

## INTRODUCTION

My name is Jacob, but my friends call me Jake. I lived a normal childhood, but in my late teens I developed a strange illness that affected my nerves and caused me to lose all the use of my muscles. Over a period of weeks, I became a paralyzed invalid, and there was nothing the doctors could do. I could talk and move my head and neck, but the rest of my body became a useless shell. I couldn't feed myself, clean myself, or even roll over in my bed. My parents were getting older and they had a hard time taking care of me. I had four boyhood friends who lived in our village who took turns coming over to feed me, clean me, and change my clothes. These guys were true friends. They talked to me and tried to cheer me up by joking with me. After feeding me, they would lift my limp arms and legs and massage them to keep the blood flowing. After a couple of years I was really discouraged. I told them to stop coming, because they were just wasting their time. I was filled with bitterness and anger that God had put me in this condition. There were times when I told them to just leave me alone and let me die.

One evening all four of them arrived together. They were grinning and I could tell something was up. James said, "Come on we're going to go see Jesus." Everyone had been talking about this miracle worker who had been staying at Simon's house in Capernaum. I sarcastically replied, "Sure. You guys lead the way and I'll be right behind you." James said, "No dummy. We're going to carry you to Jesus. He healed Simon's mother-in-law. The four of us have talked about it and we believe Jesus can heal you, too." I objected, "Are you crazy? She just had a fever, and look at me. I've been paralyzed for years!" James said, "Come on Jake, let's give it a shot. Is there somewhere else you gotta' run off to tonight?"

Before I could object again, each of them had taken one corner of my pallet and we were heading off to the house where they had heard Jesus was teaching. James said, "Do you feel like the Emperor being carried by slaves?" I said, "No I feel more like a guy being carried by four stinking camels—and ugly ones at that!" But inside I was beginning to wonder if Jesus really could help me.

By the time we arrived at the narrow street outside the house, my four friends were panting. They set me down to wipe the sweat off their faces. "Whew!" James said, "We've been feeding you way too much!" Another of my friends named Jeremiah walked around the corner to check out the house where Jesus was teaching. He came back and said, "It's no good, guys. We can't get near the house. The street is jam-packed and the house is full of people. We can't get within 50 feet of Jesus." I felt the spark of hope that had glimmered earlier snuff out. I said, "Hey guys. Give it up. I appreciate the effort, but it's no use. I'll always be an invalid. Take me back home."

But James said, "No way! We've come this far and I'm not going to let anything keep us from getting you to Jesus. Let me check it out." He left for a few minutes and when he returned he said, "I've got an idea. Let's go around the block and approach the house from the back. We can take the stairs up to the roof and we can get right above where Jesus is talking." I said, "What? That's a dumb idea, Jesus won't be able to see me and besides I'm afraid of heights."

But before I knew it, I was lifted up again and the guys shuffled around to the back of the house and walked through the garden. Just like many houses, there was a narrow set of steps leading to

the roof where people liked to sit on warm evenings to catch the breeze off the lake. Of course, I hadn't been higher than about three feet in years, and the thought of getting up on the roof terrified me. "Whoa!" I shouted as I felt my mat tilt as they carried me up the narrow steps. How we got up on the roof without them dumping me off I'll never know.

We paused for a moment on the roof and we could hear a voice speaking from below us. The thick roof prevented us from understanding His words, but there was something about the sound of Jesus' voice that was soothing. I said, "So what's the plan now, genius? Are you going to call for Jesus to come up here?"

"Better than that," James replied, "we're going to send you to him." Then he directed the other three to start digging up the roof between two beams. Jerry came back up the steps with a couple of garden tools he had found and they started hacking into the dried mud and straw that formed the roof. Jesus stopped talking. I don't think He could have been heard above the racket we were making. A murmur arose from below. I could hear men yelling saying, "What's going on?" I was saying, "Guys, this is a baaaad idea. Who's going to pay for this roof? We don't know if this guy has homeowner's insurance. He might even be a lawyer and he's going to sue your robe off. Come on guys, give it up!" But my objections only made them dig more furiously. Soon they had a hole dug that was about six feet long and three feet wide.

Then James produced some rope and they tied the rope to each corner. "Oh no!" I said, "You're NOT going to do what I think you're going to do! Don't you remember I'm terrified of heights?"

