

The God Who Meets Your Greatest Need

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, everyone.

It is lovely. It's lovely to be back with you again. I love every time I come back. There's just, there's more of you. Which is very, very encouraging.

Very encouraging indeed. This morning, we're going to be in Mark's Gospel, Mark's Gospel chapter 2. I'm going to look at the first 12 verses.

And the title this morning is this, is the God who meets our greatest needs. And it's certainly my hope and prayer this morning that what we've just sung is actually, that's the objective this morning.

It's that we would turn our eyes off our needs and turn our eyes to the God who actually can meet our needs and see him and see Jesus.

[1 : 1 1] So let's read Mark chapter 2, these first 12 verses. So Mark writes, And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home.

And many were gathered together, so there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them. And they came bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men.

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.

And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, My son, your sins are forgiven. Now some of the scribes were sitting there questioning in their hearts, Why does this man speak like this?

He's blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God alone? 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?

[2 : 3 0] Which is easier to say to the paralytic? Your sins are forgiven? Or to say, Rise, take up your bed, and walk. But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.

He said to the paralytic, I say to you, Rise, pick up your bed, and go home. And he arose 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.

Let me pray for us. Father, as we turn to your word this morning, Lord, would it bring comfort where comfort is needed?

Would it bring hope and reassurance where that is needed? But Father, mostly would it bring life this morning? Would it bring life to our souls?

Would we see Jesus clearly? Would we see him as our Lord, as our Savior, as our Redeemer?

[3 : 46] Father, we ask that you would bless our time and bless your word. In Jesus' name. Amen. I don't know if you've ever asked yourself the question or thought about what is your greatest need.

Or what is the greatest need facing individuals? Or what is the greatest need facing humanity? This morning we've heard of great need here in our friend's church in America with those who are sick.

The need around us seems massive, but how do we decide what is our greatest need? Now we could do a very modern thing and we could ask artificial intelligence for, you know, dear chat GTP, what is my greatest need?

And the answer it gave were actually quite intelligent, which is not always what you get from artificial intelligence. But it listed the usual things, so my greatest need might be economic insecurity or it could be healthcare healthcare issues, it could be social injustice, discrimination.

These are all very legitimate things. I asked my advanced higher geography class, said, what do you think the world's greatest need is?

[5 : 19] Because we've been thinking about needs and how do we meet needs around the world and almost unanimously they said, oh, we need to sort out climate change. That's our greatest need.

And I was trying to show to them that actually, and to us this morning, that what we think of our greatest need is very, very subjective. So I showed them a photograph of a young woman who lives in Chad and I said, do you think her greatest, do you think she thinks her greatest need is climate change?

And they were like, well, probably not. No, her greatest need was, she needs drinking water. She wants to know whether her child will still be alive tomorrow morning. She wants to know where her next meal is coming from.

What we assume to be our greatest need may not necessarily be the greatest need of everyone else in the world. But in our passage, we're going to see what is truly our greatest need.

And in the passage, what we see is people coming to Jesus. Throughout the early part of Mark's gospel, people have come to Jesus with their needs.

[6 : 36] And Jesus is really clear. Jesus cares about their needs, but he's going to show them that what they think is their greatest need is not their greatest need.

Not in terms of what he assesses their greatest need to be. So Jesus has arrived back in Capernaum. He's arrived back at home, possibly the home of Simon and Andrew.

And the crowd, the crowd have heard that Jesus is back. And they're like bees to pollen. Okay, they're swarming in, full of expectation.

Jesus is back. What miracle is he going to do today? Who will he heal? Whose need is he going to meet? And in Mark's gospel, the crowd are, the crowd is an interesting sort of literary device that Mark uses.

And the other gospel writers do this as well. You know, the crowd tells us that, yes, Jesus was very popular. They are the audience for much of his teaching. He has great compassion on the crowd.

[7 : 47] Yet, the crowd are not always considered to be positive. Here we see in our passage today, the crowd are, in fact, in the way.

