

INTRODUCTION

As we follow Jesus through the Gospel According to Mark we come to one of my favorite miracles in the life of Jesus. It's the story where four men tear up a roof and lower their paralyzed friend until he's hanging in front of Jesus. These four friends dug a skylight in a house so that they could get their friends to Jesus. But this same skylight allowed Jesus to see these four men. And this unintentional skylight also filled the house with light.

Part of our job as followers of Jesus is to build skylights to bring light to dark places. In this message I'm going to challenge you to apply for a job working in the Faith Skylight Company. I'm actually going to have you fill out a job application.

If you've ever had a job interview or filled out an employment application, you know it can be a nerve-racking experience. You can go online and find some humorous statements people made during job interviews. Here are seven of my favorites:

1. "Could I have a cup of coffee? I think I still may be a little drunk from last night."
2. "I was fired from my last job because they were forcing me to take anger management classes."
3. "If I get a job offer, how long before I have to take the drug test?"
4. "Can we speed this up? I've got to be somewhere else."
5. "It's best for your other employees if I don't work with people."
6. "I'd prefer to work for a company that is very lax on tardiness."
7. Provide an emergency contact number: "911"

I seriously doubt any of those applicants got the job. Let's read about four entrepreneurial friends who started the first faith skylight company two thousand years ago.

Mark 2:1-12. "A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, 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 and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralytic was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, '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 the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins..." He said to the paralytic, '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!'"

This is one of my favorite stories. I have so many questions. I wondered what the homeowner said when he saw his ceiling start crumbling; dirt and dust starts falling on Jesus and on everyone

in the room. If I had been the homeowner I would have said, "Hey, who's going to pay for this damage?" As the four guys keep creating an unintentional skylight I can't imagine Jesus could keep talking, there was too much distraction. But because He knows all things, He realized what was happening. Perhaps He said something like, "We interrupt this sermon to bring you a paralyzed man. Please direct your attention to what's left of the ceiling."

I wonder if the paralyzed man felt any fear from this ordeal of being lowered by ropes to hang in front of Jesus. So, what did you do today? "Oh, I was just hanging around Jesus for a while."

But I think the main focus of this miracle should be on those four unnamed friends who brought their paralyzed buddy to Jesus. For many years I studied this passage before I saw a key verse. In verse 5 it says, "When Jesus saw THEIR faith..." He saw the faith of those four friends. You may think that faith is invisible, but according to Jesus, faith can be seen. Can Jesus see your faith? Do you have an invisible faith or a visible faith?

These four guys formed the Faith Skylight Company. I think God wants everyone of us to be employed in this company. I'm going to ask you to apply for a position. But first you probably need to know what your job description will be if you work for the Faith Skylight Company. Here it is: Creating skylights so people can meet Jesus.

Real carpenters build real skylights so the light of the sun can brighten dark places in a home. When you work for the Faith Skylight Company you create openings to the light of the SON can brighten dark places in someone's heart.

If you're interested in applying for a position, here's the job application. Check each box that applies to you.

1. I CARE ABOUT HURTING PEOPLE

The story begins with this statement, "Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic." These four men had a friend or a relative who was suffering. He was paralyzed, and there was no way he could get to Jesus on his own. These friends had heard Jesus was in Capernaum and they were convinced Jesus could help their friend. They had an unshakable faith in Him.

They remind me of the kid who was playing a sandlot baseball game. He was playing third base and an onlooker walked up and said, "What's the score?" The kid pounded his glove and said, "Forty-two to zero, their favor." The man said, "You're getting beat pretty badly, huh?"

The kid looked at him and smiled and said, "Nope, 'cause we haven't even been up to bat yet!"

These four friends believed if they could somehow get their friend to Jesus that Jesus could make a difference in his life.

We're surrounded by hurting people; the question is do you care enough to bring them to Jesus? We have a lot of information that we share, but people don't care about how much you know until they know how much you care.

There were probably hundreds of sick and weak people in Galilee, but these four men concentrated on just one. That's good advice for us. Would you ask God to sensitize your heart and lead you to just one hurting person who needs Jesus?

