

The Day the Roof Fell In

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[0 : 00] Did anyone make a New Year's resolution? They said in the news that 8 out of 10 people won't keep any resolution that they make, but I always make them every year.

I think maybe just because I'm hopeful or, I don't know, this year will be different. I'll be one of the two out of 10. So this year actually I made two. So one was to eat more fresh food and the other one was to preach longer sermons.

No, I'm just joking. But I do need to get healthier, so I thought, well, you know, it's not good to have a resolution, go on a diet, lose weight, because I'll just, I won't do that one.

So I thought, yep, okay, eat more fresh food. I'll, you know, get Vietnamese food from the takeaway, but that's kind of fresh, so that'll work. Now, I'm not going to make you put up your hand and share it with the class, but have a think.

Did you make a New Year's resolution? And if you're too smart for that, what types of things are you wanting to change in this year?

[1 : 14] What challenges are you facing? At home? In your marriage? At school?

With your children? Your finances? Friends? Work? Health? In what ways do you hope that 2008 will be different from 2007?

Just have a little think about it. What are your needs? And how are you going to make it happen? Now, I'm sure that you'd agree that it wouldn't be hard if that man in the story had been sitting here tonight for him to answer that question.

And I don't think he'd be waiting for New Year's Day to do it either. His need was abundantly clear. In fact, in our passage, he is defined by his need.

[2 : 27] He doesn't even have a name. He is simply known as the paralytic or the paralysed man. And it's apt in a way that we don't have his name because, no doubt, this condition defined his very existence.

Perhaps he was born that way. Perhaps he'd been made a quadriplegic in some terrible accident and he had the memory of what it was like before and lived with that frustration every day. Perhaps he'd contracted an illness that had left him so profoundly disabled. Whatever it was, there's no doubt what the biggest need that this man faced.

Surely, he needed to be able to walk again, to work again, to become a contributing member of his family, of society. He needed to be healed.

Now, if we were reading straight on from Mark chapter 1, we would know as soon as we meet this man, as soon as we see his need to be healed, we would know that there is one way for it to happen.

[3 : 51] He would need to get himself to Jesus. We would know that because Mark has been introducing us to this Jesus. And Mark has been very careful to start to lay out the evidence that this man, Jesus, does the Messiah's work.

He heals the sick. He casts out demons. He proclaims the good news of God. This man, Jesus, is going to be proven to be the one who Mark says he is.

The Son of God. The Christ. Now, the everyday people living in kind of chapter 1 times, they recognized a good thing when they saw it.

And word had spread that this man, Jesus, could fix things for you. He could meet your needs. So at the start of chapter 2, Jesus is back in Capernaum.

And he's possibly at Mary's new home or at Simon's mother-in-law's place. Just says he's at home. But not only have crowds gathered like they were doing towards the end of chapter 1, but verse 2 tells us that the crowds have kind of stepped up to a new level.

[5 : 07] It says, So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door. The doors were open. Everyone's in. And Jesus is speaking the word to them, but it's packed.

However, it seems as though not only word of this man's miracle working has got around, but word has got around about something else.

This Jesus doesn't stay in the one place very long. See, his mission, he keeps saying, is to proclaim his message.

And he wants to go to as many places as he can to do that. That's his priority. That's what he's actually doing in this house. He's speaking the word to them. He's calling people to repent of their sins, to get right with God through God's Messiah.

And he wants as many people to hear as possible. So the people know, if Jesus has arrived in your town, you better get in quick. Because he could be off at any time.

[6 : 10] And you better secure your place in the queue. Enter the paralytic and his friends. They've arrived too late for a front row seat.

Maybe they didn't bring their sleeping bag and camp out like at the front of Tick-a-Tack or something. And now they fear they will miss out altogether. And yet the man's need is so great. And then I think maybe a ladder catches their eye. Perhaps you know that Palestinian houses had flat roofs made of beams laid across from wall to wall.

And the spaces are filled in, not with tiles like we have, but with brushwood packed tight with clay. So kind of the roof and the ceiling was kind of all the one thing.

And sometimes, because it was so earthen, grass would grow on the roof. And so it was actually quite a pleasant place to go up and hang out, escape the hustle and bustle in the cool of the day or something.

