

Divine Assertion

Mark 2:1-12

Bryn MacPhail / Jan. 8, 2012

After calling His first disciples, Mark recounts a number of incidents in the latter portion of chapter 1 where Jesus healed those who were sick.

As a result of these many healings, news spread quickly about Jesus, and many became interested in what He had to say.

We pause this morning at the beginning of chapter 2 because this particular incident of healing is recounted with much greater detail than the previous ones.

Mark tells us that Jesus had come home to Capernaum and was preaching to, quite literally, a packed house (2:1,2).

Mark explains that, **“there was no room left, not even outside the door”**.

We need to get a mental picture of how full this house would have been. Picturing a large dinner party crowd doesn't go far enough.

This house was so full that the normal entrances to the house had become impassible.

I don't know if many of you have ever had the experience of riding on a busy subway car, but this is what I am picturing.

When I was in seminary at the University of Toronto, I often took the subway in to school on weekday mornings.

There were some days when I would be standing on the subway platform, the train would arrive, the doors would open, but I couldn't get in. The train was so packed full of people that there was no way I could get on.

This probably isn't a bad comparison to what Mark is describing.

With the normal entrances blocked off by crowds of people, the four men carrying a paralytic would need to innovate in order to get inside.

We're told that they climbed onto the roof and "**made an opening**" and "**after digging through (the roof), (they) lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on**" (2:4).

Some Bible commentators, I must warn you, take great pains to explain how the thatch and tile roofs of 1st Century Palestine were much easier to disassemble and repair than the roofs that adorn our houses today.

When they do that, however, they entirely miss an important point: a hole in the roof is hardly the normal way to enter someone's house!

Mark says the four men "**made an opening**". That signals to me that the opening didn't already exist. We're told that they literally had to "**dig**" their way through the roof.

Can you imagine being in the middle of worship service and having someone lowered down through the ceiling?

Everything would stop.

In our context, if someone even enters through the side door during a sermon, we notice, don't we?

We try not to stare because we don't want to embarrass the person coming in, but we notice—we're temporally distracted.

In Jesus' context, they would have to stop. Clouds of dust and bits of straw would be falling on the guests below.

And yet, Jesus was not bothered by this interruption, but rather, He was impressed by it.

Jesus saw "**faith**" in the efforts of these men, and responds by saying to the paralytic, "**My son, your sins are forgiven**" (2:5).

I can't help but wonder what was going through the mind of the paralytic when he heard those words.

We can only guess, but I wonder if he was thinking, "Um, thanks for that, but I actually am here for something else. You see, I can't walk and I heard you could help me with that."

Undoubtedly, Jesus knew what the man wanted from Him, but it's as if Jesus begins with what the man really needs.

Reading between the lines, it's as if Jesus is saying, "I know that you have some physical needs, and I'm going to look after that.

But you need to know that your physical disability isn't your biggest problem. Your bigger problem is your sin, and I want you to know that I can fix that problem for you. I want to give you what you need most: forgiveness."

Jesus' proclamation angered the teachers of the law who were gathered there.

Accusations of blasphemy were on their mind, "**Who can forgive sins but God alone?**" (2:6,7).

The teachers of the law were technically correct with their assessment.

Pastor Tim Keller provides clarity on this point with the following example:

Suppose Tom, Dick, and Harry are talking.

Tom punches Dick in the mouth and there is blood everywhere.

Then Harry goes up to Tom and says, "Tom, I forgive you for punching Dick in the mouth. All is well."

What is Dick going to say about this?

“Harry, you can’t forgive him. Only I can forgive him. Tom didn’t wrong you; he wronged me.”

Instinctively, we know this. You can only forgive a sin if it’s against *you*.

So when Jesus says to the paralytic, “**your sins are forgiven**”, another statement is implied. Jesus is essentially saying, “Your sins have been against Me.”

The teachers of the law were correct. Only God can say that.

