

## INTRODUCTION

One of the biggest problems with Christians is that we don't share the good news about Jesus with others. We are too selfish with the gospel. I heard a story about a man who was taking a course in first aid. He attended the classes, read the books and was learning a lot about providing medical aid to those in need. One evening, he told his class he actually had the opportunity to use his first aid training that week. He said, "I heard a terrible crash in my front yard, and when I walked out on my front porch I saw that a car had run into a large tree. I could tell the driver was hurt—it wasn't pretty. But because of my training, I knew exactly what to do. I sat down on the front steps and put my head between my knees so I wouldn't faint."

That reminds me of many Christians. We know the cure but we are only applying it to ourselves. We aren't using our knowledge to help others. Today we are going to read about four unselfish friends who were willing to bring their friend to Jesus. It's one of my very favorite episodes in Jesus' life. I preached on a couple of these verses a few years ago but today I am going to share the full passage that describes this incident. Let's read about it and then we will learn some powerful principles we can apply to our lives.

Luke 5: 17-26. "One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick. Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, he said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven.'"

The Pharisees and teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? Which is easier: to say 'your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'get up and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins..." He said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."

I have been to the ruins of Capernaum many times and seen the narrow streets with the little houses side by side sharing common walls like our modern apartment complexes. A crowd of only 100 people would have made for a human traffic jam that would fill the little rooms and overflow into the narrow streets. It would have looked like our crowded halls between our three worship services!

Try to picture Jesus as He was sitting in that small room. Every available place in the room was occupied with people sitting and standing. We are told many of these people were the religious mafia, the official teachers of the Law. These Pharisees traveled all the way from Jerusalem to check out this renegade preacher. Suddenly, in the midst of His teaching session, pieces of the straw and plaster roof started falling on Jesus and on those seated around him. I'm sure everyone

wondered what was going on. They must have watched, as the small hole got larger and larger. All the time, straw, plaster, and pieces of wood were falling on those in the room. Soon they could see the sweating faces of four determined men. When the hole was large enough, these four men used ropes or long pieces of cloth to gently lower their paralyzed friend until he was hanging in midair. Jesus looked up. Moved by the faith of those four friends He said, "Be healed!" Wait, that's not what He says; although that is what everyone expected Jesus to say. I love it. Jesus almost always says and does the unexpected! He says to this paralyzed man, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

What happened next tells us a lot about Jesus and can tell us a lot about ourselves. From this great story, I want to share five powerful principles we can apply to our lives today.

### **1. The best thing you can do for a person is to bring them to Jesus**

These four unnamed men are my heroes. They had a friend with a need. They believed Jesus could help their friend, so they took it upon themselves to bring their friend to Jesus. Let me ask you a few personal questions: Do you have any friends, family members, classmates or work associates who need what Jesus can do for them? Do you care about them? Do you really believe Jesus can make a difference in their lives? If you do, *you will do whatever it takes* to bring them to Jesus.

If you see a hungry man who needs food, you ought to feed him. That's good. If you see someone who is cold without a coat, you ought to give him or her a coat. That's wonderful. If you meet someone who is troubled and needs someone to listen to them talk about their problems, you ought to listen. All of those are good things to do. But I want to emphasize that the *very best* thing you can do for a person is to bring them to Jesus. Why? Because a hungry man will be hungry again. A cold person will need another coat when that one wears out. But Jesus can meet a need that lasts *forever*.

You see, this paralyzed man was unable to come to Jesus on his own. Someone had to bring him. Everyday you are surrounded by people who are spiritually blind and spiritually bound. They *can't* come to Jesus on their own. 2 Corinthians 4:4 tells us the devil has "blinded their eyes" so they cannot see the truth. If you don't bring your friends to Jesus, they probably won't come on their own.

Are you willing to bring your friends to Jesus? It's the best thing you can do for any person. By now, you are probably thinking, "Well, sure, those four guys could bring their friend to Jesus, He was right there in Capernaum. How can I bring my friends to Jesus? After all, He is resurrected and ascended into heaven. How can I bring them to Him now?" Good question. Here's the answer:

### **Bringing a person to the Body of Christ (the Church) works today!**

Jesus *is* here today—the church is the Body of Christ. When you bring someone you care about to Church, you really are bringing him or her to Christ. These four friends of Jesus didn't try to give their paralyzed buddy any psycho-babble advice. They just brought and presented him to Jesus

and left the rest up to Him. You can do the same thing today. Jesus is alive and well and living in His church!

