed and beaten down. The Israelites were stifled by Roman rule, by tedious religious technicalities, and by empty rituals. The Gentiles and foreigners were stifled by the prejudice and hatred of those scribes and educated Jewish leaders who created and feed off of those tedious religious technicalities. The common people were stifled by their poverty. The man that Jesus healed was stifled by his paralysis. All of them, and all of us, were stifled by sin and the horrible self-loathing that it brought. We are all stifled, suffocated, oppressed by something. Something weighs us down, something buries us, something silences us. For many people, thousands of years ago and today, Jesus Christ is a way to breathe. Jesus Christ is the freedom from all those types of oppression and suffocation and stifling institutions. Faith is freedom. By believing in God and his teachings, by truly understanding the message of peace and love that Jesus preaches of, we are liberated from our daily trials and grand struggles. In this Bible reading, we see Jesus liberating a man not only from his paralysis, but from his sin. We see the true, multidimensional power of the miracles when we analyze how Jesus was approached and how he reacted.

The healing of the paralytic man is set apart by the way Jesus is approached. The paralytic man is lowered in front of Jesus from the roof by four of the man's friends. This man is paralyzed, he is unable to move and perhaps even to speak. He cannot approach Jesus on his own. He cannot call out to the Messiah, the Savior, the Healer. He is imprisoned by his illness. He is silenced by his suffering. This man would not have been able to witness Christ and experience a miracle without the work and faith of his friends. This man relies on the faith, the guidance, and the support, both spiritual and physical, of his friends. Jesus even expresses that the man is saved by *their* faith. These four friends exemplify the true Christian spirit. They show us that our faith and our prayers can truly impact and save other people. We must remember the power and strength of these four men who did not even need to speak a word to Jesus or the audience to help their friend attain salvation. Their actions and pure intentions spoke volumes. In our personal lives we must also bring salvation to others simply by our actions and pure intentions. These men saved their friend from his sin and illness by physically bringing him to Jesus' feet. Similarly, by acting like Christians, by exemplifying the peace and acceptance and love that Christ taught we can save humanity. We, as humans, are the crown of creation. We are responsible for what happens to this Earth and humankind as a whole, especially in these times of political turmoil and a total regression from the civil rights successes. In these times where so many are suffering and dying because of war and illness and foolish hatred, we must remember our responsibility. Our responsibility to pray for our fellow humans. To care for our neighbors, our friends, just as these four men did. These four men who carried the four corners of this man's mat in the same way Jesus carried the four points of the cross. They represent the four entities that will save all of creation: God the Father, Jesus Christ, the

Holy Spirit, and all of mankind. Yes, we all have an active role in this Church, in the spread of Jesus' truth, and the salvation from sin. We are called to witness Christ, even in a respectful silence. We are called to exude grace that draws people to Christ so that we may help others, just as these four men helped heal their friend.

Another lesson to take away from this miracle is the idea that Jesus cares for our spiritual needs, as well as our physical needs. Seeing the faith of this man's friends, Jesus forgives the sins of the paralytic man. He doesn't heal the man until he sees that his audience needs to see physical proof of this forgiveness. To the scribes, the idea that Jesus could forgive sins was just as impossible as a man being able to heal a paralytic. These people needed to see that Jesus could do what was seemingly impossible, that he could heal and perform great miracles. As humans, they needed reassurance, some sort of sign. Yet, Jesus, primary and initial concern was for the man's spiritual health. Jesus saw the suffering that was beyond the physical and temporary world; He made that his priority. One of the most difficult things for us to grasp is the existence of suffering in the world of a loving, caring, and all-powerful God. Why do good people suffer? Why do bad things happen to good people? Are our prayers falling on deaf ears? The answers to these questions are complex and difficult to understand. It is perfectly normal and utterly human to be angry at God for the existence of evil and suffering. But, as Christians, we must understand that this world is not the end. This world is only one chapter of our existences. Aging bodies and broken bones and healthy hearts all return to dust in the end, but our souls are eternal and everlasting. Yet, at the same time, souls are fragile and only have so many opportunities to be mended. Jesus was entrusted with the responsibility of healing and redeeming our souls, as he did when he forgave this broken man and when he sacrificed Himself on the cross for the sins of all of humanity.

Again, I'd like to reexamine the purpose of this miracle and all the miracles that Christ performed. Throughout his ministry, Christ not only spoke of forgiveness and love, but exemplified it. He came to save the sinners; that was his mission. The true purpose of Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection was to give humanity a second chance. To renew and redefine a powerful promise and a fulfilling faith. Truly, Christ did not have to heal this man physically. He did not have to perform countless miracles and heal thousands. He did so, not only to offer physical proof to the masses, but because he truly loved every human. No matter what they had done. No matter where they came from. God loves all of us. And it is this power of love and compassion that spurs every miracle in Christ's ministry. He really, truly cared about people, as individuals. He came to save, not only humanity, but humans. Often, we rush into things; we try so hard to save the whole world. We carry the whole world on our shoulders. We feel responsible for everything. And we forget that we can save the whole world, one person at a time. While we are called to save humanity, we must not forget that humanity and mankind exists in the whole of sum of every human, living and departed, and in the soul of each, individual person. We must not lose sight of the beautiful, little things while we fix our gazes on the grand, magnificent universe. An all-powerful, almighty God, took the time to heal one, poor, sinful paralytic man, because He loved humanity and humans. He loved each and every person, equally. Regardless of the hand fate deals us and the way we play the game of life, God loves us. Broken and whole. These miracles expose the essence of Jesus, a God who became Man for the salvation of our souls. These miracles demonstrate that we are all important and we are all loved.

To close, I would like to thank you all for this opportunity to speak on this miracle today. In this Lenten season and throughout the year, we must remember to create a personal relationship with our faith. We must remember to deconstruct and analyze these Bible passages and apply them to our lives on both a daily basis and a global scale. We must remember that we are loved in ways that we cannot even begin to understand. And we must find something good to do with that unconditional and pure love.