[7 : 14] So there was often steps going up to the roof or a ladder. And so I imagine that these friends are thinking, what do we do? We've got to get him in there.

They're resourceful men. They see this ladder and they know what they have to do. Now, this is quite a familiar story. It's often talked about in Sunday school and often talked about when evangelists come through town.

So I feel like I could almost stop here and just let you imagine the story for yourself. Feel the dirt and the straw falling on your head as the digging kind of comes through.

Hear the gasps of surprise. See the bright sunlight breaking through the ceiling. Hear the groans of effort from the four men digging on the roof.

Seeing the look of, what, anticipation, hope, fear, fear of heights on the man as he gets lowered down from the roof.

[8 : 23] It's a wonderfully evocative picture, isn't it? A wonderfully evocative story. But I want us to pause and think for a minute.

This familiar picture, this evocative picture, these sights, sounds, smells. How do they actually challenge us tonight? They challenge us tonight because they symbolize an amazing confidence and commitment in coming to Jesus for help.

Confidence that Jesus is the only person to meet the need of that man. And commitment that it was so important that that need be met.

That these men would do anything, no matter how messy, embarrassing, difficult, to make it happen. Now let me ask you. Will you have this type of confidence and commitment in coming to Jesus this year?

When it comes to those needs that you thought of before, those New Year's resolutions or just challenges. And I asked you how you were going to make them happen.

[9 : 52] Where did your thoughts turn? Was it buy that new self-help book or diet book? Go to a financial planner?

Get a tutor? Buy a new wardrobe? I mean things in the wardrobe, not a wardrobe. A gym membership? Different uni course?

Specialist doctor? Where did your thoughts turn? To make it happen? Well all of those things might be helpful.

But if they were your first port of call, then you need to ask yourself whether you have truly caught the vision of the real Jesus that Mark's gospel is trying to get across to you.

So often I think we as Christians think first of human solutions to our problems, especially ones that we think we can or should be able to solve by ourselves.

[11:02] Even though we're the very people that every Sunday affirm that Jesus is the powerful Lord of heaven and earth, all loving, who gives good gifts to all who ask him.

We need to turn this affirmation into everyday action. Perhaps 2008 is the time for you to grow in confidence in coming to Jesus first with all your needs.

To do this you might need to read more about who Jesus is. Just get to know who this man is in the scriptures.

You might need to join a group that will help you understand the Bible, who will pray for you. You might need to get help from a counselor reframing some of the patterns of thought that have come from your past experiences that are stopping you from being able to apply God's truth in your life. But you will definitely need to actively come to Jesus, like actually sit down and pray and ask him for help.

[12:28] I remember Paul preaching at the start of last year on prayer. And he said that prayer isn't just wishing things to be different. And I actually found that really challenging because I think I used to spend a lot of time thinking about things and how, you know, I wish I could solve this and I wish it was different.

And you feel like you've been thinking about it a lot. You've been expending a lot of energy thinking about it and kind of cogitating and making new plans.

But actually, you haven't prayed. You haven't sat down and said, Dear Lord Jesus, I need to talk to you about this.

I need your help to change it. You're the only one with whom true power rests. You're the one who can change it. You're the one who can do it. I come to you.

I trust in you. But, you know, I have been doing it. Like, I really was challenged and I have been doing that a lot more over the last year.

[13:34] And I feel that I can guarantee you that the more you do it, the more confidence you will have in doing it more and more. It'll become easier.

You will be able to trust. You will turn to it more quickly. Turn to the Lord Jesus asking him for help in everything. Coming to him to meet your needs.

Then we need to back up this confidence with a commitment to getting help from Jesus no matter what it takes. These men had confidence, sure, that Jesus was the one who would help them.

But that confidence didn't just part the crowd in front of them and roll out a red carpet so that they could approach. They really had to put their money where their mouth was.

They had to expend effort. They had to think creatively. They had to make a commitment to get to Jesus. And we will need to do the same this year.

[14:36] Commitment to coming to Jesus means making time for it in our busy schedules.

Commitment to coming to Jesus. Which might practically mean saying no to overtime, even though it makes us more money.

No to a certain job or position. That means you always miss church or Bible study group.

Commitment to Jesus might mean relational pain.

Like ending a friendship. Ending a romantic relationship that has been influencing you away from God. It might mean praying every day for months and months and months before God's hand at work in your situation is visible.

But still exercising faith and trust without sight. Or it might be as simple and as hard as turning off the TV and reading a sentence of the Bible over and over and over again until it makes sense and you can remember it.

Perhaps 2008 is the year that you will grow in your commitment to coming to Jesus with your needs. First time, whatever the cost.

[16:01] Now, back to the story. And despite all the confidence and commitment that has been shown, once the bloke actually gets in Jesus' face, ready for the healing, there's a twist, isn't there?

Jesus doesn't just look at his faith, reach out his hand and heal. Instead he says this. Son, your sins are forgiven.

Now, just in case you think this is kind of really random, it's important to know that in the mind of Jewish people in that time and certainly before, there was a definite link between sickness and sin.

That was in their worldview. If you've read any of the book of Job, you'll get that vibe, how they were thinking. Job loses his family, his property, his health.

And to cheer him up, his friends come and say, you really should repent, you know. There's something in your life that's making God afflict you with these things. You must be a sinner.

[17:16] Sick and sin. Now, Job is a very ancient book. But even today, we can relate to that idea. I think when bad things happen to us and we find ourselves asking the question, why me?

What did I ever do to deserve this? Is God punishing me? So, some have read this story and said, well, for the man to be healed of his paralysis, he had to have his sins forgiven because his paralysis was caused by something bad that he had done.

God had afflicted him with this paralysis because he had sinned in some way. And Jesus is just giving the right medicine for the right disease for this man.

His sins did need to be forgiven. And that's how he'd get healed. But I don't think that's actually what's going on here. We read in other parts of the gospel stories that Jesus says, no, sickness and sin don't go like that.

Sometimes they might, but they don't. In general, I think something far more significant is happening. You remember how I said in Mark chapter 1, he'd been giving evidence of Jesus' work as the Messiah.

[18:36] Well, in chapters 2 and 3, that evidence starts to become much more controversial. It moves away from just healings to things that are very deeply theological for the Jewish people.

And a conflict begins with the Jewish authorities. And this conflict will ultimately end with Jesus' crucifixion. We actually see the start of it even in this chapter today.

But Jesus has initiated the challenge and the conflict because by his words here, by what he does here, by this evidence, he's revealing more about his work as Messiah and his identity as God the Son.

You see, we have our list of needs. Lose weight, pay my mortgage, help my mom, love my husband, get more exercise.

But we each have an even greater need. Each of us are sinners before a holy God.

[19:48] We need forgiveness. That is our greatest need. And above all else, Jesus came to meet that need.

Jesus is not just a wonder-working Messiah. He is a forgiver, redeemer, saviour Messiah. This is an even greater gift than healing, exorcism, miraculous feeding.

Forgiveness. And so this paralyzed man actually becomes an object lesson. Because Jesus wants all to know that though this man appears to be defined by an outward need, it's so obvious he can't move, he's on a bed, his true need and the need of all mankind, all humanity is a spiritual need, an internal need, an invisible need.

It is to have our sins forgiven. Once again, let's pause for a little bit of self-assessment. And no hands up, no answering questions, but you just have a think.

How does this sit with you? Are you convinced that your greatest need is really to have your sins dealt with and your relationship with God set right and maintained if you're already a Christian?

[21:29] Is that truly your greatest need? And if so, do your life and priorities reflect that conviction?

And if you're not convinced, is there something, a particular idea, a particular belief that is standing in your way?

Do you actually need to know that there is eternal life after this, which is far more significant than the one we are experiencing now?

And our choices that relate to that are far more significant than our choices that relate to our life now. Do you need to know that? Do you need to understand and trust deep in your being that God loves you and knows truly what is best for you, and that is to be restored to relationship with him? Do you need to know that? Do you need to know that you are a sinner, that you have lived for yourself and separated yourself from a holy God?

[22:54] And do you need to know that you cannot earn your way into heaven by being a good person, or even by being a good church-going person? Do you need to know that people who believe they are righteous on their own cannot be friends with God?

We won't look in detail at the second half of this passage tonight, but isn't that exactly what Jesus is saying in verse 17 of chapter 2?

Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have come to call not the righteous, but sinners. If you do not recognize that you are a sinner, you cannot be a friend of God. Perhaps 2008 needs to be a time where you explore these questions. And it's essential that you do, because without this fundamental truth, you can't have any foundation to your faith.

The message of the Bible from start to finish is that our greatest need is to be forgiven and restored to a loving relationship with our Heavenly Father God.

[24 : 19] Because our greatest problem is our sin, which separates us from God and leaves us under His just anger. And Jesus Christ is the center of this message, because His death and resurrection make this forgiveness and eternal relationship possible.

And if you're seeking to understand more and more who the real Jesus is this year, you will only understand Him, His work, His identity, when you understand that your greatest need is forgiveness.

Well, to give the scribes, those Jewish authorities, their credit, they actually see the implications of what Jesus has said to the man.

By claiming to be able to forgive sins, He is equating His identity with God. Sin is against God. Only God can forgive what is sinned against Him.

And to them, that is blasphemy. But the thing is, although He is equating Himself with God, He is not blaspheming.

[25 : 36] To blaspheme is to speak against the name of God, to diminish God, to use His name in a way that denigrates His glory, to equate something less than Him with Him.

But the New Testament tells us that Jesus is, in very nature, God. In Him, all the fullness of deity dwells. He is the image of the invisible God.

He is the Alpha and Omega. Thomas says to Him, My Lord and my God. He is worshipped. He is powerful over nature, over sickness, over demons, over death.

He satisfies the hungry with good things. He gives the Spirit of God. He and the Father are one.

There is no blasphemy here. There is a revelation. Jesus is God in the flesh and He has the right to forgive sins.

[26 : 36] just as He will have the right to call Levi to be His disciple, to follow Him, just as He will have the right to pick grain to heal on the Sabbath, as we'll hear later.

Now, I said earlier that our greatest problem is not an external one, but an internal one, an invisible one, the problem of our sin. And the difficulty with this is, it's rather hard to prove that you've done it. It's rather hard to prove that you've forgiven someone's sins. You're not really going to be sure of that until you die. And then it's a bit late in their eyes.

It's kind of easier to make that promise about internal, invisible things, really, than to meet the need for an outward healing. It seems that way.

And it's shonky faith healers of all religions do it all the time. They say, you're healed, it just hasn't shown itself yet. But it will.

[27 : 45] You just wait a long time and in the meantime you could give me some money. But they can't show the outward thing and they're pretending on the internal thing.

Well, what about Jesus? He says, okay, you think I'm blaspheming when I make this amazing claim about dealing with this man's internal need.

Well, why don't I do what looks harder to you? Deal with his outward need as well. And so we read in verses 10 to 12.

But so 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, stand up, take your mat, and go to your home.

And he stood up and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, we have never seen anything like this.

[28 : 56] Well, the answer is clear, isn't it? For the Lord of creation, to give a paralysed man back full function, full health, is as easy as a word.

And the man does it straight away. It's just so simple. It's almost laughable just how kind of simply Mark lays it out.

And he got up and he picked up his mat and he walked out in front of all of them. It's so easy for the Lord of creation to heal. And yet, the crowd's response we kind of feel is a little bit of an understatement.

And we've never seen anything like this. Well, yes, but Jesus has completely turned the tables here.

What looked hard, impossible, was in fact easy for him. And what looked easy to say, well, the hard road to accomplishing that has just begun.

[30 : 10] in graciously meeting this man's needs, his spiritual core need of forgiveness and his external outward need of healing, being able to walk, pick up his mat and go to his home.

Jesus has proven that he is God and that his work is about restoring people to relationship with God.

He has proven that. And the crowds do glorify God and that is right and appropriate. But we must ask the question, have they really grasped what has just taken place?

And then we ask that question of ourselves, have we grasped what has taken place? Because we live in a time when an even greater proof has been given.

We have a cross an empty tomb and the Holy Spirit given to all who believe.

[31 : 31] The living God living with and in. We have the living word. Jesus is alive and we can see his work and his word.

We have greater proof than those crowds there. Are we glorifying God? Do we live where we actually say, oh, I think I do see things that are better than that?

Is our heart more attached to things of this world than what Jesus has done? perhaps responding to that evidence across an empty tomb and the Holy Spirit given to believers responding to that evidence can be your resolution not just this new year but every day so that you might indeed follow this Jesus the Christ the Son of God Amen Let's strengthen a dream ■ with ■ you .

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