Several weeks ago, I got an e-mail from a guy I hadn't heard from in over 15 years. His e-mail triggered my memory. I met Mark on a golf course in Alabama. Our group only had three that day so the starter asked if Mark could join our group. Before Mark knew I was a preacher, he started telling me how lousy his life was. He had recently moved to the area and didn't have any real friends. Before we finished the front nine, I could tell he was an overworked, stressed-out young executive. He was basically at the end of his rope. When he finally got around to asking me what I did, he had already filled the air with every cuss word and profanity known to man (and some I believe that were unknown to man). When he found out I was a preacher he was sincerely apologetic for his language. He said, “Maybe you can help me.” I could have gone into the preacher mode and said something like, “let's kneel down here on the 18<sup>th</sup> green and you get right with God.” Instead, I said, “Mark, I may not be able to help you, but I really believe Jesus can. I am willing to be your friend. Why don't you visit our church this Sunday and see if you don't start finding some help for your problems.” The other two guys also befriended Mark. It's good to use a “tag team” approach (just like these four guys in the story). The next Sunday, one of these men picked Mark up and brought him to our church. To make a long story short, Jesus did make a difference in Mark's life. He was saved and became a growing Christian. His company soon moved him away and I lost track of him. Now he is married and an active leader in his church in another state. His e-mail to me basically said, “Thank you for leading me to Jesus.”

Now stop for a moment and think: Who do you need to thank for leading you to Jesus? I thank God that my parents took me to church when I was young. That's where I met Jesus. Thank you mom and dad! Is there someone you need to thank? Next question: How many of your friends have you brought to Jesus? There's still time, so get busy!

The next thing, we see from this story is:

## **2. People matter more to God than buildings**

Back to Capernaum. These four friends arrived at the street where Jesus is teaching. They found people packed into the narrow space with no room to spare. But these fearless friends refused to give up. Instead of quitting, they got *creative*. They came up with a new idea to get their friend to Jesus. They climbed up on the flat roof and began to dig away at the straw and plaster forming the roof. They were going to do whatever it took of them to get their friend to Jesus.

Now, let's switch the scene to inside the room below. Jesus looked up and saw the roof being dismantled. He could have said, “Stop that right now! Who's going to pay for that roof?” Instead, Jesus knew what was happening and He knew that a roof can be fixed—it's only a building. But a person with a genuine need was more important than that building.

Could you imagine what would happen in this room right now if suddenly we saw a power saw punch through and start cutting a hole large enough to lower a person through? There would be folks crying out in horror at what was happening to our beautiful building. The first question

some people in church always ask is “How much is it going to cost?” Our first question always ought to be, “What is Jesus doing? Let’s join Him.”

We are building a beautiful new building and spending \$26 million on it. We need more space. However, we’ve got to understand that the value of one soul who needs Jesus is worth more than a hundred buildings like the one next door. Jesus asked the question, “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:36-37)

If you could put a price tag on the eternal soul of one of your friends without Jesus, what amount would be on that price tag? \$26 billion? \$26 trillion? No, both those numbers are way too low. The price tag would simply read, “priceless.”

We get so involved in building buildings that we forget Jesus is interested in *building His church*. That’s why I had this phrase put on the sign in front of our construction: Building a house of worship while Jesus builds His church. The church is people. Jesus died for people, not for a building!

Church buildings aren’t shrines or holy sites. They are tools we use to reach people and to worship God. When I work in my vegetable garden, I often use a shovel to turn the soil. Then I can plant the seeds. A shovel is only a tool; it’s not the growth of the plants. It’s an effective tool that makes turning the soil easier. This building we are building is a nice, expensive tool. It will allow us to be more effective in turning the soil of human hearts to plant the good seed of the word of God. But if we ever think the most important thing we can do is to build buildings, we have missed God.