But within moments I was hanging just below the ceiling in a room that now had a skylight. Pieces of dust and dirt were still falling and had covered many of the people in the room, including Jesus. They lowered me and stopped my descent in front of Jesus. I felt like a fool with everyone watching me. I decided if Jesus asked me what I was doing I would smile and say, "Oh, I'm just hanging out with me friends." But He didn't ask me anything. In fact, He didn't seem disturbed or surprised by what was happening. Then I saw Jesus look up at my companions and He smiled and winked at them.

Then, He spoke to me with a voice that had more quiet authority than I had ever heard before. He simply said, "Son, your sins are forgiven." That was the last thing I expected Him to say. I thought He'd say something like, "What's your problem?" But instead He said, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

And then in a blinding flash, my life changed.

I realized in a moment of crystal clarity my real problem wasn't the paralysis of my muscles it was the darkness of my heart. My worst sickness wasn't physical, it was spiritual. In that split second as the tears trickled down my cheeks, I felt all the anger and bitterness rush out of my heart. It was replaced by something I'd never felt: Hope. For the first time, I knew my life mattered. I mattered to my parents and to my friends, and, yes, I even mattered to this man named Jesus. I no longer wanted to die. I wanted to live, even if I was paralyzed the rest of my life. Before I could say anything Jesus turned to the crowd. They had been muttering among themselves. He said, "I know what you're thinking. You're thinking only God can forgive sin.

And in that, you are correct. Which is easier to say to a sinner, 'Your sins are forgiven?' or to say to a crippled man, 'Get up and walk.'? Wait, don't answer. I'll show you the answer. So that you will know I have the authority to forgive sins, watch this." Then He smiled at me and said, "Jake, get up, roll up your mat, and walk home." My first thought was, "That's a cruel joke! Can't you see I'm paralyzed?" I suddenly realized I had been using that excuse for years. But once again I heard quiet authority in Jesus' voice. The way He said it gave me the desire to try. So that's what I did. I tried to do what I couldn't do. The room was silent as I slowly sat up. My joints were stiff and my legs were brittle, but His words gave strength to my muscles and I felt myself standing up. There were gasps of wonder from the crowd.

My first thought was, "Wow, things look a lot different from up here." Then I looked at my mat and realized it had been like a chain around my neck, so I rolled it up and put it under my arm and as the astonished crowd parted I walked out of the house into the crowded street. Then the silence exploded with shouts of praise to God. And I felt tears stinging my eyes as I said, "Thank you, God!" I turned to see my four buddies on the roof. They were jumping up and down and high-fiving each other. I could hardly be heard above the noise but I yelled, "Thank you! Thank you, guys, for bringing me to Jesus. He has changed my life!"

I thought you might want to meet Jake before we read our text describing this miracle. The title of this message today is "Take Your Faith Through the Roof."

Matthew 9:1-8. "Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town. Some men brought to him a paralytic, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith he said to the paralytic, 'Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.' At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, 'This fellow is blaspheming!' Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, 'Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier: to say 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...' Then he said to the paralytic, 'Get up, take your mat and go home.' And the man got up and went home. When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men."

Mark and Luke add a very important detail about the four friends tearing through the roof to lower their friend in front of Jesus. Luke writes: "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.'" (Luke 5:18-20)

This is one of my favorite miracles. I've visited the ruins of Capernaum where this miracle occurred and every time I walk those narrow streets I always look up and imagine the four friends on the roof. They had a faith that literally took them through the roof. The expression "through the roof" is an idiom to describe something on the rise. We have said, "Gas prices are going through the roof." Is your faith going through the roof or does it seem to be going down the tubes? I want to share with you four life lessons from the miracle that will show you how you can take your faith through the roof.

## **(1) JESUS HONORS THE FAITH AND PERSISTENCE OF CARING FRIENDS**

The Bible says, "Some men brought to him a paralytic lying on a mat. When Jesus saw THEIR FAITH..." Jake's four unnamed friends are the stars of this story. I've read this passage dozens of times, but it wasn't until a few years ago that I noticed Jesus was rewarding the faith of the friends. We don't even read whether Jake had faith or not, but we can assume he did in order to allow himself to dangle from the roof. But it says clearly when Jesus saw THEIR faith! That's what I call faith that takes you through the roof!

Can Jesus see your faith? Do you have a visible faith or an invisible faith? Can Jesus see your faith as it relates to bringing your friends to Him? You have some friends who need forgiveness today. They may be physically well, but they are spiritually paralyzed and they can't make it to Jesus unless you bring them. 2 Corinthians 4:4 says that "the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see." The best thing you can do for a friend is to bring them to Jesus for forgiveness. You can feed a hungry man, and he'll be hungry again. You can put a coat on a cold child and that coat will wear out after a few seasons. Those are good things to do, but when you bring a friend to Jesus, He can make an eternal difference in their life.