Then would you be willing to bring them to Jesus? You may be thinking, "Pastor, Jesus was there in that house in Capernaum, and now He's ascended into heaven. How can I bring a hurting friend to Jesus?" Simple. You can bring your hurting friend to the church, which is the body of Christ on planet earth. This is the place where they can find hope, help, and healing. But you've got to really believe Jesus can make a difference and then you've got to care enough to bring them.

There are hurting people living in spiritual darkness. In order to work for the Faith Skylight Company you've got to care enough for them that you'll do everything you can to let the light of Jesus fill their darkness.

2. I'M WILLING TO WORK WITH A TEAM

The Bible says this paralyzed man was "...carried by four of them." They teamed up for their friend. They did as a team what none of them could have done individually. Can you imagine one of the friends trying to carry the paralyzed man? Two or three might have been able to do it. But because the cot he was lying on had four corners, a team of four people made sense.

John Maxwell has a saying: It's teamwork that makes the dream work. Someone said T.E.A.M. stands for "Together Everyone Accomplishes More."

Do you remember this year's Superbowl? The Broncos were playing the Seahawks. I was pulling for the Broncos, and they were the favorites going into the game. But they were embarrassed by the Seahawks by a score of 43-8. What happened? Denver had the superstars like Peyton Manning. Several Broncos had Superbowl experience and rings. But not a single player on the Seahawks roster had ever played in a Superbowl. The difference? Teamwork.

MVP Malcolm Smith was interviewed after the game and asked the secret of the team's success. He said it was the focus of every player to be a team, not an individual star. The Seahawks didn't have a bunch of superstars. They had a group of players committed to play as a team. Take Smith for example. Out of USC, he was slow and undersized and wasn't even invited to the NFL Combines. He was drafted in the seventh round and probably only because Coach Pete Carroll had coached him at USC. And Coach Carroll preached teamwork in every practice. And even when practice was over, the players and coaches didn't leave and go their separate ways. They often held dinners and outings for the players and coaches families. They stressed teamwork on and off the field.

That Superbowl win was a tribute to the value of teamwork. Someone has given a great definition of teamwork: "We may not have it all together, but together we have it all." That's the value of being a part of a church, and being a part of a small group. That's your team. The Christian life was never meant to be a solo sport. We need each other.

You and some friends who know the Lord should team up with the goal of helping another friend who doesn't know the Lord. You might never be able to help that person all alone, but if you enlist some people to help you, a team can accomplish much more than an individual. If you want to work for the Faith Skylight Company, you must be willing to work with a team.

3. I SEE OBSTACLES AS OPPORTUNITIES

The Bible says this team of friends faced several obstacles. "They could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd." The first obstacle was the crowd. I've seen the ruins of Capernaum many times. The lanes between the houses are so narrow there was barely enough room for two people to pass. The house was full and the narrow lanes were filled with people wanting to catch the words of Jesus inside the house.

Then there was the obstacle of the house itself. The houses were built with black basalt stone and then covered with plaster. There was only one door, and there were only a few small windows cut at the top of the walls under the ceiling. There was no back door or window to use to bring in the stretcher. The roof of the house was another obstacle. On top of the stone walls, wooden timbers were used as ceiling joists. A mixture of palm leaves, mud, and clay were mixed into a thick mortar and placed in layers between the timbers. When each layer dried another layer was added until there was a thick, waterproof roof. Then more palm leaves were placed on top of the roof. These roofs were thick and hard as a rock.

But these four friends didn't let obstacles stop them. They saw these obstacles as opportunities. They kept on moving toward Jesus. How do you react when you're confronted with obstacles? Many people see obstacles as God's way of saying, "Stop." But obstacles are often simply opportunities for faith. When Moses led the children of Israel they came to the Red Sea and faced an obstacle. If they had thought like some people, they would have said, "Oh well, God wants us to go back to Egypt, or He wouldn't have placed this big obstacle here."

Wrong. God put it there for them to see His glory. Moses took the Rod of God and touched the water and the obstacle turned into a bridge of freedom. Have there been times when you've given up just because there was an obstacle in your way?

Sometimes things we think are the worst thing that can happen turn into the very best thing that can happen. I grew up in L.A., Lower Alabama, and in the 19th century. Cotton was king in the south. As the primary crop, cotton brought prosperity to South Alabama. However, in the early 20th century, the Mexican Boll Weevil crossed into Texas, and then the Texans drove it east until it found a home in South Alabama. It destroyed the cotton crops in South Alabama, and by 1915, the cotton farmers were broke. One farmer decided to plant a new-fangled plant from South America called a peanut. Soon, the cotton farmers had begun growing thousands of acres of peanuts, and they started making more money from peanuts than from cotton. Many people would have seen the boll weevil as an evil obstacle, but some saw it as a unique opportunity. In fact, you can drive to the city square of Enterprise, Alabama and you will see a monument to a Boll Weevil.

If you want to work for the Faith Skylight Company, you’ve got to see obstacles as opportunities.

4. I LOOK FOR CREATIVE WAYS TO SOLVE PROBLEMS

There were obstacles, but these men of faith found a way to overcome the obstacles. The Bible says, “They made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on.”

Let’s listen in on an imaginary conversation among these men of faith. “Wow. That’s a lot of people. We can’t get in the front door.” Another says, “You’re right. Hey, look, see those stairs to the roof? Nobody’s up there. Let’s head up there.” So they carefully carry the cot with their friend on it. They get to the roof and see the thick timbers with the dried mud and leaves between each timber. “That’s too thick to dig through with our hands.” They put their friend down and say, “Now, don’t go anywhere. We’ll be right back.”

One returns with a metal hoe from a garden. Another found a crude axe for cutting trees. The third returns with a shovel. The fourth returns with four thick strands of rope. Then they start chopping and digging through the roof. They aren’t concerned about the expense or the damage. Desperate faith leads people to do desperate things. Their only thought is getting their friend to Jesus.

We’re always going to face problems. But people of faith should always be looking for creative ways to solve problems. A friend told me about a businessman from NYC who was going to take a month-long trip to London. He went to his local Manhattan bank and asked to borrow \$1,000 for the trip. He even drove in his new Cadillac as collateral. He was a good customer, so they gave him his money. When he returned he paid back the full \$1,000 plus \$6 interest. The banker said, “I’m curious. You’ve got plenty of money; I wonder why you wanted to borrow \$1,000 for this trip?” The businessman said, “Where else could I park my new Cadillac in a safe place in Manhattan for \$6 a month?” He was thinking creatively.

Do you remember the Rubik’s cube? Back in the 1980s it was all the rage. It was a cube you could twist and twist and twist and the goal was to get all the colors on the same side. Back in the early 1990s I was the pastor of a church in Alabama where I did a children’s sermon every Sunday morning. For this particular Sunday I had purchased a new Rubik’s cube and had figured out how to turn it about three times and then return it to be solved. I had practiced it several times until I could solve it in three quick moves. The point I was going to make to the children was that life is full of problems, but with the help of Jesus, there isn’t any problem that is unsolvable, like this Rubik’s cube. The trouble started before the worship service. I left the Rubik’s cube on the desk in my office. Every Sunday morning about six to eight deacons would meet me there and we would have prayer before the service. That particular morning I walked in and saw that one of the nice older deacons had picked up the Rubik’s cube and was twisting away at it. I’m usually pretty calm but I yelled, “Put that down!” I quickly explained I had prepared it to solve quickly. So, I tried to fix it but only got farther away from the solution. So for the children’s sermon that day I just had to say, “Kids, there are some problems that are just humanly impossible to solve—like this Rubik’s cube—so we should ask God to solve our

problems." It was weak, but that's all I could come up with!

So, think about your friend or friends who need Jesus. What are some creative ways you can team up with others to expose that person to the light and life of Jesus Christ. Have two or three of your friends invite a mutual friend to see "Heaven is for Real" or "God's Not Dead" at the movie theatre. Use acts of kindness. Write them a note telling them how much you care for them. If you want to work for the Faith Skylight Company you will need to come up with creative ways to solve problems.

