

What is Our Greatest Need? Mark 2:1-17

And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. ² And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them. ³ And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. ⁴ And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. ⁵ And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." ⁶ Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, ⁷ "Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" ⁸ And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you question these things in your hearts? ⁹ Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk?' ¹⁰ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic— ¹¹ "I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home." ¹² And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"

¹³ He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them. ¹⁴ And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him.

¹⁵ And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. ¹⁶ And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" ¹⁷ And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

- Mark 2:1-17, ESV

Today's reading has one of the most dramatic and famous stories in the Gospels: Four men carry their paralyzed friend to see Jesus. When they can't get into the house where Jesus is, they go up on the roof and literally tear the roof off the house in order to get to Jesus. They then lower their friend carefully down in front of Jesus.

What happens next probably surprises the man and his four friends as much as it shocks and offends the scribes sitting around Jesus: Jesus says to the man, "Son, your sins are forgiven." He doesn't say, "Rise up and walk," as we would have expected. Why not?

Well, as we read on, we see that Jesus does end up healing the man of his physical paralysis, but He does so, "that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." (v. 10) It seems clear that Jesus dealt with the man's greatest need first in extending forgiveness to him. He was then more concerned that we know that He has authority to forgive than that He has authority to heal. The healing is the greater visible sign, but it points to a greater hidden power, the power to forgive.

We miss out on the wonder of the Gospel when we fail to realize or remember that our greatest need is not financial or medical, not relational or psychological. Our greatest need is for forgiveness, for our sin is what keeps us from God and what condemns us forever. All other problems we face are temporary, but our sin is an eternal problem because it brings eternal consequences.

This greatest need is why Jesus would go to Matthew the tax-collector's house and why He would say, "*Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.*" (v. 17) For us to benefit at all from the coming of Jesus, we must first understand the nature of our sickness. We are sinners. We are condemned before a Holy God. Thankfully, the Great Physician has come to heal our deepest sickness and to make us whole forever!