

What is our Greatest Need?

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[0 : 0 0] Please be seated. Thank you so much, Joe and Susie, for your warm welcome and hospitality to the both of us over the weekend. It's great to be home. Can I invite you to open up your Bibles to Mark chapter 2, please? We're going to be reading Mark chapter 2 and verses 1 to 12. As you find that, I bring with me the greetings of the church family in St. Andrews, and I was asked to assure you of their prayers for Bon Accord. If you've got Mark chapter 2 in front of you, why don't I pray to God for his help as we look and turn to his word?

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for your word, that though the grass withers and the flowers fade, your word stands forever. Please help us to understand. By your Spirit, please speak to us this morning as we consider a passage that might seem over-familiar to many of us. Help us to see Jesus in this passage for who he is, the one who came to meet our greatest need. And in his name we pray.

Amen. What is our greatest need? What does humanity need the most? What is your greatest need? I wish I could survey your minds right now for what you're thinking. These are big questions, so why don't we unpack them a little bit together? Peru, as most of you know where I was born, and it pains me to say, still stands at the top of the list of countries for the most deaths per capita due to COVID. Over 200,000 people have died in a country of about 30 million. And I think what's most saddening is that here in Scotland, these deaths, or many of these deaths would have been considered preventable deaths. One might argue that in Peru and many other countries, their greatest need is access to basic medical care. We're staying with Joe and Susie, and at the bottom of Quarry Road, there's a sign that says, let's care for creation. Climate justice now. You don't need to watch the news for long to realize that humanity's greatest need, arguably, is of an ecological or climate change nature. Many of you know that I worked at the YMCA managing the mentoring program, and most of the children we worked with were victims of abuse or neglect, and it didn't take long to realize that family and love and boundaries were some of the biggest needs of these young people. When I worked for the church, I remember being in the room in the office next door with Wilma and Anne and Suzanne, and we were speaking to the NHS community worker, and we asked them outright, what is Rosemount's greatest need?

And their response was that it was community, because Rosemount's biggest problem was loneliness. And in preparing for this sermon, I even messaged some friends, none of them Christians, and I asked them, I won't share all their answers. They range from the politically charged to the very socially compassionate, but one of their answers stood out to me, and I'll just read their text. John, I think what I need most in life is purpose, something that gives meaning to what I do and why I do it.

This is a guy who's very successful, and so I was especially moved by what he said, and I'd appreciate your prayers for ongoing conversations with this friend. Here in Bon Accord, in this room, there will be a multiplicity of very real and serious and legitimate needs, and it's as we reflect on this idea of our ecological, political, physical, material, emotional, psychological, and spiritual needs, that in our passage this morning, Jesus answers the big question, the one we opened up with, what is our greatest need?

[4 : 31] So let's read Mark chapter 2, and beginning at verse 1. A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home.

They gathered in such large numbers that there was no more room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them.

Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it, and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, son, your sins are forgiven. Now some teachers of the law were sitting there thinking to themselves, why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God alone? Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, why are you thinking these things? Which is easier, to say to this paralyzed man, your sins are forgiven, or to say, get up, take up your mat, and walk? But I want you to know that the son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins. So he said to the man, I tell you, get up, take up your mat, and go home. He got up, took his mat, and walked out in full view of them all.

This amazed everyone, and they praised God, saying, we have never seen anything like this. We're going to see how Jesus answers this question, what is our greatest need, as we think of this passage in two ways. Firstly, Jesus is priority, the forgiveness of sins, and secondly, Jesus is authority to forgive sins. So firstly then, Jesus is priority, the forgiveness of sins. We see Jesus' priority, his answer to the big question concerning our greatest need, both in what he does and in what he says. Let's turn to verses one and two just once more. A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. They gathered in such large numbers that there was no more room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. At this early stage of

Jesus' ministry, and at this early stage of Mark's gospel, his ministry was gathering momentum and a following. He's been traveling from village to village. Why? Well, chapter one, verse 38 tells us, Jesus came to preach. He came to preach a sermon, and what was the message of that sermon? Well, chapter one, verse 15 tells us, the time has come, the kingdom of God has come near, repent and believe the good news. So back to our passage. What does verse two tell us Jesus is doing? And he preached the word to them. Why was Jesus preaching? Why was preaching, and preaching a message of repentance and faith, Jesus' priority? Well, precisely because the forgiveness of sins is every person's greatest need.