The popularity of the crowd throughout the gospels is not a measure of the success of Jesus' ministry. enthusiasm for Jesus and even proximity to Jesus is not a guarantee of faith in him.

But the crowd are there. And we read something very interesting right at the end of verse 2. Because it doesn't say that Jesus was doing miracles.

It doesn't say he was healing the sick. Casting out demons. Look at what it says. End of verse 2. And he was preaching the word to them.

What is it? What is it that attracts people? What is it attracts people to church? And what is it that actually holds people in church?

[9 : 06] Kyle mentioned some of this earlier this morning. There's lots of things that might attract people to come to church. Bellship. Nice building.

Good worship. A friendly greeting. But what holds? What holds us?

What means, what is it that makes us come back over and over and over again? What makes us come when we don't really feel like coming? What holds a diverse group of people that I'm looking at right now?

Or if I'm in Calderwood, I look at it, a diverse group of people. What is it that holds a group so diverse together? It's not your diversity. That will not hold you together.

What holds us is the very same thing that is holding the crowd here. What holds us is the word of God. Jesus says, Jesus is preaching the word to them.

[10 : 11] And the people are captivated by this. they're held. Can you imagine? It would have been awesome to be there and see Jesus feeding the 5,000 and to see Jesus casting out demons and doing all the other stuff that he did.

But can you imagine what it would have been like to hear Jesus preach? There's never been a preacher like Jesus. Even the best preachers you can think of, children, compared to Jesus.

To hear Jesus speak. And that is what holds the crowd and that is what I hope is holding us. It's what holds us together sometimes in ourselves.

The word of God where we see Jesus, where we see the Son of God in that word laid out before us. So in our passage we have this very interesting and somewhat amusing scene occurs.

Mark paints it for us inside the house. The disciples are there. They're listening to the rabbi. I always say this, the disciples always have a permanently confused look on their face.

[11 : 27] They're always going, we're not quite sure what this guy means. It's a permanent state of confusion. There's seated in the place of honor, we've got the scribes, some of the religious leaders of the day, those who knew the scriptures really well, they made copies of the scripture, they're also listening.

And we can imagine as well that perhaps family and friends of the disciples, perhaps Peter's mother-in-law, Peter's wife, they're all there. They're in the room. The house is rammed, it's over spilling into the outside, no one else is getting in.

And every ear is strained to hear what Jesus is saying. And then at the back of the crowd, you have to imagine, way at the back of the crowd, way over here, there's a commotion.

Because there's four men, and they've got their friend, who's paralytic, on a stretcher of some sort, and they're like, we just want to get to Jesus.

They're like, excuse us, can we get through? And it's like, no, no, it's like, you and everybody else wants to get to Jesus. You're not getting through. It's rammed, okay? There's no way through.

[12 : 42] And what will they do? Will they turn to their friend and say, look, sorry pal, we're, game's a bogey, we're going to have to go home. Okay, we can't get through the crowd.

No. One of them spots on the outside of the building, a set of steps, stairs, get up onto the roof. So they haul their friend up onto the roof, and in those days, the architecture, they had flat roofs.

Now, we have flat roofs in Lanarkshire, and we know that's a bad idea. Okay? I don't know who the architects were that came up with that. Not good. Middle East, not a problem.

So the flat roofs, and what did they proceed to do? They'd proceed to dig a hole through the roof. The roof was probably about two foot thick. And they start to dig. Meanwhile, back in the house, Jesus is preaching, and the crowds, or those in the room, they're hanging on every word that he says, and suddenly, a lump of ceiling falls and hits the ground, followed by another, and then another, and suddenly, there's a hole in the roof.

Everyone looks up, and there's four grubby faces looking down as they continue to enlarge the hole, and soon the hole is going to be big enough, and the four men lower their friend down to the feet of Jesus.

[14 : 13] And Jesus sees their faith, and he knows that they believe he will heal their friend. They believe Jesus is able to heal. And everyone else in the room is probably thinking, here we go.

this is what we came to see, one miraculous healing coming up. But look at verse 5, because what Jesus says next is both unexpected and totally shocking.

