

THROUGH THE ROOF

Mark 2:1-12

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*And again He 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. 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 ¹¹ 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!" **Mark 12:1-12.***

The expression, "through the roof" imply that something has suddenly gone sky high, seemingly out of control. Prices, taxes and tempers can all go "through the roof." In Mark 2 we see a man go through the roof. However, the direction is not up and the situation is not out of control. The man is literally let **down** through the roof under the careful control of his concerned friends, and into a situation controlled by the Lord Jesus Christ.

The account of the healing of the paralyzed man in **Mark 2:1-12** contains a number of lessons. To help us understand these lessons, however, let's consider the background for this miracle. The most unique feature of the setting, of course, is the creative way in which the paralyzed man's four friends brought him to Jesus. There seemed to be no way they could get the paralyzed man to Christ because a pressing crowd filled the room and blocked the entrance to the house where the Lord was teaching.

In Mark 2 we are told that Jesus went back to Capernaum. On His return, the news went around that He was around. Soon enough the room He entered was already crowded. It was wall-to-wall people on the inside and an overflow crowd on the outside too. It was jam-packed—people pressing against one another. Feel the body heat, smell the sweat. We're talking about a big crowd in a small place. Let us imagine the story this way and make some emphasis.

Houses like this weren't made for crowds like that. If it was Peter's house, and many scholars think it was, then it was an average man's house. It wasn't some sprawling five

or six thousand square-foot mansion you see from a boat ride. It was more like one of those little houses you see in some of the older parts of town—kind of square in shape and not a lot of square-feet in size. It was made of clay and had a set of steps along the side to access the roof. They built steps there so families could escape the heat of the day by reclining on the rooftop in the evenings when temperatures started to cool. It was a typical working man's house for its day.

Inside the house with Jesus were the big shots—some of the teachers of the law—Pharisee types—who wanted to hear this Jesus for themselves. Was He the real deal or was He a heretic? They wanted to know. And because they were big shots they got the best seats. Otherwise, it was every man for himself—just squeeze in wherever you could. And they squeezed in all right—to the point that even the door was blocked with this mass of humanity and if anybody showed up late, well, good luck finding a place to stand and see and hear.

But sure enough, five latecomers arrive—four men and their paralyzed friend. They're carrying him on a makeshift stretcher—each one manning a corner, toting their friend down the road, trying to stay in step with one another. It must have been a bumpy ride for the paralyzed man, *and for all I may say, he was trying to get them to stop and take him home.* But they are determined to get their friend to Jesus.

They stop in their tracks. *"Oh, no. What are we going to do now?"* says one. The paralytic strains to raise his head and see what's going on, and when he sees the crowd he drops his head back into the stretcher and says, *"I told you this was a waste of time. Now take me home."*

"There's got to be a way," said another of the friends. *"We're not going to carry you this far and turn back now. There's got to be a way."*

"Maybe they'll let us through," said another. *"It's worth a try."* And they made their way, each step a little heavier and a little harder than the one before.

They made it to the edge of the crowd: *"Excuse us, please. Coming through! Coming through!"*

"You're not coming through here," said a man leaning on his cane. *"Yeah,"* said a blind man, *"you'll have to wait in line like the rest of us."*

Well, that didn't work out so well. So they stepped back from the edge of the crowd and set their paralyzed friend on the ground while they rubbed their aching backs and considered their options. The paralytic speaks up, *"We'll never get through that crowd. We'll never get to Jesus."* And then one of his friends says, *"Now don't give up just yet; there's got to be another way."* Then one, who had stepped aside to get a better view of the situation said, *"I've got an idea—the steps. Let's use the steps. If we can get him up to the roof we can drop him right down at the feet of Jesus."*

"Are you crazy?" one piped up. *"Have you lost your mind? We could get in a lot of trouble for that, you know—tearing up people's houses. In case you hadn't heard, they call that vandalism."*

But the man was committed to his idea: *“Well I’m not coming this far to give up. If we can get him through the roof, we’ll pool our money together and fix it when we’re done. I’m telling you, it’s the only way.”*

Overhearing the conversation, the paralytic rolls his eyes and says, *“Would you guys just take me home ... please?”*

His friends ignored him. *“Let’s go for it,”* they said. And they did. They pushed through the crowd, stepping on a few toes, shoving a few people aside and made it to the steps. People were sitting on the first two or three steps, but they were clear after that. So up to the roof they went. And it wasn’t easy. Have you ever tried to carry up heavy load on a stair? How about a couch or a bed? It’s not easy to keep the load you are carrying balanced. The two guys on the higher steps had to keep their end of the stretcher lower, and the two guys on the lower steps had to hold their end of the stretcher higher. And the paralytic, who already felt like he was something of a spectacle by virtue of his condition, closed his eyes in embarrassment and prayed they wouldn’t drop him or that he wouldn’t roll off the stretcher and over the edge.

Huffing and puffing, they made it to the top. A couple of them were wiping their sweaty brows, another was shaking out his arms. And one put his ear to the roof to pinpoint as best he could the voice of Jesus. *“Right here,”* he announced. They started digging. And it wasn’t all that hard. A couple of them had their pocket knives. They would only have to break up the clay coating, dig out the brushwood and branches beneath, and stuff their paralytic friend, mat and all through the three-foot space between beams. And that’s what they did, lowering him hand over hand until he was at the feet of Jesus.

