

Series: *Jesus the Master Evangelist*

Title: "Tearing Off the Roof" (part 1)

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 4/12/2009

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We read in the New Testament of many evangelists. The Apostle Paul was certainly a great evangelist. Look at the accounts of his preaching in the book of Acts, in the various cities and towns of the Roman Empire. Look at his preaching to the Greeks at Mars Hill. Great evangelism. The Apostle Peter was a great evangelist. Look at his preaching after the Holy Spirit came upon the one hundred and twenty on the Day of Pentecost. Powerful evangelism. Scripture-driven evangelism. And we could speak of others in the New Testament – Stephen, Philip, and Apollos, for example.

But as we look at these men, we also see that they were fallible human beings. Paul and Barnabas had a falling out over the question of whether or not to have John Mark participate with them in the ministry. Clearly, Paul did the wrong thing in standing with the four men who had taken a Jewish vow in Acts chapter 21, and paying for their sacrifices of purification. Yet God overruled in it and used even that for His glory. And we read in Galatians chapter two that Paul himself had to take Peter to task before the church at Antioch, because Peter, in order to not offend certain people, was endorsing a position of legalism. And we also read that though Apollos was a powerful

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evangelist, some of the other believers had to take him aside and explain the way of God to Him more accurately.

But in contrast to all of these, we have the Master Evangelist, the Lord Jesus Christ. God Himself has personally come into the world and taken on a body of flesh in order to do the work of evangelism, and ultimately to give His life as a ransom for many, because He Himself is the focus of the evangelistic message.

In another series, we have seen that one of the key characteristics of a Scripture-driven church is to be focused on God's twofold purpose for the church as stated in His Word, and nothing else. And that twofold purpose is to proclaim the Gospel to the world, and to build up the saints in sound doctrine. And we have seen that another key characteristic of a Scripture-driven church is Bible-based evangelism. Doing evangelism God's way. Preaching the Gospel in its fullness. Trusting God for the results.

If we are to be obedient to the Word of God, we need to understand what the Bible says about evangelism. And we have no better place to look than the four Gospels, and we have no better example than the Lord Jesus Christ, the

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Master Evangelist. So in this series, we are going to examine three accounts from the evangelistic ministry of the Lord Jesus Himself.

The three accounts we'll be studying are the account of Jesus' dealings with the paralytic in Mark chapter two, the rich young ruler in Luke chapter 18, and the publican Zacchaeus in Luke chapter 19. Today we begin with the account of the paralytic in Mark chapter two.

So please turn with me in your Bibles to the Gospel of Mark, chapter two.

And let us hear God's Word as we read verses 1 through 12.

1. And again [Jesus] entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house.
2. Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them.
3. Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men.
4. And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying.

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5. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you."
6. And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts,
7. "Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"
8. But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, "Why do you reason about these things in your hearts?"
9. Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk'?
10. But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins" — He said to the paralytic,
11. I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house."
12. Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"

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May the Lord, as He has promised, add His blessing to the reading of His Word.

As we read the Gospels, we find that the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus were filled with interruptions. And this is one of those occasions. Often we react badly to interruptions. We see them as interferences, and usually they take us by surprise. But because Jesus was God in the flesh, no interruption ever took Him by surprise. No interruption ever caused the perfect Son of God to react in a bad way, as we often do. The Lord Jesus Himself was and is the God of the universe, the second person of the Trinity. And as such, He had appointed everything – even the things that to our finite minds, as we read the Gospels, were interruptions.

We've just read an account where the preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ was interrupted. And He was interrupted in a most unusual way, and with a most unusual result. But this interruption is in reality a divine appointment. A man in the deepest of need, both physical and spiritual, is about to have a divine appointment with the Son of God Himself.

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So let's look together at what takes place. There's more here than first meets the eye, and there are lessons here that we need to apply to our own hearts and lives, and to the evangelistic ministry of the church.

Let us take notice, first of all, of the setting in which these events took place. We read in verse one: "And again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house."

