



WEEK 3 – THROUGH THE ROOF

CHECK-IN

How are you? Where have you seen God working in your life in the last week? And... today's story is about some friends who go to extensive lengths to help a pal. So, story time... how far have you gone to help someone? We've all helped a friend move for pizza, but have you driven halfway across the country to be with a friend in a tough spot? Maybe you've donated your car to a family in need? If you can't think of anything... maybe that's saying something, too.

OPENING PRAYER

Compassionate Father, help us see where we need to be healed, and give us the courage to help others find you.

INTRODUCTION

Well, it's the final week of our series, "Mike'd Up," where I just decided to talk about three of my favorite stories in the Bible. Week 1,

we looked at a parable of Jesus, the Prodigal Son, which gave us perhaps the best summary of the good news of Jesus Christ. No matter how far we run, no matter what trouble we find ourselves in, God is always waiting there with open arms to welcome us home. Then last week, we looked at the story of Joseph from the Old Testament, who rose from humble beginnings to second in command behind the Pharaoh to save the nation of Egypt. He prepared for 7 years of famine by storing up food during the years of surplus. This allowed us to talk about how to keep God off the shelf in the good times, so that we build the habits that will get us through the bad times. Today, we'll finish with a story from the New Testament, and how a few friends did more than help a buddy move in exchange for pizza. They would ultimately change his life. But first...

Review Question: Last week, we were challenged to spend time in gratitude, thanking God for specific thing throughout our day. Were you able to do that? If so, did it have an impact on how you begin to look at your life? If not, why not? Discuss!

SCRIPTURE

Today, we move back to the New Testament and a story that takes place during Jesus's ministry. As one of my all-time favorites, I was shocked I'd never preached on it before... so here you go. We're in just the second chapter of Mark, so this story comes very early on in Jesus's ministry. However, he's had enough time to perform some miracles, done some healing and some preaching... and therefore, already garnered quite a following. By the time of our story, he

couldn't go into a town without being mobbed. So he and the few disciples he has with him are spending most of their time in the country and occasionally go back to town... this is where our story picks up.

Read Mark, chapter 2, verses 1 through 12.

I love this story... from so many levels. I love what it means for the paralytic, I love Jesus's response, I love the "up yours" to the Pharisees... all of it. But mostly I love the example of this group of friends going to extraordinary lengths to help one of their own, lowering him down through the roof to be healed by Jesus. You could say, they went to the mat for their friend.

Question 1: Consider this story. What stands out to you about it? Does anything specific catch your attention? What bothers you? Discuss!

REFLECTION

What does it mean to "go to the mat" for another human being? In the scripture, this man's friends lowered him on a mat, into Jesus's presence in order for him to be healed. For us, "going to the mat for a friend" means building relationships to the point where we will fight for one another. But how do we do it? What does it mean? Well, first, it might mean getting a little healing ourselves.

Now, occasionally when I'm reading a Bible story like this one, I like to put myself into the story... to imagine myself in the different points-of-view of the various characters. How would I feel? How would I react? What can I learn from being in their shoes? And to help us talk about how to support one another in Christian community, I want to do that with you today... putting ourselves into this story. So let's start with the point-of-view of the paralyzed man: put yourself in his shoes. You're paralyzed, maybe from birth. But you hear about this miracle-worker and a glimmer of hope begins to creep into your mind. Then one day, your friends burst through the door, unable to hold their excitement that this Jesus is in town. Barely bothering to get your permission, they carry you through town on your mat like you're the Queen of Sheba. Unable to get close to the house where you can hear the man teaching, they sneak around back and hoist you onto the roof. Despite your accusations of their insanity, they begin tearing a hole in the roof and lower you through it. Landing at Jesus's feet, you're a little embarrassed. "Uh, sorry to drop in on you like this. *nervous chuckle*" Jesus forgives your sins, then tells you to get up and walk home. And so, you do. You pick up your mat and walk out. YOU WALK OUT! You start toward home, and over your shoulder are your crazy bunch of friends, cheering their heads off. What a moment!

You know what I feel when I put myself in the POV of the paralyzed man in this story? Gratitude. Thanks. Humility... that friends would go so far as to lift me up on to a roof... taking me to a man who just might be able to help. Last week we talked about thanking God... this

time, the point is to thank others. Because like the paralyzed man... we might be lost without the help of our friends.

Question 2: Have you ever had someone “go to the mat” for you? Think about it... has there been a time in your life when a friend picked you up, wouldn't take no for an answer, who fought on your behalf? Share the story, then, commit to making a phone call, sending a message, or writing a letter. Thank someone for going to the mat for you.

Another way to look at this story is from Jesus's angle. I'm always hesitant to pretend I'm Jesus... do that too often, you end up believing you can walk on water, and it just ends badly. However, let's give it a shot today. You've gone back to your hometown. You've got all these people around, and you figure... why miss an opportunity? I'll preach a little. So, you jump into your best stuff. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven... hey that's pretty good,” you see a little dust fall from the ceiling. “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. This is good stuff, someone should write this down. Matthew, grab a pen.” Clumps of ceiling begin to fall now, but you try to shake it off. “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” You look around, and no one is paying attention at this point because an entire section of the roof is being pulled back, and something big, wrapped in a blanket is being lowered into the room. Then you see it has a head and feet... it's a person! And he comes to rest on the floor right in front of you. You look up and there's 4 little heads, peeking down at you through your

brand new skylight. You look back down and realize this man is paralyzed, and it dawns on you what is taking place. This man wants to be healed, and not only him, but his friends, too, believe so strongly that you can get the job done, that they have gone to extraordinary lengths to bring him here. Your heart is filled with amazement at their faith and compassion for this man and his friends.

But then you look down, looking into the man's eyes, and you sense that there's more than his legs that need to be healed. There's something in his heart that needs to be healed, as well. And seeing the faith of this man and his friends that brought him here, you say, "my son, your sins are forgiven." But then, you feel the glares from across the room, from the Pharisees, and you know what they're thinking... "who are you to forgive sins? Only God can forgive sins. Who do you think you are?" And one of the few times you decide to prove yourself... because you are so moved by what just happened, you say to them, "which is easier, to tell this guy that his sins are forgiven, or to heal him? But because I want you to know I have the power to do both... watch closely. Get up, and go home, dude." Jesus is moved to compassion for this paralyzed man, and in the face of the opposition... in the presence of the doubters, knowing that it's stuff like this that will ultimately lead to his death... Jesus goes to the mat for this man.

Here's the thing... Jesus wants to go to the mat for you. What do you need to let him heal? Is there a sin in your life you need to give up? Confess that, give that over to him. Because just as he did for the

paralytic, he'll say, "my child, your sins are forgiven." Or maybe, there is a pain or a hurt in your life you need to give to God? For the paralytic it was a physical pain. For us, it might be the loss of a job or relationship, through divorce or break up, or the passing of a loved one. Maybe it's the pain of not thinking you're not good enough, or worthy, or valuable. Maybe it's hurt from continued abuse or neglect or criticism. Maybe it's the sheer exhaustion of being this busy. Give that pain over to God, because Jesus wants to look at you, heal you, and tell you to pick up *your* mat and walk.

Question 2: Ask yourself that question... what do I need to let Jesus go to the mat for me for? Is there something in your life you need to let Jesus heal? If you're comfortable, share that with the group. If not, give some consideration to talking to a counselor or pastor about it. It's important to work through this type of pain.

The final way I want to talk about putting yourself into this story is from the POV of the friends: Imagine you're in this little group for the moment. For as long as you've known Thaddeus, he's been paralyzed. You met him at the local Hebrews Coffee shop. Thad is good guy, big heart, quick with a joke, but you can see the pain in his eyes when your group of friends talks about going for walks, or traveling to neighboring towns, or playing soccer in the courtyard in front of the temple. And you'd do anything so that he could just experience that joy... even just once. And then you hear about this healer... drawing crowds from all over the countryside. He seems legit... and the thought pops into your head, "we should take Thad", your little wolf

pack is like, “yeah!” Then one day, the buzz spreads through town that this miracle worker is here. So you gather up the posse, and you burst through the door... “Thad, we’re getting you healed today, buddy.” So you hoist him up, and start marching him toward the house where Jesus is hanging out, but the place is so packed you can’t even get close to the door. You will not be deterred. “How about the roof?” someone says. “Sure,” you say. Why not?”

So you climb up, and lift Thad to the top... tear open the thatching... and lower him down right in front of Jesus. it’s dark inside, so it’s almost impossible to see. You squint trying to make out what’s going on. And then suddenly, passing through the ray of light, cast by the hole you’ve just torn, was Thad WALKING! You run to the edge of the roof, and as the crowd parts, and there is Thad... carrying his mat... and the crowd goes wild! Thad walks off into the sunset, fade to black, roll the credits.

When I put myself in their shoes in this story... the feeling I get is one of joy, elation... one of devotion, and being happy for a friend who has realized a dream. They didn’t know if it would work, but to show that they loved their friend, they decided to do something about it. This story demands an answer to this question... who is God calling you to go to the mat for? Verse 5 is so telling – they’re just 5 words, but it’s incredible, “When Jesus saw *their* faith...” Not just the faith of the man, but the faith of his friends, as well. When Jesus saw *their* faith, he forgave his sins and healed the paralyzed man. Who knows how God will respond when we go to the mat for another person?

Question 3: Who is your “Thaddeus”? (We don’t if that was his actual name, but it would be cool if we get to heaven and it is.) Who is someone God is calling you to go to the mat for? What are you feeling led to do for a brother or sister in Christ? Who is God calling you to drop through a roof?

Your homework this week, go to the mat for a friend.

CLOSING

So, no matter who you have identified with today... 1) the paralytic in need of healing, grateful to friends for fighting for you, or having something that Jesus needs to heal. or 2) the friends who fought for someone they cared about, the question is: who wouldn’t want to be a part of a group like that? The level of community that was displayed by this group of friends who went to the mat for their pal is built into the body of Christ... built into our community of faith. You are in a community of brothers and sisters who will go to the mat for you and for whom you can go to the mat. So, to close... your homework for the week has three parts... 1) who do you need to thank for going to the mat for you? 2) what do you need to let Jesus heal? and 3) who is God calling you to go to the mat for? And then either you or them or both, might just need to get dropped through the roof at Jesus’s feet. May we and they be healed.

**Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations
and close in prayer.**