It got the attention of everyone inside the house—first the digging noise, then the falling clay and brush, people dodging as best they could in that crowded space, then the bright beam of light, highlighting the dust and silhouetting the form of the paralytic on his mat coming down. Every eye was looking at the ceiling. Every eye followed the man down while three or four below reached up to catch him and steady his decline all the way to the floor. And then every eye, including Jesus, looked up at the four grinning faces peering down through that hole in the roof.

And when Jesus saw them, was He ever impressed by their faith. One commentator points out that *“Mark measures faith not by its orthodoxy but by its determination, courage, and persistence.”* These four friends surely demonstrated those qualities and impressed Jesus with their faith. So Jesus looked down at the paralyzed man, and without hesitation said, *“Son, your sins are forgiven.”*

Huh? I’ve got wonder if that statement didn’t shock more than the teachers of the law in the crowd. It must have been a shock to those friends on the roof: *“Your sins are forgiven? We didn’t come all this way, drag him all this far, lug him up here to the top of this house, tear up a patch of a stranger’s roof, and drop him down to your feet, Jesus, to get his sins forgiven. We brought him to get his body healed. So what’s with this ‘your sins are forgiven’ stuff?”*

You can't blame them if they felt that way. How would you like it if you fell off a ladder, broke your leg, experienced great pain, were rolled into the emergency room, and the doctor walked in and said, "*Your sins are forgiven; now send him home*"? My guess is you'd rather he just fix your leg. Jesus' words of forgiveness must have been a real puzzler to the paralytic's friends.

And those words angered the teachers of the law. They didn't speak up, but as if they had one of those cartoon speech bubbles coming out of their heads, Jesus could read their thoughts: "*Who does this blasphemer think he is? Only God can forgive sins.*"

So Jesus took their challenge and asked them a question: "*Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk?'*" That's not such a hard question, is it? It's probably easier to say "*Your sins are forgiven*" because who will ever really know if the man's sins are forgiven or not? But if Jesus says, "*Get up and walk,*" well, we'll know immediately whether Jesus is a fraud or the real deal.

So Jesus decides to say both those things. And He does it to prove to these teachers of the law that He is the Son of Man and that He has the authority to do the God-like act of forgiving sins. Then, having forgiven the paralytic's sins, Jesus tells him to get up, take his mat, and go home. And guess what—this twisted, pretzel of a man straightened up like a soldier at attention, grabbed his mat, and marched right out of the place in full view of everyone there. And the same crowd who wouldn't make a way for him to get *in* the house when he was paralyzed made a clear path for him as he walked out the door.

Meanwhile, his four pals on the roof are high-fiving one another, shaking their heads in amazement, and laughing out loud at the healing of their friend and the power of this Nazarene named Jesus. And at least one of them muttering under his breath, "*Thank God we don't have to carry him home.*"

This is a great story, and there are any number of ways we could get at it. We're going to get at it by taking a lesson from the four men in the story who did whatever it took to get their friend to Jesus.

These men are an example of taking love of others to the next level. They could have been passive. They could have decided, "*If our paralyzed friend wants to meet Jesus, let him figure out how to do that for himself.*" The men could have decided, "*It's too much effort to get him to Jesus, maybe Jesus will someday come to him.*" They could have decided, "*If we try to get him to Jesus, he might get mad at us and it might hurt our friendship, so let's just leave it alone.*" Or they might have reasoned, "*In this world some people walk and others are paralyzed. Maybe he's supposed to just stay that way.*" Those four men could have made any of those deductions, remained good friends of the paralytic, and treated him with sympathy and love. But they took love to the next level.

They did whatever it took to get him to Jesus. They recognized Jesus was the only one who could help him. They weren't shy about enlisting the help of others in getting him to Jesus. They exercised persistent faith, not giving up till they got their friend to Jesus. And they overcame every obstacle that stood in the way—pushing through discouragement, pressing through the crowd, looking for alternative ways when the direct route was unavailable, risking their treasure and the good will of others by tearing a hole in a stranger's roof. They were bold and creative and unashamed and overcame every

obstacle to get their friend to Jesus. They took love of those who need Christ to the next level.

Conclusion

If we had been the friends of that sin-sick and paralyzed man, would we have concluded that God had "closed the door?" After all, the **normal** approach to the Lord was blocked off! Maybe we would have concluded that the problems meant that it wasn't "God's timing" and told our paralyzed friend that his need would have to wait until a more "opportune time." Or would we have been like the faithful four who creatively "engineered" a way to get their hurting friend to Christ?

That was then. What about now? If we use creative engineering, how many "*closed doors*" will open up as we try to get our bosses or our teachers, our family members or our neighbors to Christ? Have we spent time searching out just the right piece of literature, tape or video for an individual? Have we creatively sought out just the right kind of invitation? Most importantly, have we really gone out of our way to be friends with a person whose life is literally paralyzed by the results of sin? Have we introduced that person to other caring Christians--maybe even to a Christian who has been healed of the same type of "paralysis?" Have we been open to every "through the roof" idea? Have we used every ounce of our creativity? Have we prayed for specific opportunities to get that particular individual to Christ?