Now in the preceding chapter, Mark chapter one, we read that Jesus had been preaching in Capernaum. But then He left Capernaum to go and preach in the synagogues of the surrounding towns throughout Gallilee. But now He has returned again to Capernaum. Capernaum is at the northern end of the Sea of Gallilee, and it was Jesus' base of operations for much of His early ministry. And in verse two we read that "Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door."

We see here that Jesus has entered into a house. We're not told whose house it is, and we're not given many details about the house.

But Jesus has drawn a crowd. Jesus drew crowds everywhere He went. Multitudes followed Him throughout His earthly ministry. And as always,

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people were in the crowd for many different reasons, some good, and some bad.

Some people came because they wanted to hear what He had to say, and by the working of God the Holy Spirit their hearts were open to the truth, and they believed.

Other people came only because they wanted to see His miracles. They wanted to see a show. To put it in modern terms, they wanted to be entertained. "What's He going to do next?"

Other people came because they hated Jesus Christ. They hated His message. They hated His claim that He was the Son of God. The scribes and Pharisees and Sadducees hated Him because He was a threat to their established religious order. They hated Him because He would not subject Himself to their corrupt authority. Jesus pointed out to the people that the Pharisees and Sadducees had replaced the pure Word of God, the Old Testament Scriptures, they had replaced it with the traditions of men. And in so doing, they had led the people astray, and they were leading them to eternal death. And these haters of Jesus Christ wanted to try to catch Him in

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His words, to trip Him up, to prove to the people that He was an imposter. But they were never able to trip up the Son of God, not even once.

And other people came, as we shall see, because they believed that Jesus Christ was indeed the Son of God, the Messiah of Israel, the One who could heal the sick, who One could cleanse the leper, the One who could cause the blind to see, the One who could free the demon-possessed, the One who could make the lame to walk. And people with such infirmities came to Jesus themselves. And others, as we shall see, others brought those who were in need, to the Messiah to be healed.

Almost always, Jesus the Master Evangelist preached to a mixed audience. And so it is for the church. As we saw in a previous series, Martyn Lloyd-Jones understood this as he came to the pastorate of his first church in Wales. Even within the walls of the church, he was preaching to a mixed audience. And some of the first fruits of his ministry were people within the church itself – people who thought they were Christians, but under the faithful preaching of the Word they came to understand that they were lost sinners who needed to be saved. And we in the evangelical church today always need to keep in mind that we deal with a mixed audience, and that outward appearances can

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be deceiving. Some who may, to the eye of man, appear to be within the kingdom, are in fact known to God to be yet outside the kingdom.

So now we have the setting in our minds. Jesus is preaching in Capernaum, He's preaching in a house, and He's preaching to an overflow crowd, and it is a mixed audience, a crowd made up of people who were there on the basis of many different motives – some saved, some lost; some with godly motives, others with ungodly motives.

And I'd like for us, with our mind's eye, to imagine ourselves in that place. In the eye of your mind, place yourself in that house, place yourself among that crowd, place yourself there as an eyewitness to the events that are about to unfold.

And as we do that, let us notice, first of all, that preaching is taking place. Verse two tells us that Jesus "preached the word to them."

We find that from the very beginning of His earthly ministry, it was Jesus' practice to preach about Himself using the written Word, the Scriptures themselves. Early in His ministry, after He has been tempted for forty days in the wilderness, Jesus came to Nazareth. And He went into the synagogue there, and He began to preach. He opened the book of Isaiah and read from

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chapters 49 and 61. He read about Himself. He read Isaiah's prophecies that the Messiah would come to earth, and that He would begin to teach and to preach about Himself. And Jesus said to the people in that synagogue that day, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." "Today the Messiah's earthly ministry has begun." You have seen it with your own eyes. You have heard it with your own ears.

And now, not many weeks later, Jesus is preaching to these people, in this house in Capernaum. And no doubt Jesus is preaching the same message, from the Scriptures. That was Jesus' pattern. That was His practice. And it must always be ours. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. Evangelism must be Bible-based. Rooted in Scripture.