In the first three hundred years of the Christian church, they didn’t even have buildings. They met in homes and public buildings and open areas. They baptized in rivers and lakes. The church became institutionalized when the church started building buildings. In my dictionary, a synonym for institutionalized is “imprisoned.” Thank God for this building, but we must remember that to God *people matter more than buildings*.

### **3. The greatest need a person has is forgiveness**

Sometimes you hear people talk about “lowering your expectations” or “raising your expectations.” I started to title this message “Lowering and Raising Your Expectations.” In this miracle of Jesus, there are four men who literally lower their expectations in front of Jesus. I mean, they used ropes and physically lowered their paralyzed friend in front of Jesus. And then, Jesus literally raises their expectations when he heals the paralyzed man from his mat. When these four crazy roof-rippers lowered their friend in front of Jesus, everyone was waiting to see what He would do and say. I’m sure there was a powerful moment of total silence. I love the part where it says “When Jesus saw their faith...” I believe He saw the faith of the four friends as well as the faith of the paralyzed man. That’s when Jesus looked at the paralyzed man and said something completely unexpected. He said, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.”

Forgiven? Who said anything about needing forgiveness? It seems a strange word to say to a paralytic. Everyone else there thought his greatest need was for physical healing ... but not according to Jesus. Jesus is able to look below the surface and to determine the real problem. This man wasn't a paralytic because he was a sinner. We are all sinners - and whatever our physical condition, we need forgiveness. The very first word that Jesus spoke from the cross was, "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34)

Jesus is going to heal the paralytic physically, but that is a minor miracle compared to the miracle of forgiveness. Divine forgiveness is the greatest miracle that can ever happen to a person. I say that for several reasons. (1) Forgiveness meets the greatest need of a person; (2) Forgiveness demands the highest price—it cost Jesus His life-blood at the cross. (3) Forgiveness lasts the longest time. Physical healing only lasts a few years but forgiveness lasts an eternity.

There are many needy people around us. Some need housing, others need food, and others need clothing. We see poor people who need money. We see sick people who need health. We see confused people who need peace of mind. So many needs surround us, we often feel overwhelmed. But the greatest need everyone possesses is the need for forgiveness. That's why the very best thing you can do for your friends is to bring them to Jesus, because He is the only one who can do anything about their greatest need.

#### **4. It's better to be a stretcher carrier than a sermon critic**

As soon as Jesus spoke those words of forgiveness, some of the religious mafia were offended. They questioned Jesus' authority to forgive sins. They were sitting there criticizing His statement, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." While Jesus was helping this poor man, they were sitting there thinking that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy.

It's easy to see there were two kinds of people there that day. The stretcher carriers and the sermon critics: Which one are you? Are you actively bringing people to Jesus? Or are you just come to church and sit there and think about all the things you don't like about the church? I have found that people who bring others to Christ are usually the sweetest, most cooperative people in a church. On the other hand, we have too many people who are self-appointed Pharisees who only look for things to criticize.

As they were thinking these thoughts of blasphemy, Jesus read their minds, just like He is reading your mind here today. Obviously, I don't have the ability to know what you are thinking. Actually, I'm glad I *can't* read your mind while I'm preaching! If I could, I would probably be too distracted or disturbed to keep preaching.

Jesus' response to these sermon critics was amazing. While He was in the process of forgiving sins and healing a paralyzed man, He also delivered a powerful message to those sermon critics. Look at verse 22. Jesus asks, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts?" He follows that with another question: "Which is easier: to say 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?" Then He makes this awesome statement: "But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins..."

Let’s examine Jesus’ statement for a moment. I want to ask you to stretch your mind a little. I often say the Christian life is not rational or logical. But conversely it is not irrational or illogical. I tend to think the things of God are so far beyond our ability to understand that I would call them “supra-rational” or “supre-logical.” There is a classical field of study called logic. Basically, the science of logic seeks to develop methods and principles for determining correct and incorrect reasoning. It is an accepted method of arriving at a conclusion by presenting one or more propositions or premises.

### **A Categorical Syllogism**

Now if this is new to you, it may boggle your mind a little. Sometimes a thinking person assumes they can merely check their brain at the door of the church. Wake up and pay attention, because I want to apply the science of logic to try to arrive at a conclusion about *who Jesus claimed to be*. When there are two stated premises and one conclusion, it is often called a categorical syllogism. That’s a fancy label, but it just means “how to figure something out logically.” Let’s apply it to what we learn in this passage.

