

At 2AM on Thursday morning, I awoke from REM sleep with an idea so revolutionary, it was sure to: (a) make millions and change the face of technology forever and ever. So, like a fool, I tapped my wife on the shoulder – who by the way was still in REM sleep – and said: “hey honey. I’ve just dreamed up an idea so revolutionary it is sure to make millions and change the face of technology forever and ever. To which she responded: “this better be good. What is it?” “I’m going to create an “app” that can categorize the contact lists in people’s phones and on social media accounts to make them easier to navigate. What do you think?” Her response was priceless: “I think you need to roll over and go back to sleep. That was done 20 years ago when smart phones were first invented. You just don’t know how to do it.” So, at 2:09 AM, I looked at my cellular device and – viola – there it was in all its glory: the button to categorize my contacts so I don’t have to scroll down for 436 minutes until I find the right one. If, somewhere between lunchtime and naptime on this Sunday afternoon, you began the process of categorizing your contact list on your cellular device so that you don’t have to scroll down for 436 minutes until you find the right contact, your categories might be like mine. There’s the Help You Move Category. These are the friends you call when you get in a bind. They are the ones who will not only help you move, but they show up with the U-Haul in the middle of the night because they know you would do the exact same thing for them. Then, there’s the Help Bury the Body Category. These are the friends that are still around you when all the rocks give way in your life and the ground beneath you starts to split. They are the ones who will not only show up with a U-Haul when you need them, they will also bring a Sherman Tank and a shovel if necessary. But then there is the category that stands alone because it isn’t at all like the others. It’s not the Help You Move Category, nor is it the Help You Bury the Body Category. Instead, it is the Hide Your Eyes, Hide Your Ears and Hide Your Kids Category. You know exactly what I’m talking about don’t you? They are the ones that you never know what they are going to say or do. The only thing that you do know is that when you are around them in a public place embarrassment at any moment isn’t just a possibility. It’s a guarantee.

The Bible has some interesting stories of friendship. David and Jonathan were the best of them. Job and his “friends” were the worst of them. Solomon had too many of them. And Jesus didn’t have enough of them the moment his feet left the soil of the Garden of Gethsemane. But the story of friendship you’ll hear about today from the Gospel of Mark is one of the unique in all the Bible because (1) these friends fit all three categories. The Help Move Category? Check. The Help Bury the Body Category? Check. The Hide Your Eyes, Ears and Kids Category? Check. And (2) four of these men loved their paralyzed “friend” enough to lower him down from the top of a roof just so he might be able to see Jesus and be healed. That’s real friendship. And according to Jesus, it is real faith: the kind of faith that can, quite literally, tear the roof off the joint. But what’s most interesting about the story we’ll see today is this: it’s the first time in the Gospel Jesus points to a group of individuals and tells them in front of the crowds: “this right here is what I’m looking for. Your sins are forgiven. Take up your mat and walk.” And in so doing, the paralytic and his four crazy friends have a lot to teach us about the type of faith Jesus looks for in us. So turn with me to Mark 2:1-12. And notice the activity in their faith as we read.

A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home.² They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them.³ Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them.⁴ 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.⁵ When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”⁶ Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves,⁷ “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”⁸ 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?⁹ Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk’?¹⁰ But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the man,¹¹ “I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home.”¹² 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!”

What the Paralytic and His Four Crazy Friends Have to Teach Us About the Type of Faith God Looks for in Us:

1. No excuses

- **Excuses for Car Wrecks from the Metropolitan Insurance Company:** (1) We hear a lot of excuses in our lives. But insurance companies hear them the most, particularly for auto accidents. I ran across these real ones from the Metropolitan Insurance Company: (a) I pulled away from the side of the road, glanced at my mother-in-law, and headed straight over the embankment; (b) I thought the window was down, but found out it was up when my head went through it; (c) As I approached the intersection, a stop sign suddenly appeared in a place where no stop sign has ever appeared before.

- **Main Idea of the Point:** Those who are weak in their faith – or lack it altogether – often use “people” as their excuse. But not for the paralytic and his four crazy friends. No person in that crowd was going to stop them from tearing up the roof to go down to Jesus.
- **Main Textual Emphasis: Jesus Rapid Growing Public Ministry in Capernaum and the Friend’s Quandary:** (1) Mark has already laid out in ch.1 what has taken place in Capernaum (a city in Galilee) to cause the masses to swell: (a) He called Andrew/Peter and James/John as disciples; (b) He taught with authority in a synagogue and cast out the devil in church; (c) He healed Peter’s mother in law; (d) He healed the sick and demon-possessed; (e) he healed a man of leprosy, who told everybody after Jesus told him not to. As a result, he and his disciples had to leave town. (2) Now Jesus has come back into town, the city had gotten wind of it and the masses swelled and swelled and swelled. (3) Here was the one guy – the paralytic - out of the crowd who needed to see Jesus but couldn’t. (4) But desperate times call for desperate measures. And they were not going to let the swells of people prevent them from getting close to Jesus.
- **App:** We have a tendency in life to let people effect our relationship with Jesus and the church. I see it all the time. But people are no excuse for your faithfulness or lack thereof.