The Double Miracle

So now, in our mind's eye, as we think of ourselves in that house, among that crowd, we see that Jesus' preaching is interrupted. And it is interrupted in a most unusual way. We read in verse three:

Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men.

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Four men come, and they're carrying another man. Apparently they're carrying him on some kind of litter or stretcher. And we're told that the man is a paralytic. In fact, in the original here the Greek word is *paralytikos* – the word from which we get our English word "paralytic."

This word can indicate many different types of paralysis. It could be the kind of paralysis that is caused by a stroke that would affect the ability to walk and talk and move to a greater or lesser extent. It could have been the kind of paralysis that results from severe spinal injury. Or, it could have been the result of a disease, such as multiple sclerosis, or what we call today ALS, infantile paralysis, or Lou Gehrig's disease.

Over time, these diseases produce a complete paralysis of the body. The one who is affected by these diseases loses the ability to use his limbs until they become absolutely useless. The one affected loses the ability to speak. Eventually he cannot even hold his head up. And eventually it affects the person's breathing and heart action, so that death comes.

I tend to think, because four men brought this man to Jesus, and because they would let nothing stand in their way, I tend to think therefore that this man was in that kind of severe difficulty, and that death might have been near.

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We don't know that for a fact, but I believe the Gospel accounts give every indication that this was what we would call an emergency case, a life-and-death situation.

And we see also the determination of these four men who brought the paralyzed man to Jesus. Verse four:

And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying.

These men literally took the roof apart in order to get the paralyzed man to Jesus. We're told here in Mark that they broke through the roof. The idea of the word for breaking through here, is the idea of digging through. Archaeologists tell us that the roof of a typical house in the Middle East at that time was a structure made up of several layers. The first layer, on the inside, was the rafters, the structure on which the roof rested. Then above that was a layer of reeds. And above that was a layer of heather or other springy vegetation that had been cut and placed there as insulation. And on top of the heather, earth was deposited and beaten down into a solid mass. And on top

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of that was the outer layer, the part exposed to the sky, made up of tiles, so that the roof would shed water when it rained.

When I was a kid I saw this Biblical event portrayed in a movie, and in the movie, all these four men had to do was lift away some tiles, and there below them was Jesus. But the real thing wasn't that simple. We're not seeing the Hollywood version. We're seeing the real thing. It wasn't that easy. These men had to literally tear the roof apart – they had to take off the tiles, they had to dig away the dirt, they had to tear away the insulating material, they had to tear away the reeds, in order to get this man to Jesus. They were absolutely determined to bring this man to Christ.

Imagine that in your mind's eye this morning. Jesus is preaching in our midst. And then we begin to hear noises on the roof up above us. Then we hear tiles being pulled away, then we hear digging and chopping over our heads. And we wonder what in the world is going on. And after awhile, debris from the ceiling starts to fall down on us. And then we see a little daylight, and then more debris, and more daylight, and more debris, and more daylight, until we begin to see the four men up on the roof, and they're working away until they've opened a large hole in the ceiling.

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And then as we're looking up these men disappear to one side, and a few moments later they come back in view above us, and we see that they have a man, on a bed, and they're letting the man's bed down through the hole they've chopped in the roof. And some in the crowd have to back away, so that there's room to let down the man on his bed, all the way to the floor.

And now there he is, lying on his bed in the middle of the crowd, unable to get up, unable to move. And Jesus Christ, the Son of God, sees him, and moves to him. And we read this, in verse five: "Jesus saw their faith."

"Jesus saw their faith." How do you *see* faith? Well, it's interesting here that Mark, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, doesn't use the Greek word that means "to see with the eyes." He uses a different word. He uses the Greek word *oida*, which means "to know something, to possess information about something." And that is the point here. This is the Son of God who saw their faith. This is the discerner of hearts. This is the Lord, the creator God, who doesn't simply look on the outward appearance, but looks on the heart of a man.