5. I DON'T QUIT EVEN WHEN CRITICIZED

What would you do if someone started digging a hole in your roof? You'd probably call the cops. What would you do if you saw someone digging a hole in your neighbor's roof? You'd call the cops. I think it's reasonable to think that the homeowner or neighbor of this house probably yelled up for the men to stop destroying that roof. But they didn't stop. They kept on digging.

Jesus didn't tell them to stop. Why? Because Jesus knows people matter more than buildings. Jesus knew there were two miracles that were going to happen as a result of that skylight. First, Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven." That's the greatest miracle in the world. That's what Jesus wants to say to each of you today. "Your sins are forgiven."

But even Jesus was criticized. The religious leaders were thinking, "Who does He think He is? Only God can forgive sins!" They were right. Only God can forgive sins. Jesus knew what they were thinking, just like He knows what we're thinking right now.

He said, "So, what's a bigger miracle? Forgiveness or healing? You all expected me to heal him. Well, just so you will know that the Son of Man has power to forgive sin, go ahead, friend, grab your bed and walk out of here."

And that's what the man did. I can imagine Jesus looking up at the four workers in the Faith Skylight Company, and He smiled at them as they were high-fiving and hugging each other.

Do you have friends or family members who need Jesus? Don't give up on them. Even if you are criticized don't stop enlarging that skylight. Just keep letting them see the light of Jesus. When Jesus sees your faith, He'll smile, too.

CONCLUSION

Of all these characters in this story, which one do you see most like yourself? You may relate to the paralyzed man. You may not be physically paralyzed, but you are bound by sin and you need to have Jesus forgive you. Jesus is in the house today. If you will come to Him and honestly say that you are in need and ask Him for His help He will say to you the same thing He said, to that paralyzed man, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

For others of you who are Christians already, you see yourself like the four friends. You want to work for the Faith Skylight Company. You want to open ways for your friends to meet Jesus.

But there were other people in this story. They were the one who were crowding in the house, even the religious leaders. In other words there were two kinds of people there. Some were on the way to Jesus and some were IN the way of Jesus.

It's true of our church today. You are either actively bringing people to Jesus, or you are basically just coming, sitting, listening and going home.

I have always been fascinated with the ministry of the great Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon. He was pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London in the 19th century. Most experts agree there was a particular sermon Spurgeon preached in 1887 that caused the congregation to explode with growth. Many called it the turning point in the life of the Metropolitan Tabernacle. Do you know what the sermon was about? It was taken from this passage we studied today. The title of his message was "Sitting By." He preached about the Pharisees and teachers of the law who were content to "sit by" as Jesus was performing this miracle. He applied it to Christians who are satisfied to always be "sitting by." He described an entire category of church attendees who were basically good for nothing. All they did was take up space. Spurgeon boldly told those Christians who were content to "sit by" never to return because they were only in the Lord's way. That sermon had such a great impact on people that throughout the next week hundreds of members of his church expressed to him that they were no longer going to be "sitting by." They would become like the four friends who brought someone to Jesus.

When Spurgeon arrived the next Sunday, he wasn't prepared for what he found. It was as if every member of his church had brought someone who needed Jesus. Hundreds were led to Christ that day and it began a spiritual awakening in London that lasted many years.

What do you think would happen in our church if a couple thousand of you made up your mind that you weren't going to be "sitting by" anymore? What would happen next Sunday if a couple thousand of you brought your friends, relatives, and work associates who need Jesus?

The Boss is offering you the job today. Will you come to work for the Faith Skylight Company? The pay isn't very much, but the retirement benefits are out of this world!

OUTLINE

APPLICATION FOR FAITH SKYLIGHT COMPANY

Job Description: Creating skylights so people can meet Jesus.

Check all that apply:

- 1. I CARE ABOUT HURTING PEOPLE
- 2. I'M WILLING TO WORK WITH A TEAM
- 3. I SEE OBSTACLES AS OPPORTUNITIES
- 4. I LOOK FOR CREATIVE WAYS TO SOLVE PROBLEMS
- 5. I DON'T QUIT EVEN WHEN CRITICIZED

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



*David O. Dykes, Pastor
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