

What You Really Need From Jesus

Mark 2:1-12 *Mark 2:1 And again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house. ² 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. ³ Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. ⁴ 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. ⁵ When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you."*

⁶ And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, ⁷ "Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" ⁸ But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, "Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? ⁹ "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'? ¹⁰ "But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins" -- He said to the paralytic, ¹¹ "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." ¹² Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"

Abraham Maslow was a rather creative psychologist who tried to explain human behaviour. If you can picture human need as a pyramid or triangle, Maslow said that at the bottom are physical needs that must be met – food, drink, reproduction, sleep. Once you've met those needs, on top of that are security needs, personal, financial and health security. Once you've met those needs, the third layer up in the pyramid are love and belonging needs – the need for intimacy, friendship and family. The fourth level of needs is esteem needs – to achieve and be respected. Finally, at the top, Maslow said there is the need for self-actualization, to be and become all that you can – to reach your full potential. Maslow's theory has become known as the “Hierarchy of Needs”, and some businesses and governments still use it as a model to help them manage or administer their people, thinking that they must meet those needs in that order to get happy, healthy, creative employees and citizens.

If we were to ask God Himself to give us a hierarchy of needs, what would He place first? What would our Designer, the one who knows us far better than any behavioural scientist ever can, what would He say is our greatest need? Would He agree that our most basic needs are physical, and our most elevated need is self-actualization?

This passage teaches us what we really need, by showing us what Jesus said and did for a paralytic. As we study this passage, we are hearing what the Creator regards as our deepest and most pressing need, illustrated through this paralysed man. The account unfolds with three events: seekers who showed persistence, a Saviour who showed pardon, and a sign that gave proof.

I. Seekers Who Showed Persistence

And again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house. ² 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. ³ Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. ⁴ 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. ⁵

Jesus has finished one of His preaching tours. Remember, He is going around all of Galilee, presenting Himself as Messiah, declaring the kingdom is at hand, because the King is present. From town to town, village to village, synagogue to synagogue, Jesus travels. But then He returns to Capernaum, the home town of Simon Peter and Andrew and James and John. Capernaum is really like His headquarters, His home base that He comes back to.

And you can be sure that every time He returned to Capernaum, everyone knew. You remember

when the whole town came to Simon's house after the Sabbath ended, and Jesus healed them all? So, here He is, back in town, and multitudes come – this time not so much for healing, as to hear Him teach.

He's probably in Simon Peter's house again. Given the description, Simon's house would have been a somewhat larger house, the kind that the upper middle-class Jews had, with a fairly large gallery inside the house, along with several rooms. Jesus was probably teaching in this gallery, with people having crowded into every available space, no doubt right into the area outside the house, into the street.

Enter the scene four men, carrying their friend on his mattress or pallet. He is paralysed, and these men want to get him to Jesus. We don't know anything about them. Maybe they were in town when Jesus had healed the whole town on that evening. Maybe they were from a neighbouring village. And apparently, they heard about Jesus' presence too late to secure themselves a spot inside the house. As they approach, no one makes a path for them. No one stands aside for the man on the stretcher. No, everyone is shoulder-to-shoulder, standing room only, and no one is budging. There is a crowd into the courtyard, and most people have their back to them, peering into the windows, intent on hearing Jesus.

So what do the four do? They do as we do when the lift comes and it is crowded: stand back and say, "I'll take the next one", right? They do as we do when the bus is full or the train is full, or the queue is too long, they say, "We'll come back later", right?

No, that's not what they do. They are so determined to get to Jesus, so driven to get their friend to this remarkable Teacher-Healer, whom they've heard can even cure leprosy, that they devise a plan. Jewish houses typically had a staircase on the outside of the house, leading up to the roof, which was flat. They climb those stairs, and go to the part of the roof under which Jesus sat. This was probably the gallery, and would not have been too hard to unroof. It was made of a lighter framework, covered with mud and smaller tiles. A few strong men could have pulled it up in a few minutes.

It's a pretty bold plan. Apparently these men don't mind interrupting Jesus, displeasing a crowd, or paying for roof damage. Give them some credit. Today people avoid church if they can't find an easy parking spot. People don't come to church if it means sitting motionless in a chair with their foot pressed on an accelerator for an extra 20 minutes. People don't come to church if it means being on one place for longer than two hours. These men are of another kind. Persistent, diligent even relentless.

We can imagine that, as Jesus is teaching, a faint noise from above becomes louder, a scratching and rustling that becomes a cracking and tearing. Jesus stops His teaching and looks up, as does everyone in the house. Eventually the tiles above begin to move, and some dirt and clay begins to fall on the people beneath, and the sunlight begins to break in. Expressions of surprise and annoyance mumble through the crowd until eventually to everyone's breathless surprise, a pallet is slowly let down with ropes, while arms come up to steady it. On the pallet is the paralysed man, his anxious eyes looking up, wondering what Jesus' reaction will be to this bold intrusion. And amidst all the arms and bodies steadying the pallet, the face that comes into view, now standing right by his bed as it's lowered, is Jesus.

