

Through The Roof - Desperate To Reach Jesus**Sunday, August 25th, 2024, 5:30 p.m.**

I'm so grateful for this opportunity to preach. And I want to look at a story in the Bible that most of us here are all very familiar with. I hope tonight to look at these verses with you through a new lens. And right off the bat, I want to humble myself before you all and say that I'm very much preaching to myself tonight. So I hope you know that this sermon comes from a place of love... and is something I'm working on myself.

Luke 5:17-26

17On one of those days while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea, and also from Jerusalem. And the Lord's power to heal was in him. 18Just then some men came, carrying on a stretcher a man who was paralyzed. They tried to bring him in and set him down before him. 19Since they could not find a way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on the stretcher through the roof tiles into the middle of the crowd before Jesus. 20Seeing their faith he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

21Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to think to themselves, "Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" 22But perceiving their thoughts, Jesus replied to them, "Why are you thinking this in your hearts? 23Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? 24But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" — he told the paralyzed man, "I tell you: Get up, take your stretcher, and go home."

25Immediately he got up before them, picked up what he had been lying on, and went home glorifying God. 26Then everyone was astounded, and they were giving glory to God. And they were filled with awe and said, "We have seen incredible things today."

All right, let's break down exactly what just happened in those verses. One day—that wasn't the Sabbath—Jesus was teaching and doing miracles. Not that it matters, but we know it wasn't the Sabbath because the religious leaders of the time, LOVED to point out when Jesus did something they thought He shouldn't be doing on the Sabbath, and there's no mention of that in this story. So we can come to the not-so-important conclusion that it didn't take place on the Sabbath.

For Jesus, this was just a regular weekday. But because Jesus was teaching... There were some important people in the crowd that day. We're told there were Pharisees and teachers of the law in the crowd. They were experts in Jewish law, and they packed that room so full just to hear what Jesus was saying. For most of the people in this crowd, they were there for a lecture, a lesson, or a TED talk. Just Then!

I know this reference is going to point out how old I'm getting. But when I read "just then" I picture the Kool-Aid Man crashing through a brick wall saying "OHH YEAH" like did did in those old TV commercials. Do you remember those?

Anyways, just then, "some men came carrying on a stretcher a man who was paralyzed." It says, they tried to get him to get him close to Jesus, but they couldn't find a way in because of the crowd. So in an act of desperation, they broke through the roof and lowered him down.

Most sermons, at this point, would likely take a path more well travelled and highlight the love, care, commitment, compassion, concern, dedication, determination, passion, persistence, responsibility, and strength of those men who didn't give up until they got their friend to Jesus. And there is a sermon there for sure! But that isn't where I'm going with this sermon.

Because in a Bible study, a friend of mine recently pointed something else out about this story. And I couldn't shake what he said. I talked to him afterward and asked if I could do exactly what I'm doing now and expand on his observation for this sermon. He obviously said yes, otherwise I'd be preaching about something else tonight. But here's what he said, Now that he has read this story a bunch of times. Now when he reads it, what he sees is, "A bunch of religious people who got in the way of people who were desperate to meet Jesus". I don't know about you, but it felt like my heart fell out of my chest when he said that. Can you see what he meant when he said reading this now, what he sees is: "A bunch of religious people who got in the way of people who were desperate to meet Jesus" Is it just me? Or does that feel like it's hitting too close to home for anyone else?

Those guys knew their friend needed to be healed. And they knew they needed to get their friend to Jesus. But when they tried to get close, they weren't able to go inside.

I really don't think I need to spell this out for us. I think there's a good chance some of you, if not most of you know exactly what I'm talking about. But just in case you don't, here are a few modern-day examples that come to my mind when I think about a room full of religious people stopping desperate people from meeting Jesus.

