

The Best Help You Can Give

Mark 2:1-12

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Have you ever been in a place that was so crowded you could barely move? Where was that for you? For me it was every time I rode the Metro (subway) in Mexico City when we lived there for three years. I never thought I was claustrophobic but I think that was where my phobia first got its start.

As we continue in our series through the gospel penned by Mark and inspired by God, we see again that Jesus is drawing huge crowds. Here's where we're headed today. We're going to walk through an incredible encounter that takes place in Mark 2:1-12. I'll read the passage, adding some interpretative insight and application as we go along. When we're finished with the text we'll focus on some takeaways and then we'll celebrate communion. To help with the flow of thought, I've adapted an outline from John Stevenson for the first part of the sermon.

1. Setting. Let's begin in Mark 2:1-2: "***And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, [Jesus has been on a preaching mission in Galilee for many weeks, and now comes back to his home base] it was reported that he was at home [this is likely Peter and Andrew's house, where Peter's mother-in-law had been healed]. And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door.*** [Jesus was like a magnet to the crowds. There were so many people gathered that there was no way anyone else could get close. The use of the double negative intensifies the situation – it was packed inside and it was a traffic jam outside].

And he was preaching the word to them." [This is the word for conversation, not "preaching" per se. It speaks of "lovely sounds." This reminds me of the lyrics from "In the Garden" – "*He speaks and the sound of his voice is so sweet, the birds hush their singing.*" It's important for us to not just preach at people but to also be able to dialog and discuss, using pleasing words].

2. Sickness. Let's continue in verses 3-4: "***And they came, bringing [carrying] to him a paralytic [this word describes someone who has lost control of his body either through a stroke, a disease, or from birth] carried by four men [each holding a corner of the mat he was on]. And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, [that had to have been disappointing] they removed [uncovered,***

literally “unroofed the roof”) **the roof above him** [houses had flat roofs that served like a patio with an outside stairway], **and when they had made an opening**, [roofs were made out of a combination of thatch, mortar, tar, sand, branches, and mud].

[Can you imagine if a hole appeared in the ceiling right now? We’d all look up and the dust and the debris would be falling on us. The hole would have been made big enough to let the man down through it] **they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay**. [The man would have been laid at Jesus’ feet. There was no doubt a hush in the house. Imagine if you looked up and saw a man being lowered through the roof right now! That would be distraction, wouldn’t it? Most of us lose focus when someone comes in late or leaves to use the restroom.]

3. Startling Statement. In verse 5 we read: “**And when Jesus saw their faith** [Jesus was not bothered by the interruption at all. This is the first appearance of “faith” in Mark’s gospel. Notice that Jesus saw “**their** faith.” We’ll come back to this in a few minutes], **he said to the paralytic, ‘Son**, [this was a term of deep affection similar to saying, “*My child.*” Matthew 9:2 includes this phrase, “**Take heart, my son...**”] **your sins are forgiven.**” [To forgive sins means to send them away; to cancel a debt. This is quite startling because it was assumed that this man’s main need was to be healed of his paralysis. But actually that was his felt need; his foremost need was to be forgiven for his sins. Forgiveness of sin is at the heart of Christianity and is its greatest miracle because it lasts forever].

4. Skepticism of the Scribes. The main job of the scribes was to copy the Scriptures and to be guardians of God’s Word. That’s probably why they were in the house in the first place because they were checking to make sure that what Jesus was saying lined up with Scripture. Look at verses 6-7: “**Now some of the scribes were sitting there** [It’s interesting that in this SRO crowd (“Standing Room Only”), the scribes are seated, as if in judgment. This shows us that there are followers and foes in the room], **questioning in their hearts** [note that they didn’t say any of this out loud], **‘Why does this man speak like that?** [BTW, each episode of controversy in this chapter is provoked by a question about the behavior of Jesus or the disciples] **He is blaspheming!** [This charge is repeated in Mark 14:61-64 as rationale for Jesus eventually being put to death] **Who can forgive sins but God alone?”**

Actually, the scribes were technically correct. Only God can forgive sins. We see this in Isaiah 43:25: “**I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own**

sake, and I will not remember your sins.” Daniel 9:9 says, “To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him.”

Tim Keller offers a helpful illustration. Suppose Tom, Dick and Harry are hanging out when Tom stands up and punches Dick in the mouth. Harry then turns to Tom and says, *“I forgive you for punching Dick in the mouth. All is good.”* What do you think Dick would say? *“Harry, you can’t forgive Tom. Only I can forgive him. He didn’t wrong you; he wronged me.”* Listen. You can only forgive a sin if it’s against *you*. When Jesus tells the paralytic that his sins are forgiven, in essence He is saying, *“Your sins have been against me.”* The scribes *are* right – only God can forgive sins so if Jesus is claiming to be able to do this, then He’s claiming to be God.