The room quiets down to almost total silence. People stop shuffling, some even breathe quieter to see and hear what Jesus will do and say.

What will He say? The seekers who showed diligence lowered their friend to Jesus.

II. A Saviour Who Showed Pardon

⁵ *When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you."*

Here is a man unable to walk, who needs to be lowered from the roof on a stretcher. Here is Jesus the Healer, who can heal blindness, deafness, deformed limbs, leprosy, and cast out demons. You have three guesses as to what Jesus is going to say. What are we all expecting? What were they expecting? "Son, rise up and walk", right? Instead, Jesus says words that must have felt like a hearing dish shattering in the kitchen. "Your sins have been forgiven you."

Why did Jesus say that?

Part of the answer is in the text – *when Jesus saw their faith*. When He saw their unwavering determination to get to Him, meaning they were utterly convinced that He was the answer they needed, the One who could solve the problem, He pronounced the man's sins forgiven in response to that.

But that's not really what we're asking. Why did Jesus say 'Your sins are forgiven you' and not "Rise up and walk"? The answer is, if that's the first thing Jesus says to the man, it must be because that's the thing he needs most. Love meets needs in their order of priority. In the eyes of Jesus, far more important than fixing his limbs was fixing his relationship with God. Far more essential to this man's happiness – eternal happiness - was that he be reconciled with God than that he be restored to full mobility.

It is not that this man's sins had caused his paralysis – though they may have. It is true that not all sickness comes about because of sin. But it is also true we would not have sickness in the world except for us having introduced sin into the world. It is that before Jesus would heal the outward symptoms of living in a sinful world, he would first heal the man of the core problem – sin.

On the surface, we don't believe that is our greatest need. If you had been lowered down to Jesus – what would your expectation have been of what He should do for you? What do you even now think your greatest need is? You are in that man's position now – lowered down in front of Christ. What do you, and others who know you expect Him to say? Your financial situation is fixed? Your job situation is changed? Your marriage is repaired? Your health is fully restored? Your boyfriend or girlfriend asks you to marry them? Your family situation is fixed? Like the Jews around this man, we think we know what our greatest need is. And do you know what Jesus would say to you if you were lowered down in front of Him? Exactly the same thing – your sins are forgiven. Love meets the greatest needs in their order of priority.

Imagine for a moment you were living in a town run by a powerful businessman. Everyone in the town ultimately has something to eat because of him and his business. Even the police and the judges answer to him. He has power over everyone's lives. Now imagine that somehow you run into debt with this businessman. You owe him money. And to make things worse, you insult his son in a private meeting.

What is your greatest need in this town? To get more money? To get a better medical aid? To fix up your house? To improve your marriage? Right at that moment – your greatest need is reconciliation with the powerful businessman. Everything else fades into insignificance until you get that right.

Well, that illustration barely touches the true reality. We are living in a universe created by God.

God is not a bystander, He is the owner, the manager, the one who runs the world. You cannot leave and go to another world. Ultimately – everyone gets their food from him. But from the word go – we insult God. We go our own way instead of His way. We seek our own will instead of His will. We worship and enjoy ourselves and not Him. We take and enjoy His gifts and do not say thank you, but instead congratulate ourselves and start to worship His gifts. Worst of all, when He sends His own precious Son into the world to die for our sins, we deny that He was the Son, we make jokes about Him, movies that mock him, we even use His name as a swear word.

What do you think your primary need is in such a world?

Our greatest need is forgiveness. Warren Wiersbe said, “Forgiveness is the greatest miracle that Jesus ever performs. It meets the greatest need; it costs the greatest price; and it brings the greatest blessing and the most lasting results.”

I once sat in a doctor's waiting room and heard a patient arguing with the doctor. The longer it went on, the angrier the doctor became. I heard her saying, “How do you expect me to help you if you won't listen to me?” If you and I will not agree with God over what our deepest needs are, we are just like that patient. Our Designer knows our needs better than we. We ought to pay attention to what God says we need most.

Today we see and hear people who want to tell God, the doctor, what He really needs to do. So we end up with what A.W. Tozer called a utilitarian Christ. Christ is a means to my own ends. He is there to fix my marriage, and relieve my financial problems, and remove my depression, and give me success in business, and help me to win at sports, and win a Grammy, and an Oscar, and the lottery and whatever else. The gospel becomes how you can add Jesus to your lifestyle and make it even better.

I can't tell you how many conversations I have had with angry people who are very disappointed that God will not come and do something practical for them, by which they mean meet their physical needs. That paralytic could certainly have made that complaint.