#### **Premise A: Only God can forgive sins**

The teachers of the law asked this question among themselves: Who can forgive sins but God alone? That was a sound premise on which both the teachers of the law and Jesus agreed. Sin is a spiritual violation of God’s commands. Since all sin is against God, He is the only One who has authority to forgive it.

#### **Premise B: Jesus claimed authority to forgive sins**

Jesus accepted their premise and followed with a logical argument. He said, “That you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins . . .” He was claiming that He *did* have the authority to forgive sins. There is really no way to argue with the fact that Jesus said these words. Matthew, Mark and Luke recorded them.

#### **Valid conclusion: Jesus claimed to be God**

Look at those three statements again. Some people say Jesus never claimed to be Divine. But this and other passages show us clearly and logically that Jesus claimed to be God. Now you can’t prove logically whether or not He *was* God, but you have to accept the fact that He *claimed* to be God because He claimed to have the authority to forgive sins. The reason this is so important is because so many people try to say Jesus was merely a good teacher who never claimed to be God. It goes back to the classic argument suggested by C. S. Lewis: You can’t just say that Jesus was merely a good man. He was either a LIAR, (He claimed to be God, but knew He wasn’t); or a LUNATIC (He claimed to be God and really thought He was, but He wasn’t); or the *only* other option is that He is LORD. In other words, He *did* claim to be God. It’s up to you to believe it or not.

So, if somebody at work or school asks you what you learned in church today, tell them you learned a categorical syllogism that proved logically that Jesus claimed to be God. It will impress your friends and teachers!

The final thing we learn from this incident is:

### **5. The best evidence for truth is a changed life**

Jesus *did* claim to be God. He demonstrated it not only by forgiving the man's sins (his greatest need) but also by healing the man from his paralysis. Jesus used this healing miracle as a teaching tool to demonstrate to the people present that He *was* God. In verse 24, Jesus says, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." Get up? That's the one thing this man had been unable to do. He was powerless to get up and walk. We see here that Jesus never gives you a command without also giving you the supernatural power to obey Him.

The paralytic felt strength and health begin to flow into his arms and legs. He jumped up and grabbed his stretcher. Verse 25 says, "he went home praising God." I sure wish I could have been there to see that! The astonishment and love on the face of the man after he realized that his sins were forgiven and his body restored to wholeness. I don't imagine he slowly dragged himself out of the house. I picture him walking and leaping and praising God. I can just imagine Jesus looking up through the whole in the ceiling and seeing four faces with huge grins staring down at Jesus. I can see the looks of amazement on the faces of the religious mafia who just moments before had been convinced that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy. What made the difference? The paralytic was *changed*.

Remember our categorical syllogism? There are some people who are looking for some kind of "proof" to substantiate the truth of the Bible. While a logical argument may convince a few people about Jesus, the very best proof of the power of Jesus is a changed life. This paralyzed man had to be carried in but he walked out. He came to Jesus as a sinner and he walked away forgiven. That one encounter with Jesus changed his life. His life was a testimony to the power of Jesus Christ. Is that true for you as well? Have you met Jesus and allowed Him to change your life? If you have ever encountered Jesus you ought to be able to sing with honesty, "What a wonderful change in my life has been wrought since Jesus came into my heart. I have light in my soul for which long I had sought—since Jesus came into my heart. Clouds of joy over my soul like the sea billows roll since Jesus came into my heart!"

### **CONCLUSION**

This is a great story. Of all these characters we've examined, which one do you best identify with today? Some of you are like the paralyzed man. You may not be physically paralyzed, but you are bound by sin and you need to seek Jesus for His forgiveness. Jesus is here today in this crowded room. He knows your needs and He cares. Will you present yourself to Him today in faith? If you will come before Jesus today and say, "Lord, I am in bad shape. I've got lots of problems. I can't help myself but I believe you can help me. Will you help me, Lord?" If you come to Jesus in repentance and faith today, He *will* say to you, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." That's the first step in a wonderful life of knowing Jesus as your personal Savior.