[8 : 21] Now, whether you've been a Christian for five decades or five minutes, you've likely read or heard the story of the paralytic and his friends. So rather than reread these verses, let's try and picture that we're there.

We're in Capernaum, a wee village on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. I checked the weather forecast for Capernaum today. It's about 31, 32 degrees, high humidity. I know it's very hard for us Aberdonians to actually imagine what that's like, especially on a weekend like this. But let's use our imaginations.

We're in the house. It's crammed with people, and that can only make things hotter and stickier. And right in the center of the room is Jesus. We're surrounded by fellow eager listeners and some scribes, and we're all trying to figure out who this disease-healing, demon-delivering teacher is.

Now, just outside the house, four men and a paralytic have arrived. They've heard about Jesus too, and you can't imagine their disappointment when they realize that there is no way to get inside to get their friend before Jesus. And that's putting it mildly. If what is being said about Jesus is true, then he might actually be able to heal their friend. So the disappointment of the jam-packed house doesn't discourage them. In fact, they have a team meeting. I picture them in a huddle for some reason. And this is a bit of a sidebar, but oh, how I would have loved to have been there for that conversation. Why? Just so I could hear firsthand friend number one who said, I know, let's try the roof. In those days, one of the perks of prime Capernaum real estate was that a roof doubled up as a space to hang out. It served the same purpose as a patio or a porch. And I guess after the pandemic, many of us are very grateful for outdoor socializing areas. The three friends turn to friend number one and say, what are you on about? Jesus is inside the house, not on the roof.

To which friend number one replies, oh yeah, I know, but you know, we could remove the roof. A look of puzzled confusion among the group members. Classic friend number one and his wild suggestions. But the thing is, this time it isn't such a wild suggestion. We need to get our friend to Jesus. If anyone can help him, surely this guy can. We're inside the house, remember, and all of a sudden you hear a weird noise above you. It's not just you, but everybody is hearing this sound. And in fact, dirt and sand starts to fall on your head. Talk about a distraction in the middle of a sermon.

[11 : 35] I'm getting used to hear the loud thump of a Bible as it's being dropped, but never a hole in the roof. And that's when we see out of this hole a mat being lowered. I imagine some ropes on all four corners. On it lies a paralyzed man and now nestled at the feet of Jesus. These friends have gone to extreme lengths, vandalism with sufficient witnesses to corroborate their crime, all so that their friend could be seen by Jesus. So can you picture the friend's anticipation? What is Jesus going to do next? What is he going to say? Is he going to heal our friend? Jesus looks at the friends poking their heads out the hole, and he looks at the paralyzed man in front of him. He opens his mouth and says, son, your sins are forgiven. What do you make of Jesus's words? A bit odd? Anticlimactic maybe?

I hope we're all on the same page, that the paralyzed man was brought to Jesus so that he would be healed, not to hear about his sins. At the time, there was a belief that physical sickness was intrinsically tied to your personal sin, but Jesus isn't making a point about that. What we do know is that what Jesus said was outrageous, that it shocked everyone, especially the scribes. Why did Jesus say what he did?

Why not deal with the man's physical needs first? Because Jesus's words reveal his priority. Jesus knows that nobody has a greater or more desperate need than their need of forgiveness.

And why is this our greatest need? Because sin is our biggest problem. I was recently asked in St. Andrew's after a church service by someone who was at church for the very first time, what is sin?

Is it the bad things that I do? And I guess that's what many people think sin is. That and that sin is a word used by intolerant and unloving people. But according to the Bible, sin isn't just the bad things that we do or the poor choices we make. It isn't just the really bad stuff done by really bad people.

[14 : 16] Sin is everything that is displeasing to a holy God. Every jealous thought, every word said in frustration, every minute being spent in laziness and selfishness. And sin, no matter how insignificant it may seem, it may seem, is at our very core, it's essentially rebellion against a holy God.

The Bible describes it also as debt or a crime and ultimately that which separates us from God. What sin leads to is the most tragic future for anyone. Eternity in hell, being rightly punished for rejecting the God that made you, and as Joe was telling the kids, that gave you all these incredible gifts. This is why sin is our biggest problem. Because God matters and because eternity matters.