The scribes were angry because Jesus was claiming to be more than a miracle worker. Jesus was making a *divine assertion*.

What I love about this exchange is that Jesus doesn’t simply engage in a theological debate with the scribes.

I love that Jesus backs up His claims to authority with profound and miraculous displays of mercy.

Jesus asks, “**Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven’, or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk?’**” (2:9).

While the scribes ponder the question, Jesus continues, **“in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...”** He said to the paralytic, **“Get up, take your mat, and go home”** (2:11).

We’re told that the paralytic then got up, took his mat, and walked out in full view of them all (2:12).

I think it is important for us to pause and to consider what motivated Jesus to heal this paralytic. I think there are a few different elements in play here.

First we note that *Jesus healed the paralytic’s physical ailment to demonstrate His authority to heal the man’s spiritual ailment.*

There is a huge sense in which Jesus was substantiating His earlier claim to forgive sins. And, no doubt, a miracle of this magnitude gives credibility to Jesus’ message. His actions lend strong support to His words.

The second element in this healing is *the faith of the paralytic and the men carrying him.*

Mark doesn't identify a single individual, but simply records that "**When Jesus saw *their* faith**" He pronounced forgiveness for the paralytic.

And thirdly, by healing the paralytic *Jesus demonstrates genuine concern for our physical needs.*

It's already been suggested that the paralytic's greatest need related to his spiritual disability and not his physical disability.

Clearly, Jesus' priority for this man was his spiritual state, but it's important to note that the man's spiritual needs do not conflict with his physical needs.

Jesus doesn't say to the man, "Stop concerning yourself with walking—that's really not that important. The only thing that matters is that you gain forgiveness for your sins."

Jesus doesn't say that. Jesus doesn't disregard the man's need and desire to walk. It is secondary, yes, but it is still important to Jesus.

I want us to think this principle through in terms of how it applies to our own life.

The paralytic presented himself to Jesus wanting to be able to walk.

What have you been presenting to Jesus? Are you struggling in a relationship? Are you struggling in your marriage? Are you struggling in a relationship with a friend or colleague?

Or, is it a physical illness that you have been presenting to Jesus about? Is it a situation at work that you have been asking Jesus for help with?

Is someone you care about in distress?

Like the paralytic, have you been presenting your needs to Jesus?

If you need any further motivation, or incentive to do this, what I can say to you with full confidence is this: *Jesus cares immensely about your situation.* Jesus cares about your needs.

Both, the Scriptures and our personal experience tell us that God does not always extract us from our problems and adversity.

But the Bible does assure us of God's concern, and His provision of mercy and strength to endure.

Friends, present your needs to God—and like the paralytic, and his companions, present your needs with faith that you have come before One who is able to supply sufficient remedy.

The last application for you and for me relates to the thing that the paralytic and his companions did not seek. They did not come to Jesus for forgiveness. They did not come to Him for spiritually healing.

We suspect this is because they didn't precisely know whom they were dealing with. They didn't realize that this Galilean healer was actually God in the flesh.

Jesus sincerely cared about the man's physical needs, but He was more interested in his spiritual needs.

I need this reminder.

I need this reminder as I consider all of the things I pray for in a given week. I'm praying about personal relationships. I'm praying for people in distress. I'm praying about finances. I'm praying about matters related to this church.

Maybe you are praying similarly.

Keep praying about these things. These things matter to Jesus.

But what matters even more to Jesus is the current condition of our relationship to God.

The paralytic and his friends didn't know precisely whom they were dealing with. But I think most of us do.

Jesus wants to help us. And the challenge isn't that we are asking for too much. The challenge is that we are asking for too little.

To ask only for help with our physical/emotional needs means we haven't gone deep enough.

Jesus has the power and the authority to make us entirely well.
This was His divine assertion 2,000 years ago.

His power and authority remains.
His desire to heal you remains.

Do not delay.

Present yourself to Jesus.