But that is in imaginary Christ. He does not exist to meet our shopping list of needs according to our set of priorities. And if we come to Him thinking He does, it is a recipe for disappointment, frustration, even anger.

Our deepest need is to be relieved of the guilt of being at war with God. The things we think are the biggest problems are actually symptoms of the bigger problem – sin.

We are not the only ones who did not anticipate Jesus' answer. There were some grumblers in the room, and Jesus set about teaching them too. Here is the third act in this scene.

III. A Sign That Gave Proof

⁶ And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, ⁷ "Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" ⁸ But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, "Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? ⁹ "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'? ¹⁰ "But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins" -- He said to the paralytic, ¹¹ "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." ¹² Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"

Sitting in the room were some scribes. This is the first encounter that Mark records between Jesus

and the religious leaders. They hear Jesus' words, furrow their brows, look sideways at each other, and accuse Jesus: Blasphemy! He has claimed to do what only God can do!

Now, these men were not wrong in one sense. Because only God can forgive sin. You cannot release another from debt unless the debt is owed to you. At the very least, this was a claim to exercise God's prerogatives. At most, it was a claim to be God in the flesh.

Jesus knew what they were thinking. So He says to them, Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? How did He know what they were thinking in their hearts? He not only had omniscience, but He was shrewd enough to know what the scribes would have thought of such a statement.

So Jesus proposes a test question. Which is easier - to say to the paralytic, your sins have been forgiven, or rise, take up your bed and walk? In other words, you're thinking that I'm just sprouting empty words that I have no authority to say. You think I'm speaking fictions – easy to say, but of no substance. So which is easier to say?

Which *is* easier to say? On one level, neither is harder. On another level, it *appears* that saying your sins are forgiven is easier, because you cannot verify it. If you say to a paralysed man, I heal you, stand up and walk, everyone can see if you had the authority to do so.

So now Jesus, having been challenged, draws his sword. He steps into the ring. He steps up to the plate. You think it's easier to say, your sins are forgiven, and harder to say, rise up and walk. Okay, in that case, if I heal him, and do the harder, then it must be true that I also did the easier and forgave Him. If my words have authority to heal His paralysis, then My words have the same power to forgive sin.

So Jesus says to them, “But in order that **you** may know that the Son of Man has authority on the earth to forgive sins” – he says to the paralytic – “I say to you, rise up, take up your bed, and go into your house.”

What was the result? And immediately he rose up, and took up his bed, and went out before them all. The people are amazed, they glorify God, and they remark that they have never seen anything like this before.

But what does it mean? It means that the scribes have been caught in their own trap. If He is not God, and claiming to forgive, then He is indeed blaspheming. But who can have the power to heal the paralysed but God Himself. They've witnessed it before their very eyes. And of course – the Pharisees now have no way out. He has given them visible proof of what He did invisibly. He has done something outwardly to prove that He did something inwardly. He has shown that He is the Son of Man – the Messiah, the God-Man. And if He is God – then He can forgive sins – but then we need to submit to Him, not Him to us.

They didn't like it then, and people don't like it today. They love the idea of Jesus the Healer; Jesus the Model Example; Jesus the Bread-Maker; Jesus the Wise Speaker; Jesus the Peacemaker. All these things allow us to use Jesus for our own ends. Jesus becomes our personal genie, and we rub the lamp by just saying His name. But when Jesus tells us that He is our Creator; that He is the first and the Last, the uncreated Word that has beheld the Father without beginning; that He is the rightful heir to the universe; that we must submit to Him; that we need to turn away from rebelling against God; that we must apply to Him for forgiveness. Then we respond like the crowd in John 6,

"This is a difficult saying, who can accept it?"

I rejoice that my parents loved me enough to give me what I needed, even when it was not what I wanted. I rejoice that we have a God who loves us enough to give us what we need the most. What we need the most is forgiveness, mercy from God, clemency, amnesty, a second chance. In Jesus, we have that. Jesus was not making a big claim with no substance. He was, and is, the mediator between man and God the Father. By becoming one of us, He could die for all of us. By being sinless, He could bear and take our sins. By being righteous, He could grant us His righteousness.

Why have you come to Jesus? Why did you come to Jesus? Maybe you came for one reason, and found out that that wasn't really what you needed. Maybe you did come for a bit of conscience relief. Maybe you came for a kind of good luck. Maybe you came for some type of protection or blessing over your business. Maybe you came so your children would have a 'moral foundation'.

Not all of those things are bad. But once you've arrived, Jesus' Word to you is: your greatest need is forgiveness and fellowship. I will not fix your marriage, fix your finances, fix your emotions, fix your family, fix your health, until we deal with this life and death issue – forgiveness of sins.