2. Desperate circumstances require desperate measures

- **The Desperate Cries in the Land of Oz (1)** In the Land of Oz, there were three desperate cries from three desperate residents who were willing to do anything and everything to plead their case before the wizard: (1) “When a man’s an empty kettle, he should be on his metal. If he only had a brain.” – Tinman (2) “I could unravel every riddle for every individdle if I only had a brain.” – Scarecrow. (3) “If I was king of the forest, I’d click my heel and the trees would kneel, and the mountains bow, and the bulls kowtow.” – Lion.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** Those who are weak in their faith – or lack it altogether – will look at their unfavorable circumstances and say: “nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen. Nobody knows my sorrows.” But not the paralytic and his four crazy friends. The paralytic, carried by his friends, took his present circumstances to Jesus – and only to Jesus - with the hope of an answer for better ones.
- **Main Textual Emphasis: The Hard Life of a Paralytic in Biblical Times and His Desperate Decision:** (1) He needed help to get from one place to the other. Every single day of his life. Just to make the journey to be part of the crowd would have required help. Just like today. (2) He would have considered himself cursed by God. That’s the way people viewed those types of limitations in those days. (3) As a result, for someone in a religious world who needed help because they were paralyzed, help was hard to find. For they thought in those days, the same and reproach that was paralysis would/could fall upon them. (4) So to receive help, you have to have special people. And he had them. (5) And here was the thought process of the paralytic: “I might be paralyzed. I might be cursed. I might need help. I might not find any. But if I know there is a remote possibility Jesus might help me, then I’m going to do whatever I can to find out. Like Mephibosheth, I want his grace to cover my legs.”
- **App:** There is a difference between “wishing” and “hoping” in unfavorable circumstances. “Wishing” is passive. It requires no effort. It says “I wish things were different, but I know they’ll never be. But “hoping” is active. It requires navigation through the crowd, through any means necessary, in order to experience the hands of the One who can change those circumstances.

3. Active, courageous, and risk taking

- **African Impalas** – (1) If you go to the Palm Beach Zoo, you can see lions, tigers and bears, oh my. (2) But if you walk to the middle of a zoo, there is one animal you’ll find very interesting. It’s the African Impala. (2) The only thing that separates the impala from the people is a 6-foot fence. (3) I asked the zookeeper why the fence was so small and he said: “impalas have the ability to jump 15 feet in the air. But they absolutely refuse to do so if they can’t see where their feet are going to land.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** Those who are weak in their faith – or lack it altogether – fear taking a risk because they (a) don’t want to face the possibility of rejection or (b) don’t want to stand out. But not the paralytic and his four crazy friends. They deconstructed a roof in front of the masses just to get a glimpse of the One who’s hands can heal. With no assurances whatsoever about what would/could happen.
- **Main Textual Emphasis: Tearing the Roof Off the Place and a Surprising Response from Jesus:** (1) These friends don’t know how long Jesus is going to stay in Capernaum, so they are desperate to see Jesus. (2) They decide to climb onto the roof and harness the paralytic up. (3) Roofs were constructed in the 1st century in Galilee by laying tree branches and limbs on the top of the house and then putting a layer of mud over the top of it followed by another layer of straw and gravel. (4) They were “unroofing the roof” and the people below would have been showered with dirt and debris.(5) It also stopped Jesus from his teaching when he looks up, sees their faith and says: “your sins are forgiven.” (6) That’s something you don’t expect because (a) Jesus is claiming to be

God with these words because only God can forgive and (b) The paralytic thought his greatest need was physical healing. It was forgiveness instead.

- **App:** Faith isn't passive. It's active. It requires courage. And sometimes it requires standing out from the rest of the crowd. But here's the thing about faith: what we learn about God and ourselves from it comes in direct portion to our participation in it.
4. Applause from heaven counts, not the worlds.
- **The One Place Derrick Never Follows Orders:** (1) Elementary, Middle School, and High School graduations; (2) Before the students walk, the instructions are clear: "please hold your applause until the end; (3) And I start out doing that. But if I see one of our kids walking across the stage, I go to town clapping; (4) I can't help myself. I want to show the world my approval for that student.
 - **Main Idea of the Point:** Those who are weak in their faith – or lack it altogether – can get discouraged when the world and/or people close to you don't respond favorably to the news of your divine intervention. But not the paralytic. He didn't let the hardness of the scribes heart rob him of the joy of taking up his mat and walking forward.
 - **Main Textual Emphasis: Why the Scribes Don't Applaud:** (1) In verse 7, the narrative of the story moves from the action of the paralytic and his four friends to the scribe's hardness of heart. (2) Because the miracle was public, and because the paralytic took up his mat and walked, the scribes could have rejoiced and considered the significance of Jesus. But they didn't. (3) They accused Jesus of blasphemy because to be forgiven, you had to go to a high priest and make a sacrifice. That wasn't done. That's because Jesus was the high priest and would be the sacrifice. And he had the authority to do so because he was also God in the flesh.
 - **App:** We have two choices in life about what we desire: (a) the applause of the crowd. If we desire that we will be disappointed when they don't clap at God's divine intervention. Or we can seek (b) the applause of heaven. And that applause always comes when we, like the paralytic, don't let anything or anyone prevent us from getting close to Jesus. Hallelujah. Thine the Glory.