And this is why Jesus' priority is forgiving this man's sins. Since sin is our biggest problem, isn't it amazing that Jesus says to the paralytic, I will deal with your greatest need and reconcile you to God forever? And I guess my question for us is, do we think of sin the same way Jesus did? Or are we a little too afraid, perhaps, to be as bold as Jesus was, to ever suggest that someone's genuine physical needs, though very important, is not their greatest need? Because that's just unloving, right?

As we think of the people we interact with, is it our mindset that their biggest need, over and above everything else, is to have their sins forgiven? Are we moved by compassion by the quarter of a million people who live here in Aberdeen, the other quarter of a million people who live in Aberdeenshire, whose greatest need is the forgiveness of their sins? What about the couple thousand that live here in Rosemount? Or the ones and twos in our lives whose greatest need is the forgiveness of their sins?

Do we share in Jesus' priority? Because I think ultimately it's about shifting our worldview. Forgiveness of sins is humanity's greatest need. Paralytics, politicians, the entire population of the world, our greatest need is the forgiveness of our sins. If you're a believer here this morning, we ought to be so grateful. Jesus has said to you, son and daughter, your sins are forgiven.

[17 : 25] And there is no greater state than to get up from your knees knowing that God has forgiven every sin you've ever committed. Thank you, Jesus, that my eternal future is safe. People have great needs, desperate needs, and I sincerely hope that I haven't belittled any of them. That isn't my intention.

But nobody has a greater need than their sins being forgiven. It's everyone's greatest need. And we must be persuaded of this so to share in Jesus' priority and so that we can passionately share with others that there is an antidote to our greatest problem. And what is the antidote? How is it that Jesus can say what he did? On what grounds does he say, son, your sins are forgiven? Who is Jesus that he can say those words? Well, these questions lead us helpfully to our second point. Jesus' authority to forgive sins. Will you turn with me once more to verses 6 to 12?

Now, some teachers of the law were sitting there thinking to themselves, why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God alone? Immediately, Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts. And he said to them, why are you thinking these things? Which is easier, to say to the paralyzed man, your sins are forgiven, or to say, get up, take your mat, and walk? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.

So he said to the man, I tell you, get up, take your mat, and go home. He got up, took his mat, and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone, and they praised God, saying, we have never seen anything like this. He's blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God alone? On the one hand, the scribes are absolutely right. Only God can forgive sins. Sin is rebellion against a holy God, and so it follows that only he can pardon offenders. When Jesus told the paralytic that his sins were forgiven, he's making a massive, outrageous, and offensive claim about his identity. Jesus is essentially saying, I am God. And to make such a claim was punishable by death, and hence the outrage of the teachers of the law. Jesus perceived, we're told, in his heart their outrage, and he responds by essentially asking, why do you question that I'm God? Goes on to say, which is easier, to say your sins are forgiven, or to say, get up, take your mat, and walk? And this isn't a trick question. Jesus is making the point that it is easier to say your sins are forgiven, because how would you know? Where would the evidence be? Get up and walk is harder, because the paralytic either gets up or he doesn't. Jesus is either a fraud or the real deal. So does Jesus have the authority to forgive sins? Well, verse 10 is so clear and helpful.

But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. In other words, to show you that I am God. I'm going to tell this man who cannot walk, whose nerves and ligaments and tendons and muscles and bones do not work, I'm going to say to this paralyzed man, get up and walk out.

[21 : 34] And defying even modern medicine, the man miraculously and instantly got up, because Jesus is God.

The laws of nature interfered with by the one who created the very laws. Jesus is power over this man's physical need, proving that he has the authority to forgive sins. Now, the eagle-eyed among you may have noticed that Jesus describes himself as the Son of Man. He's trying to make the point about his divine nature, so why call himself the Son of Man? Well, this is a title from Daniel chapter 7. I've put the reference up in the slides, and I'd encourage you to go and read that.

But Daniel 7 describes the appearance and character of the Son of Man. He's a heavenly being appointed by God to be king over all the earth forever. And Jesus is saying, I am that king.

I am that man from Daniel chapter 7. I am the one Daniel was speaking about, and my power over this man's great physical need confirms that. Now, this divine title sure looks back to the Old Testament, but it also looks forward. And for this, I'd love for us to scan a couple of verses in Mark together.