I saw a video of a sermon that went viral online, so there is a good chance some of you saw it as well. Pastor Ed Newton from a church in San Antonio, Texas interrupted his sermon right in the middle of it. Because someone in the congregation kept answering the rhetorical questions he was asking in his sermon. That on its own could be considered somewhat disruptive, but on top of that, he was using language you wouldn't expect to hear being used in church. So the pastor stops preaching for a second and in a loving tone talks to the man to say something along the lines of, "Hey, can you do me a favour, I need you to stop cussing, okay? Can you do that for me? Yeah? And can those sort of sitting around him help keep him accountable?" The man shouts out in response to the pastor, "This man right here (pointing to the guy next to him) just saved my life today. He picked me up off the side of the street and saved my life" The congregation applauded when they heard that while the pastor looked visibly moved by the story. As the video goes on, the pastor couldn't just dive back into his manuscript. He couldn't just pretend none of that happened and just carry on with his sermon. Eventually, the guy who was shouting out was invited to the front, while the pastor did an impromptu interview, interviewing both the man shouting out and the man who brought him to church that morning. By the end of the video, they were collecting an offering to help get this man back on his feet, and from what I've read the church was putting the man through rehab to help him get his life back together.

Can I tell you something. I uncontrollably wept, when I saw the video for the first time. And then when I showed it to Amanda the next day, we both cried as we watched it. In churches all across the world, if someone disrupts, or disturbs the Sunday morning service, an usher is trained to remove them. Now, we tell them to do it gracefully, and lovingly, but ultimately do what you need to in order to get them out of the room. And before you start shouting out from your seat, interrupting me. I know Scripture says, that worship gatherings should be controlled, there should not be chaos, and that one person should speak at a time. I know it says all those things and more. But I thank God that the pastor in that video wasn't worried about the fact that they had another service or two after that one, and they likely had a tight schedule to follow. I'm so glad that the church sprung into action and did what needed to be done to get that man to Jesus. That is a truly heartwarming story because that church got it right.

But, how about the single mom who tried to drop her baby off in the nursery so she could come into the service, but the child was too upset and wouldn't stay with a stranger? So she takes the child into the service, and—as a baby does—they fuss now and then or make a noise here and there. The mother feeling so embarrassed works up the strength to look around and notices the glaring looks from the people around her making her feel so unwelcome, and so unloved that she gets up and leaves mid-way through the service.

What about someone who comes in wearing revealing clothing, because that's all the clothes they own and that's the only way they've ever known how to dress? And before they're halfway through the hallway they notice people pointing and staring and then someone from the church approaches them, because they felt like someone needs to do it, and they tell them their clothes aren't appropriate for church. Imagine how confused they must be knowing that the world wouldn't judge them for the clothes they were wearing, but all they got was judgement and criticism from the people they met at church.

Imagine you're sitting in a service and the worship team starts playing a hymn, and then out of nowhere it becomes one of those modern hymn mash-up songs that you can't stand because they destroy a perfectly good hymn that we could be singing instead. And you struggle to sing through the new part of the song because you're so disappointed with the decision someone made to play that version of the song.

Or how about a church that hosts a BBQ in their parking lot after service? Who notices people from the neighbourhood, who they don't remember seeing in the service in line for food. And instead of feeding them a free, already-cooked warm meal, they tell them, "Sorry, this is just for people who came to the service".

I can keep going, but I think I've made my point. Does anyone else feel a sick feeling in their stomach right now, like I do? When I read this account from Luke's Gospel, through the lens that my friend pointed out. Like I said before, my heart felt like it fell out of my chest. Because I don't know about you. But from time to time, I'm guilty of this.

Those "religious experts" who packed themselves into that room. They came from all over, including Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem. Which meant, they made plans in order to be there. They didn't just hear noise from

outside and poke their head in to see what what happening. They came cause they wanted to be there. But the problem was, they came for the wrong reasons. They came so they could watch and judge. Let's give them the benefit of the doubt and say, they didn't wake up that morning and decide, "I want to go be critical and go and watch and judge people" But during that gathering, Jesus knew their hearts, and he knew what they were thinking without them even needing to say a word. All they could do was find faults and criticize the things Jesus was doing, rather than to be helped by Him.

Knowing that this was going on, Jesus just continued what He was there do to. He was there to heal and to save people. So here's this paralyzed man, on a stretcher in front of him. Who's friends—in an act of desperation—break through the roof to get him to Jesus. In the hope that Jesus would heal his body. And Jesus responds in typical Jesus fashion. It says, "Seeing their faith he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven." What are you doing Jesus!? They didn't bring him there for his sins to be forgiven! What are you doing!? Are you confused?"

But the more time I spend reading this more more I realize. The exact same thing happens when: Hopeless, lost, broken, beat-down people walk into a church service on a Sunday morning for the first time. Whether it's for the first time in a long time, or for their first time ever. Either way, they probably don't come into church thinking, "You know what I need, I need my sins forgiven" No, they're looking for help! They're looking for healing! They're looking for something, and they don't know where else to turn. So, Let them come!

I'm reminded of what it says in Acts 15 Let me just read that to you:

Acts 15:1-21

1Some men came down from Judea and began to teach the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom prescribed by Moses, you cannot be saved." 2After Paul and Barnabas had engaged them in serious argument and debate, Paul and Barnabas and some others were appointed to go up to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem about this issue.

3When they had been sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and they brought great joy to all the brothers and sisters. 4When they arrived at Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church, the apostles, and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. 5But some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to command them to keep the law of Moses."

6The apostles and the elders gathered to consider this matter. 7After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brothers, you are aware that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the gospel message and believe. 8And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he also did to us. 9He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. 10Now then, why are you testing God by putting a yoke on the disciples' necks that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? 11On the contrary, we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus in the same way they are."

12The whole assembly became silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul describe all the signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. 13After they stopped speaking, James responded, "Brothers, listen to me. 14Simeon (Simon Peter) has reported how God first intervened to take from the Gentiles a people for his name. 15And the words of the prophets agree with this, as it is written:

16After these things I will return
and rebuild David's fallen tent.

I will rebuild its ruins
and set it up again,

17so that the rest of humanity
may seek the Lord —

even all the Gentiles
who are called by my name —
declares the Lord

who makes these things 18known from long ago.

19Therefore, in my judgment, we should not cause difficulties for those among the Gentiles who turn to God, 20but instead we should write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from eating anything that has been strangled, and from blood. 21For since ancient times, Moses has had those who proclaim him in every city, and every Sabbath day he is read aloud in the synagogues."

Whats going on here? Well, the early church is in uproar. Because all these new Gentiles were coming to hear the message of the Gospel and they were being saved through faith alone. And the Jews couldn't stand this. "They don't look like us, they don't act like us, they didn't even need to be circumcised! This can't be! Tell them to go somewhere else." Paul and Barnabas tried debating them on the topic, but that went nowhere. {There's another whole sermon for you there} Then, Peter took a turn explaining the situation to them. Telling them, that their hearts are cleansed by faith. Paul and Barnabas took another turn and they recapped all the amazing testimonies that they witnessed in their journeys. Then James had a turn, and I'm paraphrasing but he said, "We knew this was going to happen. Remember what it says in Amos 9:11-12? That's what he quoted to them. As he wrapped up he said, "Therefore, in my judgment, we should not cause difficulties for those among the Gentiles who turn to God" And we could read it like this: "Therefore, in my judgment, we should not cause difficulties for those outside of these walls who turn to God" Amen. James was saying there were a LOT of people who turned to God through Christ, and they expected even more were going to join. And his instruction was that they need to be as gentle as possible with them and not make things hard or discouraging. We shouldn't cause them any stress or confusion with complicated rules or debates. Instead, let's start with, and focus on, the core parts of faith in a way that will make sense to them. Right? Look what he said, once they turn to God, then we should teach them to follow the things the Bible says. Notice the order of those things. First, they need to come to Christ. Then we'll worry about teaching them the ways of Christ. And when we do that, we need to do it in ways that they will understand.

The problem is, this is really hard to do for some of us to do. And for good reason, because we have been taught deep and very thought-provoking Bible teaching over the years. We've moved away from milk and baby food, as we should and now we're chewing tough discount-bin steak. I mean no disrespect when I say that, I just like the mental image that paints when it comes to studying Scripture. It's not always easy to chew through and digest, but give it enough time and you'll get it into your body. But because some of us, in this room, have been Christians for maybe as much as 60 years, or maybe more? Over time, we forget what it's like to be a child. We forget to put, first things, first, when it comes to desperate people seeking Jesus.

I think another area we sometimes get things mixed up in. Is when we're so careful not to affirm the sin in someone's life, We feel like, "Before they can come to my church they need to stop sinning, so the people around us in church don't think that I'm affirming the sin in their life by worshipping next to them." And the person that they're worried about, who might be sitting near them in church when they bring someone. They might be giving judging looks to that person who doesn't seem to "belong" in church because in their mind they're thinking, "Woah, I had to give up the sin in my life. Why do they get to come here with sin in their life?"

If someone comes in desperate to meet Christ. We need to remember that it sometimes takes time for them to re-learn and adjust things in their lives. People tend to stick to the things they've learned, experienced, or witnessed along the way. That's usually all they've ever known. So we need to be patient with them. And allow God to work in their lives.

Remember, when it comes to the sin in the lives of others: We can't change someone's heart. We can't decide for them to stop sinning. That's between them and God. We can: teach them, love them, help them, invite them, pray with them, pray for them. But only God can cleanse their heart.

Think about it, in terms of circumcision. No one is coming into this building excited they need to get circumcised. Just in case there are little ears in the room. No one is excited that "a piece of them" needs to be removed. The brave, and persistent guys who lowered their friend down through the roof weren't interested in their friend being circumcised. They wanted him to be able to walk. And praise the Lord the story ends with him being able to walk. But because of the faith they had, the faith it took to believe Jesus could and would do something. Because of his faith, Jesus forgave his sins.

And when he does that, in the lives of people who didn't grow up in church. Who didn't have to wake up early to go to Sunday School every week. Who didn't have to go to Bible camp, and memorize memory verses. While they were busy doing all those things, this new person was doing whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted to do it. When that happens, it deeply upsets the "religious experts". And they started thinking to themselves, "Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" They didn't need to say anything out loud. Jesus already knew exactly what they were thinking, and He replied, And I'm paraphrasing, but here's what He said: "So, what do you guys think? Would be easier for me to forgive this man's sins? Or to heal him and make him walk again? Actually, you know what, You don't need to answer that. Just so there's no doubt in anyone's mind of the power in my name, I'm also going to heal this paralyzed guy as well. Did you hear that? Get up, take your stretcher with you and go home."

The man got up, and as you could imagine he went home glorifying God. When we are transformed by the renewing of our minds. God gets the glory. When you're saved through faith, you've got a testimony to share. So that others can know the wonders God has performed in your life. It says, everyone was astounded and they were giving glory to God. Everyone left saying, "We have seen incredible things today" When I think back to that man in the video I was talking about earlier, who was shouting out during the sermon and was planning to step out in busy traffic and kill himself that day. I can't help but believe everyone in that room walked out saying, "We have seen incredible things today". Because a desperate person met Jesus.

I know some people might not like this message. I know how convicting it is because I feel it in my own life. I hope you heard these things that I've said tonight from my heart. Western Evangelical churches for the most part have a lot of room to grow in this area. As I wrap up, I want to point out something that in Luke's gospel happened right after the account of the religious people in the room and the guys that went through the roof.

Let me read to us:

Luke 5:27-32

27After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, "Follow me." 28So, leaving everything behind, he got up and began to follow him.

29Then Levi hosted a grand banquet for him at his house. Now there was a large crowd of tax collectors and others who were reclining at the table with them. 30But the Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

31Jesus replied to them, "It is not those who are healthy who need a doctor, but those who are sick. 32I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

And with that, let's pray.