It requires both faith and persistence to bring someone to Jesus. Do you REALLY believe Jesus can forgive and change even the most hardened person? Then start working on them. And don't give up. Jake's four friends didn't give up. When they found the way blocked, they didn't quit, they tried a creative approach! God wants you to be a persistent roof-ripper and do whatever it takes to bring your friends to Jesus.

I think we give up too easily. Maybe you've invited a fellow worker or a classmate to come to church and they have politely declined. Do you give up? A study was done a few years ago that revealed that before a person who is far away from God is brought into a relationship with Christ that they have to receive an average of 27 different "touches." A touch may be an email, a text, a phone call, a visit, a coffee appointment...on and on. Don't give up until you've tried at least 27 different ways to bring your friend to Jesus!

You are here today because of someone else's faith. It might have been concerned parents who raised you to know Jesus. Jesus saw their faith, and here you are. You might be here because of a friend who shared Christ with you. Jesus saw their faith, and here you are. We're all here at Green Acres, because 54 years ago a group of people thought a church needed to be started in the southern edge of Tyler. Jesus saw their faith and here we are.

Your faith can't make them believe, but your faith can bring them to Christ. Who do you need to believe for today? Will you pause for a moment and sincerely pray this prayer? "God give me the face or the name of a person right now who is far from you and who needs to be brought to you." God will answer that prayer, now will you start believing for them to come to Christ?

## **(2) SIN IS OUR MAJOR DISABILITY**

Jesus said, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven." Jake had a physical problem everyone could see, but he had a spiritual problem only Jesus could see. If you had seen Jake, you would

have noticed his paralysis. But Jesus can see our hearts, so when He looked at him He saw the spiritual need and He addressed it first.

I've spoken with ER physicians and when a patient is rushed in from a wreck with multiple injuries, they always treat the most serious problem first. If someone comes in and has trouble breathing and a broken finger, they're going to deal with the breathing issue first and save the broken finger until later. Dr. Jesus was doing the same thing that day. He knew Jake needed forgiveness more than He needed healing. Sin is our major disability. The Bible says, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). The heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart. We all need forgiveness.

I could stand up here and tell you, "Your sins are forgiven," but I don't have any power to forgive sins. I'm a sinner myself. Only Jesus can say, "Your sins are forgiven," because He is God in the flesh—the sinless One. But on the authority of God's Word, the Bible I can promise you if you admit you are a sinner and repent of your sinfulness and ask Jesus to forgive you, He WILL forgive your sins. Have you accepted God's forgiveness? Who else do you know who needs His forgiveness?

### **(3) WE NEED MORE STRETCHER CARRIERS THAN CRITICS**

Not everybody was happy with what Jesus said. When Jesus announced Jake's sins were forgiven, the Bible says, "Some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, 'This fellow is blaspheming!'" Mark tells us these critics were teachers of the law; I call them the religious mafia. They were correct in their assertion that only God can forgive sins. God in the flesh was there in the room, and He not only had the power to forgive sins, He had the power to read their minds. Our text says, "Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, 'Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your heart?'" Right now Jesus knows what each of us are thinking. As I look out at you I have no clue whether you're listening to me or thinking about the Cowboys game, or those new pair of shoes you want to buy. But Jesus knows our thoughts!

There were two kinds of people there that day, just as there are in most churches. There are stretcher carriers and sermon critics. Which are you? One group was ON the way to Jesus and the other group was IN the way of Jesus. It's been my experience that people in church who are always trying to bring their friends and welcome newcomers are some of the sweetest, most cooperative folks you'll ever meet. They're excited about what God is doing and they want to share it with everyone. But the critics are another story. They gripe about someone parking in their parking place, or someone sitting in their pew! If you come to church looking for something to criticize, you can always find it. It was too cold, or too hot, the music was too loud, or too soft, we sang too many hymns, or we didn't sing enough hymns, the preacher preached too long, or the preacher preached too sho..... well, nobody ever complains about a short sermon! But my point is if you come looking for something to criticize you will always find it. But if you come to church looking for Jesus, you'll find Him, too. It all depends on what you're looking for.

Which group do you belong to? May God give us more stretcher carriers and fewer critics!