So will you turn with me to Mark chapter 8 and verse 31? I love the sound of pages. Mark chapter 8, verse 31.

[23 : 17] He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

One chapter over in chapter 9, verse 31. So you just probably need to flick the page. Mark 9, 31. Because he was teaching his disciples, he said to them, the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise. And just one more verse, Mark 10, 45. Probably the most famous verse in the book of Mark. Mark chapter 10, verse 45, which says, For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Jesus being described as the Son of Man identifies Jesus as the one with authority to forgive sins, but also reminds us of how Jesus is going to secure the forgiveness of sins.

How will the King of Daniel chapter 7 secure the forgiveness of sins? Well, through the King's sacrificial death and resurrection on the cross. That is what secures our forgiveness. On the cross, Jesus took the punishment for our crimes against God, our sin, and dealt with our greatest need.

In his resurrection, he comprehensively demonstrated that he is the one with power over sin and death, and therefore the only one we can turn to for the antidote to our greatest problem.

[25 : 15] What does it mean to you that Jesus has the authority to forgive sins? Does it make any practical difference? Imagine how much more confident and bold we would be in our evangelism if at the forefront of our minds was the truth that Jesus can forgive my friend and my family member? At a more personal level, isn't it wonderfully assuring, especially when our other needs in life seem to always take center stage, to remember that Jesus can and has dealt with my sin? He has the authority to forgive sins because he is God, and he himself went to the cross for us. If you're not a Christian and you're listening to Jesus's words from this passage, he is the only one with the authority to deal with your greatest problem. And it's the unique nature of Christianity that the central character himself is God and thus able to forgive. Your sin separates you from God forever, and if you don't repent and believe, it will separate you from God forever. So please don't be like the scribes and the

Pharisees and grumble in your heart, but rather ask your questions. We'd love to talk them through with you. I think of the paralytic's friends and the lengths that they went to to get their friend in front of Jesus just so that he could heal their friend's legs. How much more should we run towards Jesus when he can heal your sin problem forever? So as we wrap things up, have you ever stopped to imagine what the first thing the paralyzed man did after he got up, took his mat, and walked out? Now I can't say any of these with absolute certainty, but I wonder. I wonder if he picked up his son and, you know, threw him around, gave him a little hug, or whether he had a little dance with his wife in the kitchen, or if he ran to his friends and told them that he was available for five-a-side football at the weekend.

I wonder what he'd have said if you'd asked him on that day, what did Jesus do for you? I think he probably would have shouted it at you. Well, can't you see? I can walk.

He told me to get up and walk, and I did. He cured me. But what about if we asked him that same question 20 years down the line, or 30 years down the line?

The knees have started to go. He can't run or skip like he used to, and that five-a-side injury is coming back to haunt him. What would his answer be then? What about in heaven? What did Jesus do for you that day? I think the man formerly the paralytic would say, on that day, he forgave me and saved me forever. And brothers and sisters, the Lord Jesus came into this world to forgive sinners.

[28 : 52] Why? Because it is our greatest need. Our illnesses, our financial issues, our fractured relationships, our wider global needs, they matter. They really do. God knows about them, and he cares.

However, if we are trusting in Jesus, those needs will not have the last word. Cancer won't have the last word. Our serious illnesses won't have the last word. The heartbreak that you're feeling won't have the last word. Even death won't have the last word.

We can say that with absolute certainty, because it is genuinely good news that our greatest need, sin, has been dealt with because the Son of Man came into this world to be ransomed for sinners.

If you are a forgiven sinner, then rejoice. Give thanks, and remember this incredible truth, when our earthly needs seem too big to handle. But can I encourage us also to go out and think of everyone as Jesus did. Everyone we encounter as someone desperately in need of their greatest need being met. Tell them about Jesus. Tell them out there that forgiveness is to be found in Jesus.

It's God's greatest gift precisely because sin is our biggest problem, and Jesus has the authority to meet our greatest need. So let's pray together.

[30 : 45] Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for the Lord Jesus. Thank you so much for the Lord Jesus. We thank you that he came into this world not to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for all those who trust in him.

Thank you, Lord, that Jesus has the authority to forgive our sins, that he himself is God, that he himself has the power, and therefore he is the one who can forgive us.

Help us to share in Jesus' priority, and help us to give thanks to you that you have, and that you can forgive the sins of those who come to you in earnest.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.