He says, my son, your sins are forgiven. those were not the words that those four friends were expecting.

They were probably not the words they even wanted to hear. I wonder, were they initially disappointed? Did they think, oh, we didn't dig away through the roof for this?

You see, the four friends, despite their faith, they had an incomplete view of both Jesus and their friend.

[15 : 28] They could only see their friend's physical need. And they could only see that Jesus had the power to meet that physical need. They could not see that their friend had a greater need, nor that Jesus was way greater than simply a healer.

And it's not that Jesus doesn't care about the man's physical need. We're going to see how much he cares. But it's more that Jesus has seen his greatest need.

Jesus knows that his sin is his greatest problem. Jesus knows that his physical problem, yes, could lead to years of suffering. But he also knows that his sin problem will lead to an eternity of suffering.

sin. And I wonder sometimes if there's a danger for us, a danger for the church, that we can get our priorities a little bit wrong.

Yes, there are social problems and needs that the church is called to respond to. There's issues of poverty and injustice. We absolutely need to care for the sick.

[16 : 42] But we need to remember that these are symptoms of a greater problem. In Calderwood, we have a book group and they're currently working through a book about the life of Anne Judson.

Anne Judson was a missionary along with her husband was a missionary to Burma. Amazing woman. And certainly in Burma, while she was there, there was unbelievable poverty.

There was injustice, there was dodgy politicians and leaders. But Anne Judson says herself, those were not the things that she gave her life for.

She looked past the social and physical problems to see the real problem. And she says in her writings, the real problem was that there were thousands and thousands of people going to hell because of their sin.

And that's what motivated her to spend most of her life in Burma. It cost her her life and the lives of some of her children.

[17 : 57] Because sin is our greatest problem. It puts us at enmity with God. It separates us from God. It means that we are rightly under the judgment and the wrath of God.

And despite everything that we have in the West, despite all our advancements, we cannot deal with this ourselves.

No amount of self-help or willpower, therapy, counseling, psychology, or psychiatry is going to be able to fix this.

no amount of education, social engineering, rehab, restorative justice can fix the problem. Because you see, all sin is an offense to God.

And when we sin, God is always the offended party. Now, if I was to offend Cal this morning, the only person who could forgive me would be Cal.

[19 : 11] But if Alan said, I forgive you, well, that would just be a bit weird. Because Alan's not the offended party. Cal's the offended party.

And what we see here in this passage, when Jesus says, son, your sins are forgiven, he's saying, I'm the offended party, and I forgive you.

He's saying, I am God, and I, only I, have the right to forgive you. And it's this interpretation of what he says, which is so shocking, and so outrageous.

The scribes sitting in the room, in their heads, they are going apoplectic. They're having a major meltdown. And Jesus hears their thoughts, because they're thinking this, they're thinking, this guy is blaspheming, he's claiming to be God.

Because only God can forgive sins, and they're partly right. These guys know their Old Testament. They know, as Isaiah 43, 25 says, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sin.

[20 : 31] Or perhaps Micah 7, 18, says, who is God like you, pardoning iniquity, passing over transgression? So just as the four friends had an incomplete view of Jesus, so the scribes have an incorrect view of Jesus.

they think Jesus is only a man. They think Jesus is just another wandering preacher, a crowd pleaser, a troublemaker.

They're blind. They're blind to who Jesus really is. They're blinded by their knowledge, and they're blinded by their traditions. And what Jesus is about to say and do is, really going to push their buttons.

I don't know if you've noticed this in the Gospels, Jesus is really, really, really good at winding up the scribes and the Pharisees. He does it intentionally as well.

He really pushes the buttons, because he knows what the scribes are thinking. He's not a mere man, and he's going to call them out. And can you imagine being one of the scribes sitting in that room, and suddenly Jesus tells you what you've just thought.

[21 : 57] That is going to be disconcerting. And they're going to be thinking, who is this man who knows my thoughts? And so Jesus responds to them with a question.

He says, which is easier, to say to the paralytic, your sins are forgiven, or to say, rise, take up your bed, and walk. Now, of course, on the surface, it would seem very much like saying, well, your sins are forgiven, that's a much easier thing to do.

It's very hard to challenge, you know, who can tell? Or if you tell a paralytic to take up his bed and walk, well, everyone can see if the healing's happened or not.

There's nowhere to hide. Either you can, or you can't. And verse 10 and verse 11 are so key.

In fact, for the whole of Mark's gospel, they're so key. What does Jesus say? He says, in order to show that I can do the invisible, in order to show that I can forgive sin, in order to prove that I can do what only God can do, in order to show that I have authority over sin, I am going to do the physically impossible, to prove that only I can do the spiritually impossible.

[23 : 23] And he tells the man to rise, pick up his bed, and go home. And the man does this. He leaves the room both physically and spiritually healed.

Let's jump back to verse 10 for a wee second. Jesus refers to himself here using a key phrase, he refers to himself as the son of man.

And this is one of Jesus' favorite ways to describe himself. And it pops up in Mark's gospel, I think it's about 14 times in Mark's gospel, and it appears throughout the other gospels as well.

And often it can be, if we're not so familiar with the gospels, this phrase can be really misunderstood because we can think it means Jesus is referring to himself as a human. He's a son of man, he's a son of a human, he's a son of Adam.

But that's not what Jesus means. You see, when Jesus refers to himself as the son of man, he's referring to Daniel chapter 7.

[24 : 27] And in Daniel chapter 7, there's an absolutely amazing picture of the throne room of heaven. And this is what it says.

Daniel says this in verse 13, And I saw in the night visions and behold with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man. There's that reference. And he came to the ancient of days and was presented before him and to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples and nations and language should serve him.

And his dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. So we have this amazing picture of the throne room of God.

This is a place that believe it or not this is a place that if your sins are forgiven, if you love Jesus, this is a place that you're actually going to see. You're going to be in the throne room of God.

And for those whom we love dearly who have gone before us, they will be in the throne room of God staring and gazing in wonder on the ancient of days. And here is Jesus describing himself as this son of man.

[25 : 53] He's the one who comes on the clouds. He's the one who has been given dominion over all things. He's the one who sits at the right hand. And he is the one who has authority to forgive sins.

He's the one who wipes the slate clean because he is God. And he wipes the slate clean not by sweeping sin under the carpet.

He wipes the slate clean because when he came into this world, he didn't come as the king on the throne. No, he came as the suffering servant.

He came not as a ruler, but as one who came to serve. He says later on in Mark, for even the son of man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

See, the son of man enters into this world as a servant, and he ensures his authority forgives sin is guaranteed because he pays the price.

[27 : 04] He pays the ransom price. He bears the injustice of taking a punishment which should have been ours so that justice can be satisfied, which makes the way possible for sin to be truly forgiven.

And so this is something which is open. It's open to all of us. If you want to know forgiveness of sin, the only place you can turn is to Jesus.

Because only he is the offended party. Only he has paid the price. Only he is the one who has authority to forgive you. And it's free.

Think about the man on the stretcher. What did it cost him to have his sins forgiven? nothing. It's a gift to be received by faith.

Faith that Jesus has the authority to declare that you are forgiven. If we turn to him in forgiveness, if we have turned to him in forgiveness, then we know, and we should know, his sacrifice is sufficient.

[28 : 17] there's no sin beyond his forgiveness. When Jesus forgives you, it is total.

Psalms 103 says he removes our sins as far as the east is from the west. Again, in my case, he casts your sins into the depths of the sea. The record is wiped clean.

You are forgiven and you are justified in his sight. And here's the other thing. Jesus loves to forgive sin.

He's not reluctant. He's not there like a stern head teacher. It's not what he's like. Dean Ortlund's little book, *Gentle and Lowly*.

Amazing book. If you've never read *Gentle and Lowly*, read *Gentle and Lowly*. It's this picture of Jesus. The one who's a friend of sinners. And just in the way that a doctor loves to make people well or a teacher loves to see people grow in knowledge, Christ loves to forgive.

[29 : 29] And as believers, we need to remember that. When we fall and when we fail, which we will, and when we feel the shame of that, when we feel we've let Jesus down, don't think of Jesus as someone standing there, a steersman, tapping his foot with frustration at your idiotic and my idiotic selfish behavior.

fear. Because that's not what Jesus is like. He stands there with his arms open. He longs to forgive you and to set you back in solid ground and to make you well.

In our passage this morning, and I sometimes do this with students as well, I ask them, who in the picture, who in that story of just look at that, who represents you?

Which of the people are you most like? Who do you want to be like? Perhaps we might think, well, the friends, guys with a stretcher, they seem like good guys.

Yeah, they're commended. Okay, they're loyal. But they've got an incomplete view of Jesus. I hope nobody wants to be the scribes.

[31 : 01] They're the bad guys in this story. Okay? I know bad guys seem to be quite cool. Okay? But we really don't want to be one of the bad guys. The scribes are weird, really.

Because they're like someone on trial in court. They're standing in the dock and the judge says to them, you're not guilty. And they say amongst themselves, well, I'm not sure that that judge actually has the authority to tell me that I'm not guilty.

In fact, I don't like the cut of his gown. He doesn't look right. I'm not even sure he has the right qualifications. And anyway, he said a few things in that other trial yesterday, and I don't agree with him.

They reject Jesus. They reject forgiveness. Perhaps, maybe we're thinking, well, the crowd, they seem all right.

Tells us at the very end of the passage that they went away amazed. They went away glorifying God. You're thinking, so far, so good, they marvel at what they have seen.

[32 : 16] But here's the really sad thing. There is no record of anyone from the crowd rushing back to Jesus to say, can you forgive my sins as well?

It's possible to be amazed by Jesus. It's possible to even think that Jesus came from God. It's possible to be in church and around other believers and actually never know the forgiveness of Jesus.

Because it is something to be known, not merely associated with. So who do we want to be? Well, actually, I think, if I can say this, I think we want to be the broken man on the stretcher, lying at the feet of Jesus.

He is us. He brings nothing to the party apart from his brokenness. That is all we contribute to our salvation, our brokenness.

That's the position we are all in, whether we know it or not. God. But at the feet of Jesus, he receives spiritual wholeness and then receives physical wholeness. In this life, we can come to Jesus right now and receive immediate spiritual wholeness, instant forgiveness.

[33 : 53] forgiveness. In this life, he might also meet our physical needs. And he might not. But here is the hope and the confidence that everyone can have.

What is certain? That everyone, everyone, no exceptions, everyone who has had their spiritual brokenness healed in this life.

We'll know a future in glory with a new physical body, with a new mind, a body and a mind that will never break, that will never decay, that will never know death ever again.

A body and a mind capable of comprehending wonders about Jesus that we will never know this side of eternity, but they already know.

Those who have gone before us, they are restored, they are healed. They're able to gaze upon Jesus fully with wonder and with worship, and they see him as their king and as their lord.

[35 : 16] And that is the hope for each one of us. Let me pray for us. Father, we come and we know we have our needs.

We know the things which break us, the things which grind us down, and we turn to you.

We turn to you as the one who we can cry out to about our physical needs, but we turn to you as also the one who looks beyond the physical to our spiritual needs, to our spiritual brokenness.

Father, would you help us to turn our eyes to Jesus, to turn to him, the one who lifts us up, who lifts us out of the mire and sets us on a rock, the one who brings words which offer life, the one who brings words that can bring joy in the midst of sadness, that can bring hope in the midst of mourning and grief, and the one who speaks with all authority, and who speaks into our lives, and longs for us to come to him, because his arms are wide open to us.

Father, would we know the love of Jesus, would we know all the hope and the joy and the life that is found in him and in him alone. We pray this in his name.

[37 : 10] Amen.