5. A Scolding from Jesus. I love what happens next. Jesus not only forgives sins; He reads minds, which is something else only God can do in verse 8: ***“And immediately*** [Mark loves this word because it shows that there was no delay between them thinking their thoughts and Jesus knowing their thoughts. John 2:25 says, ***“He himself knew what was in a man.”***] ***Jesus, perceiving*** [He was not only *immediately* aware of their thoughts, but *clearly* and *fully* aware] ***in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, ‘Why do you question these things in your hearts?’”*** [This had to be very unsettling to the scribes. Jesus loved to answer questions with counter questions like in Mark 11:30: ***“Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me.”***

In verse 9 He asks a question that no doubt confounded them: ***“Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’”?*** At first glance it’s easier to say that someone’s sins are forgiven because there’s no way to verify it. Notice the word ***“say.”*** It’s easy to *say* that sins are forgiven and to *say* someone can walk. But actually, both are difficult and impossible for man to do. Both are possible only with God.

Look at verse 10-11: ***“But*** [a word of contrast] ***that you*** [the scribes] ***may know*** [Jesus wants them to understand who He is] ***that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins***—***he said to the paralytic— “I say to you, rise*** [get up now], ***pick up your bed*** [instead of lying on his stretcher; he was now to lift it up], ***and go home*** [this shows us again that our first priority is to live our faith at home and to share with our family what God has done in our lives].” By doing the visible, Jesus is proving that He can do the invisible. He can heal externally and internally. He healed the physical to show that He can heal the spiritual. This would prove that the sins of the paralytic were pardoned.

6. A Sensational Cure. Picture the scene. The scribes have not said anything and no one but Jesus has spoken. This encounter ends powerfully in verse 12: ***“And he rose [the man did what he was commanded to do] and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all [I picture him stepping over the seated scribes and weaving his way through the crowd. I’m sure four sets of eyes were peering down through the hole in the roof in astonishment as they fist pumped and started cheering loudly], so that they were all amazed [this means “to be beside oneself; to be blown away”] and glorified God [to magnify and recognize that it was God who did this], saying, “We never saw anything like this!” [They are astonished because his sins are forgiven and his feet are now strong]***

Isaiah 35:6 says that one of the marks of the coming kingdom will be this: ***“Then shall the lame leap like a deer.”*** This also makes me think of what happened in Acts 3:8 when a paralyzed man was healed: ***“And leaping up he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.”***

Takeaways

I want to go back and pick up on a phrase found in verse 5: ***“And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’*** What do you notice? Whose faith did Jesus see? Right, it was the faith of the four friends. Sometimes Jesus acts in a person’s life because of another person’s faith. *The best help you can give is to bring hurting people to Jesus.* Many people will not come to Jesus unless someone brings them.

We’re not told the names of these four guys but Ray Stedman offers the following:

- Faithful Frank said, *“I believe we can get this man to Jesus.”*
- Hopeful Harry said, *“I believe there is hope for this man.”*
- Loving Larry said, *“I really love this guy. I hate his sin but I love him.”*
- Determined Dan said, *“Let’s roll.”*

The paralytic was prevented from coming to Jesus because he couldn’t get there on his own. If we hope to help those who are hindered from coming to Jesus, it would do us well to model our behavior after these four guys. Faith must be made visible according to James 2:17-18: ***“So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is***

dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.’

As I meditated on the phrase, “***And when Jesus saw their faith,***” I wrote down seven traits that these four guys demonstrated. As we go over them, ask yourself this question, “*Do I exhibit these qualities toward someone who is in need of coming to Jesus? Do I have this kind of visible faith that can help bring a lost person to the feet of Jesus?*”

1. Caring. We’re not told how they knew the paralytic but obviously they cared about his condition. This reminds me of what we learned last week about how to love the lepers in our lives. Our mission is to extend mercy to those in misery. We walked through a long list of people that many of us struggle to love. I want to add one more group I inadvertently left off. We’re called to reach out in love toward homosexuals. Let me be clear. The Bible teaches that the practice of homosexuality is a sin and that marriage is a covenant relationship between one man and one woman for life. But that doesn’t mean we can treat them as lepers. We’re called to care for all kinds of people.

Ask God to slow you down so that you see the needs of those around you. And then ask God to help you see people like he does. If you realize that you struggle with caring for those who live differently than you do, pray this simple one-sentence prayer, “God, break my heart with the things that break yours.”

2. Courageous. It took tremendous courage for these guys to step out and bring their friend to Jesus because they had no guarantee that he would be healed. They could have felt self-conscious but they didn’t. Others might have thought they were crazy. Faith often involves risk, doesn’t?

*Have you folded in your faith recently? Have you been bailing when God is calling you to be bold? Determine to speak up for the Savior when it’s difficult on your campus or at your workplace. Memorize these words given to Joshua in Joshua 1:9: “**Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.**”*

3. Creative. Once they got to the house, they saw that it was way too crowded to get their friend inside. They decided to think outside the box and ended up blowing the roof off (literally). When you reach out to bring someone to Jesus,

you will encounter many obstacles. It will not be easy so you'll need to get creative.

Here are some ideas that may generate some more creative ideas: Invite someone to a service or an outreach event, like the Women's Christmas Party next month. Give them a book like "Anchor for the Soul" or "How Good is Good Enough?" Open your home for a cookie exchange in December. Reach out on social media. Rake your neighbor's leaves. Offer to pray for someone. If you've tried one way and it hasn't worked, don't be discouraged. Instead, get creative.

4. Committed. They stayed with the man, even when there were roadblocks. They didn't drop him and leave him to fend for himself. It was no doubt difficult to transport him through the hilly and rocky area around Capernaum. When they saw the crowds they could have turned around but instead found some stairs and took the man to the roof. And then they broke through in order to get him inside and then they had to keep him balanced while they lowered him to Jesus.

Have you given up on anyone? Why don't you recommit to do whatever it takes to bring him or her to Jesus and then determine to hang in there for the long haul?

5. Conviction. These guys had faith that Jesus could do something for their friend if they could just get him close enough. In their minds, nothing was too difficult for the Lord to do and if they didn't bring their buddy to Jesus he would have no hope. They were moved to action by deep conviction.

Are you convinced that those without Christ are lost in their sins? Do you doubt that Christ can save that person you know who seems so hard and bitter? Have you ever said, "He'll never get saved? She's too far gone for God to rescue?" Ask God to grow your faith.

6. Cooperation. There was no way one guy could carry the paralytic by himself. Two wouldn't work either. Three would be better. But four was perfect because they could each take a corner. I guess we could say, "*Four of a kind beats a full house.*" They had to be going in the same direction and traveling at the same speed and they no doubt had to coordinate efforts to get him through the roof without dropping him to the ground. This reminds me of the mission statement for the Quad Cities Missing Person Network – "*We are people helping people find people.*" Together is always better.

We don't need to form a committee to cooperate with others in bringing people to Jesus. I like what J. Vernon McGee once said, "*Committees are made up of those who take down minutes and waste hours.*" He added, "*A committee is made up of a group of people who individually can do nothing, but together they can decide that nothing can be done.*"

Is there someone you can partner with to reach someone else who is far from God? Could you co-host an event? Is there someone you can take with you to visit a shut-in? Could you gather a team of Christ-followers to rake a neighbor's lawn? One way to partner with others is to connect people to another ministry here at EBC like Celebrate Recovery of Grief Share for the holidays.

7. Costly. It will almost always cost you something to bring someone to the Savior. *If it were easy everyone would be doing it.* It might cost you financially. It might cost you your reputation. It will certainly cost you time and energy and maybe missing your favorite TV show. It wasn't easy to carry this guy to Jesus. Plus, they may have incurred a cost for the roof repair.

Are you willing to pay the price to bring someone to Jesus? What are you willing to give up to do so? There's no way we will be able to raise \$45,000 for the mobile ultrasound van for Pregnancy Resources without it costing us something. We will each have to sacrifice something to make it happen. Operation Christmas Child costs about \$25-\$35 to fill up a box. By the way, I heard last weekend that a newly married couple is filling 100 boxes! I know of another young family that has already done a dozen!

Prayer Post-it Notes

The first place to start when helping people come to Jesus is to begin praying for them by name. As a way to put this into practice, I want you to think of three people who don't yet know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Think of their names. Picture their faces. See their needs.

Once you have three people in mind, I want you to pull out a pad of post-it notes that we've placed in the racks or chairs in front of you. When you find a pad could you take one off and then make sure the people around you have one as well?

Let me tell you what we're going to do. I'd like you to write those three names on this post-it note. It might be best to just use first names or even someone's initials or a code name if you don't want anyone to know you're writing their name down.

Take some time right now to do this.

Invitation

We are all spiritual paralytics. Sin has put us flat on our backs and we can't get up unless the Savior does His work of forgiving. Do you remember what happened to Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel 4:4? He was Jonathan's son and King Saul's grandson. He became crippled when he fell out of the arms of his nurse as she was fleeing. In a similar way we are paralyzed because of a fall as well. When Adam and Eve fell, we fell with them. Our only hope of healing is if Jesus heals us. How only hope of forgiveness is if Jesus forgives us. Romans 5:6: "***For while we were still weak [paralyzed], at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.***"

Maybe you have a felt need today. Struggling in a relationship? Health issue? Work problem? Depressed? Stressed? Addiction? Messed up? Go to Jesus with that need because He cares about you but also know that your foremost need is divine forgiveness. To only ask for help with our physical or emotional needs simply means that we haven't gone deep enough. God may not fix your presenting problem but He will solve your sin issue if you ask Him to do so.

Communion – Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-28

As we prepare for communion today, could you hold your post-it note in your hand and pray for the people you wrote down? And ask God to embed these seven qualities into your life. *The best help you can give is to bring hurting people to Jesus.*

Post Your Post-it Notes

As we conclude today we're going to leave the lights down low and in a spirit of reverence I'm going to ask you to not talk to anyone as you leave. We'd like you to take your post-it note and put it up on one of the black boards that are displayed in the lobby. I'll go first and then you can follow me whenever you're ready.