For others of you who are Christians already, you are either a stretcher carrier or a sermon critic. You are either actively bringing people to Jesus, or you are basically just coming, sitting, listening and going home. May God give us more stretcher carriers and fewer sermon critics.

I have always been fascinated with the ministry of the great Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon. He was the Pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London last century. When we visited London in June, I took the tube to visit the location of his great Metropolitan Tabernacle. There is still a church there. At its height, there were eight to nine thousand people attending multiple services each Sunday. Out of necessity, Spurgeon often asked his regular attendees to stay home on a certain Sunday so there would be room for unbelievers to come and receive Christ. Sadly, today, only about 200 people gather there on Sundays.

Most experts agree that there was a particular sermon that Spurgeon preached in 1887 that caused that 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 that we have 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. He said some people are *on* the way to Jesus and others are *in* the way of Jesus! He 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 of thousand of you made up your minds 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? You can do the same thing these four men did and the same thing the members of Spurgeon's church did—we can do, the question is *will* we?

Are you content to sit by and watch? Are you willing to go out and bring your friends to Jesus? Leonard Ravenhill wrote the following poem several years ago. I have never been able to get it out of my mind: Could a sailor sit by idle, if he heard a drowning cry? Could a doctor sit in comfort and just watch his patients die? Could a fireman stand by idle, let men burn and lend no hand? Can you sit at ease in church with the world around damned?

There is nothing more important you can do than to help a person find eternal life in Jesus. Most of us recognize Louis Pasteur's name because of "pasteurized milk." He was a French chemist who is considered the father of microbiology. He was famous for many of his scientific discoveries but he considered his vaccine for rabies his greatest achievement. Pasteur lived during a time when thousands of people died from rabies. Pasteur started work on rabies in 1882,

but was frustrated because rabies is caused by a virus too small to be seen with a microscope. He developed an experimental vaccine but he was unsure if it would work. One day, a rabid dog bit 9-year-old Joseph Meister, who lived in Pasteur’s village. Joseph’s mother begged Pasteur to use the experimental vaccine on her son. Pasteur injected the boy for ten days—and he lived. When Louis Pasteur died in 1895, he asked that only three words be etched on his tombstone: JOSEPH MEISTER LIVED. He saw that as the most important contribution to the world.

What kind of heritage are you going to leave when you die? Will there be anyone you can point to at the end of your life and say, “JOHN DOE LIVES” because I brought Him to Jesus? What kind of spiritual heritage will you take to heaven with you? Will there be anyone in heaven because you brought them to Jesus?

## OUTLINE

### 1. THE BEST THING YOU CAN DO FOR A PERSON IS TO BRING THEM TO JESUS

*Bringing a person to the Body of Christ (the Church) works today!*

### 2. PEOPLE MATTER MORE TO GOD THAN BUILDINGS

### 3. THE GREATEST NEED A PERSON HAS IS FORGIVENESS

### 4. IT'S BETTER TO BE A STRETCHER CARRIER THAN A SERMON CRITIC

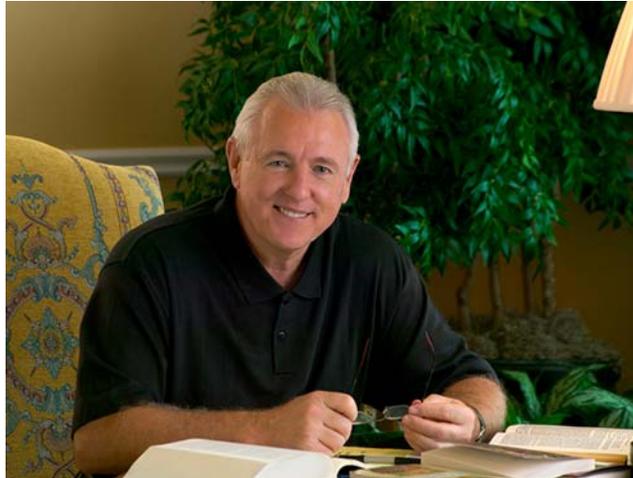
A categorical syllogism:

Premise A: Only God can forgive sins

Premise B: Jesus claimed authority to forgive sins

Valid conclusion: Jesus claimed to be God

### 5. THE BEST EVIDENCE FOR TRUTH IS A CHANGED LIFE



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes