

State of the Holy Union Address

A Study of Mark 2:1-12

Introduction:

- A. If I were Him, I think I might have been irritated. Jesus was there in the house, speaking to a crowd packed in like sardines. They're all hanging on His every word. It's every preacher's dream. He's got their undivided attention. And then it happens.

Directly above Him, dirt and debris begin to fall. It's falling right where Jesus is. And He loses the crowd mid-sentence. Everybody is looking up at the ceiling. They hear footsteps and muffled voices and chipping. And then the roof cracks open and hands and feet poke through like a chick from an egg.

And everybody realizes: Some yahoos are digging through the roof!

Jesus and those closest to Him step away from the falling debris and watch the intruders widen the hole.

Is this some kind of repair work? Don't they realize there's an important meeting going on? Don't they realize Jesus is there trying to teach?

Apparently they do. Because they begin to lower a disabled man on a pallet. Right down to Jesus. On purpose.

The event is recounted for us in ► Mark 2. Beginning in Verse 1, it says,

^{NAU} Mark 2:1 When He [Jesus] had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home. ► 2 And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, not even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them. ► 3 And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four men. ► 4 Being unable to get to Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him; and when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying. ► 5 And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

- B. I want to ► zoom in on two groups in this dramatic event—two groups that tell us something terribly important about ourselves.

1. The first group is comprised of the four guys—the guys who brought their paralyzed buddy on a pallet. I call them the Wrecking Crew.

They are trying to bring their disabled friend to Jesus, but they can't get in the house. They're blocked by a barricade of backs.

2. And that's the second group: the Barricade of Backs.

So we have two groups: the Wrecking Crew and the Barricade of Backs. Here's what I'm wondering: To which group do we belong at Moon Valley Bible Church? Which group best describes us: the Wrecking Crew or the Barricade of Backs?

Let's look more closely.

- I. What can we say about the Barricade of Backs? Who are they and what are they like?
- A. I don't want to be too hard on the Barricade of Backs. After all, there are certainly worse places to be than in a house listening to what Jesus has to say. These people are interested in the teachings of Jesus.
- B. And some of them are biblical scholars. Read on and you'll find that some scribes are in the house. Scribes of that day were professors who researched the Old Testament and taught the people.¹ There are certainly worse things to be than biblical scholars and teachers.
- C. And the Barricade of Backs includes people who are very impressed with Jesus. They admire Him. Read on and you'll find that Jesus miraculously heals the paralyzed man and ► Verse 12 says,

^{NAU} Mark 2:12 . . . they were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this."

They're impressed with Jesus. And they even "glorified God." That is, they praised Him; they honored Him; they extolled Him.² Sounds pretty good to me.

- D. But ► a barricade is a barricade. They didn't let the paralytic in. Their backs were turned. The needy one is ignored. We can only imagine the details of it.

That the four guys show up a little late is understandable. They had to round up and carry their paralyzed friend. By the time they get to the house, the crowd is overflowing. They can't even get close to the door. Everybody's trying to press in to see Jesus and hear what He's saying.

I can imagine one of the four guys tapping somebody on the shoulder: "Excuse me, but we're trying to get our friend inside to see Jesus. Would you be so kind as to make way?"

¹ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev.ed., vol. 4, s.v. "Scribes," by Frank E. Hirsch (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1988).

² W. Bauer, F.W. Danker, W.F. Arndt, and F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed., s.v. "δοξάζω," (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), hereinafter abbreviated BDAG.

Maybe the response was, “I was here first.” Or maybe there was no response at all. Just a turn of the head, like the driver who won’t let you in line and won’t even make eye-contact, as if you don’t exist.

These aren’t horrible people, just normal people—people who are a little self-absorbed—people who are spectators—people who don’t want to give up their spot because they’re looking to get closer to Jesus themselves.

II. But then there’s the Wrecking Crew. Let’s consider them for a moment.

- A. It seems to me that, at one time, the Wrecking Crew must have been a Barrier of Backs. They must have stood and watched and listened to Jesus at some point. And I’ll bet they still do with regularity. How else would they have come to know that He is the Healer? How else would they have come to know that He is the Forgiver of sins? How else would they have come to believe in Him? And we know they believe because ► Verse 5 says Jesus *saw* their faith.

Which is an intriguing idea: seeing faith. How do you see something invisible? Well, it’s hard to imagine anybody doing something this bold without believing. They’re actions demonstrate invisible faith like a flag demonstrates invisible wind. They’re convinced: “Hey, we know what Jesus has done for us, and we seen what He’s done for others, so we’re going to do whatever we have to do to bring our friend to Jesus.”

- B. Somehow, ► they have moved from being self-absorbed spectators to being so concerned about the welfare of their needy friend that they’re willing to do almost anything to get him to Jesus. They’re on a mission for others.

From his cell in a Flossenburg concentration camp during World War II, German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer said ► this: “The church is only the church when it exists for others.”³

Compared ► to the Barrier of Backs, those in the Wrecking Crew are few in number, but they are determined. When faced with an obstacle, they don’t throw up their hands and say, “Well, I guess God closed that door.” No. They climb the roof and *make* a door.

They’re willing to break things so that the broken can get mended.

They’re focused. They’re passionate. They’re tenacious. They’re creative. They’re unashamed. They’re unselfish. And, by the way, they’re messy.

³ Quoted by Mark Buchanan, “Wreck the Roof,” *Leadership Journal*, Winter 2007 p. 53.

III. And what about us? What about Moon Valley Bible Church? I wonder: Are we more like the Barrier of Backs or the Wrecking Crew?

- A. Seems like the two groups may represent points along a continuum of responsiveness to Jesus. And maybe the continuum is spiritual maturity.

Most everybody enjoys the comforts of a nice building and the privilege of good teaching and the fullness of being spiritually fed and the presence of Jesus. But somewhere along the line, there is a need to become less and less like the Barrier of Backs and more and more like the Wrecking Crew. Less and less like parasites who consume and more and more like paramedics who serve. Because the parasitic are of no help to the paralytic.

Our neighborhoods and workplaces are full of broken people. Who will bring them to Jesus?

- B. And it's not just about sharing the gospel. Of course that's crucial. People do need to know that, by His death and resurrection for our sins, Christ alone promises eternal life to all who simply believe Him for it. That's the good news of His amazing grace and love.

But there's more to demonstrating the love of Christ than saying things. There's also doing things. Like reaching out to meet the basic human needs of our community and world in the name of Christ.

In our text, the Wrecking Crew compassionately worked to meet the physical need of their friend. And in the process, their friend ends up receiving the healing *and* the forgiveness of Christ. Jesus deals with the whole person. So should we.

Anybody you know need Jesus?

- C. Jesus ► would later say to His followers:

^{NAU} Matthew 28:19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations"

... ► and ...

^{NAU} Acts 1:8 ". . . you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

1. It's a call to be Wrecking Crew, not a Barrier of Backs. It's the call in which we at Moon Valley have the greatest room to grow.

At the beginning of the summer, you may remember that we took a survey of our congregation. The good news is that the percentage of people who have

believed in Jesus for the first time while attending Moon Valley increased significantly. We continue to grow in Christlikeness. And, of course, we are delighted to baptize ten people in our two services today. We celebrate God's work in our midst.

But there is much left to be done. Of thirty-one Characteristics of Completeness in Christ evaluated in the survey, one ranked dead last. It reads: "I am fulfilling Christ's commission to make disciples, reaching another generation."

2. Go. Make disciples. Be My witnesses.

Does Jesus have the authority to issue such commands?

Back in our text, Jesus had not yet given these orders, but already those in the Barrier of Backs balk at His authority. In ► Verse 5, when Jesus says to the paralytic . . .

^{NAU} Mark 2:5 . . . "Son, your sins are forgiven."

. . . it's an explicit claim to deity and authority. Jesus is claiming to be the one and only God who has ultimate authority, including the authority to forgive sins. The scribes get it. And they don't like it. Beginning in ► Verse 6, it says,

^{NAU} Mark 2:6 But some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, 7 "Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?" ► 8 Immediately Jesus, aware in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, said to them, "Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts? ► 9 "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven'; or to say, 'Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk'? ► 10 "But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—He said to the paralytic, 11 "I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home." ► 12 And he got up and immediately picked up the pallet and went out in the sight of everyone . . .

Interesting that the Barrier of Backs now seems to have no problem clearing the way for an ex-paralytic. He "went out."

And, as I said earlier, the Barrier of Backs, with the probable exception of the scribes, they are very impressed at this point. But many are still ambivalent about Christ's deity and authority. Great teaching. The guy's amazing. Obviously gifted.

But my Lord? My God? The One who made me? The King who has the right the rule over me?⁴ The One who calls me to serve Him in reaching another generation?

Jesus tells us. Go. Make disciples. Be My witnesses. Be a Wrecking Crew.

It's encouraging to me that the Wrecking Crew in our text didn't need a command. They were just convinced: "Hey, we know what Jesus has done for us, and we seen what He's done for others, so we're going to do whatever we can to bring our friend to Jesus."

- D. And ► that's what we're about at Moon Valley. We're about ► moving step by step from the Barrier of Backs to the Wrecking Crew. The journey can be hard, but we'd like to make it simple.

Making it simple to take the next step will be a theme for us this year at Moon Valley. And I'd like you to consider taking the next step today. We've made it simple.

You may have noticed that the room is arranged differently this morning.

1. For one thing, we've got tables set up to my right and spilling out into the lobby, representing a lot of different opportunities to take a next step at Moon Valley. Think of them as various wrecking crews that you might join.
 - a. There are Life Group wrecking crews. Life Groups constitute the hub of community life at Moon Valley. They are small groups of people who gather regularly in homes to do four things that the very first church did: worship, connect, grow, and serve. A Life Group is a wrecking crew mobilized and deployed to reach another generation in our neighborhoods. It's the church next door—the church doing the abundant life together.

Not all the Life Groups are represented. Quite a few are so full that we'd like you to consider the alternatives represented here today.

You can approach any one of the tables and there you'll find a simple answer to the question: If I'd like to get involved, what's my next step?

- b. There are also missions wrecking crews. For example, you could go check out the area in the back with all the computers. That's where we hold our weekly ESL classes to help Latinos in our community

⁴ In the parallel account in Matthew 9:8, there is a hint that crowd is not convinced of Christ's deity. It says, "they were awestruck and glorified God, who had given such authority to *men* [emphasis mine]."

learn how to speak English. If you'd like to get involved, you'll find the next step there.

Not all our missions efforts are represented. Only those where there may be a clear next step for you right now.

- c. And there are other ministry wrecking crews. For example, our ministries to youth and children are represented. Those wrecking crews need some team members right now. We've got more paralytics on pallets than we've got people to carry them. What's your next step?
2. To my left, in the back, there are different tables where you can sit down, have a cup of coffee, and get connected. And be close to an exit in case things get weird. What's up with those tables?

Well, think of this house as the house in our text. I want to be very quick to point out that I'm definitely not Jesus. Just ask my wife and kids. But I do teach His word.

The area in the back is a small way to break down the barrier of backs. It makes it a little easier for folks to connect and feel a part of the family. And it has the added benefit of clearing the lobby which, from now on, will be focused on providing information on how you can take the next step at Moon Valley.

3. And I hope you received this week by email the very first issue of *Life Today*. If you didn't, but would like to, please give us your email address on a Connection Card and put it in the box in the back. We'll get you hooked up.

Life Today is a one-page, weekly publication designed to make it simple to take the next step at Moon Valley. It is a handy source of simple ideas for how to worship, connect, grow, and serve, particularly in the context of Life Groups. And you'll usually get a short feature about how a real person in a real life situation tried to apply the Bible and what happened. Simple.

4. And then there's the gathering we're having at about noon today. We used to call it *Family Focus*. But it seems that our focus got fuzzy, so we got some new glasses with a new prescription. We're calling it *Next Step* because that is our new focus.

We're going to hang and eat, and it's going to be short and sweet. You'll hear a little more about next steps we're taking as a church and you'll have more time to consider your next step by browsing the tables of opportunity. It's simple.

We're about moving. Moving step by step from the Barrier of Backs to the Wrecking Crew. The journey can be hard, but we'd like to make it simple. What's the next step for you? I'm going to ask God to make it clear.