### **(4) OBEYING JESUS' WORDS WILL CHANGE YOUR LIFE**

"Then he said to the paralytic, 'Get up, take your mat and go home.'" Jesus gave him a command. Jake could have said, "But I can't walk!" But instead of offering Jesus an excuse He just obeyed Him and trusted Jesus would give Him the power to walk. There's a great lesson there for us! When Jesus commands you to do something He always gives you the power to do it! But God's power isn't provided until the very moment you step out in faith. Jesus told Peter to step out of the boat and walk on the water. Peter obeyed and stepped out and discovered it was the Word of Jesus supporting him, not the water!

Some of the commands in the Bible seem hard or impossible to obey. Jesus tells you to share your faith, and you don't think you have the right words to say. Well, obey Him and in the moment you do, He'll give you the right words to say. Jesus commands us to rejoice in all circumstances. Your life may be filled with so much pain right now you don't see how you can do anything other than weep. Well, just start rejoicing by faith and you'll find God giving you more and more power to rejoice. Take tithing for instance. God has commanded us to return a tenth of what we earn to Him. You will never experience God's supernatural power and supply until you choose to obey Him. It's true of every command of God. You will only experience God's power when you choose to obey.

I'll never forget the way I heard Dr. S. M. Lockeridge describe this in a sermon. He said, "If God commands you to jump through a brick wall, your job is to jump AT it and it's His job to get you THROUGH it!" Amen!

## CONCLUSION

Let me ask you two important questions. Are you going to heaven when you die? Only you can answer that. But here's the second question: Are you carrying anyone with you to heaven? When you got to heaven and stand before the Lord will there be anyone there who will point to you and say, "I'm here because he brought me to Jesus. I'm here because she brought me to Jesus?"

When the four friends brought Jake to Jesus they had done all they could do, but it was enough. Jesus took over at that point and did what they couldn't do; He forgave his sins and healed him from that which controlled him. Who do you know within your circle of relationships that you can bring to Jesus? It may take a team of you working together like in this miracle. Will you commit yourself before God to pray for them, work with them and bring them to Jesus? I'm not talking about using the Four Laws or the Seven keys, I'm talking about bringing them to the place where Jesus is. Jesus is alive and well in His church today and He's still forgiving and changing lives.

In 1877 Charles Luther wrote an old hymn that asked the question, "Must I go and empty handed?" I can recall singing this song as a child. The verse said: "Not at death I shrink or falter. For my Savior saves me now; But to meet Him empty handed, Thought of that clouds my brow." The chorus goes: "Must I go and empty handed; Must I meet my Savior so? Not one soul with which to greet Him, Must I empty handed go?"

Does the name Joseph Meister mean anything to you? Unless you're a physician who has studied the origin of the rabies vaccine you've probably never heard of him. Joseph was a nine-year-old boy living outside of Paris. On July 6, 1885 he was severely mauled by a rabid dog. Rabies was a fatal disease that always led to a slow painful death.

Louis Pasteur, a microbiologist, had been working on a vaccine for rabies, but it was in the experimental stage. He had been frustrated, because the rabies virus was too small to be seen under a microscope. Little Joseph's mother begged Pasteur to use the experimental vaccine on her son. Pasteur was risking his career, because he wasn't a licensed physician. If the boy died, he could face criminal charges. But out of mercy for Joseph, he injected him every day for ten days and Joseph Meister lived. His vaccine for rabies worked!

When Pasteur died in 1895, he was internationally renowned for his scientific work. Today we use his name when we speak of Pasteurized milk. He was a medical and scientific hero, but rather than having all his accomplishments added to his tombstone, Pasteur left orders that he only wanted three words on his tombstone. So if you visit his tomb in the Pasteur Institute in Paris you'll read these words: JOSEPH MEISTER LIVED. To him, that single act of saving the life of little Joseph defined his life's work.

What kind of heritage will you leave when you die? I can't recall everyone I've led to Christ, but I'll remember leading Charles Jowers to Christ. I was in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade and I shared Christ with him during study hall and he received Christ. If you want to put something on my tombstone, put "Charles Jowers lives...forever!" I challenge you to take your faith through the roof and do whatever it takes to bring your friends to Jesus!

## OUTLINE

"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.'" *Luke 5:18-20*

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"Some men brought to him a paralytic lying on a mat. When Jesus saw THEIR FAITH..."

### (2) SIN IS OUR MAJOR DISABILITY

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Not everybody was happy with what Jesus said. When Jesus announced Jake's sins were forgiven, the Bible says, "Some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, 'This fellow is blaspheming!'"

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"Then he said to the paralytic, 'Get up, take your mat and go home.'"



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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes