

## *The Four Friends and the Paralyzed Pharisees*

*There were five of us who grew up together – me, Vinnie, Freddy, Tommy, Shlomo. We were always getting into trouble. But hey, we were kids. One summer it was really hot, it was so hot that my old man had to feed crushed ice to his chickens so they wouldn't lay hard-boiled eggs. One day we were all sitting under a big tree trying to cool off when Tommy says, "Hey, we should go to the river tomorrow." Then we all started making plans. Before sun-up the next morning we went to visit old man Avram to borrow that big donkey of his called Jake, the only one that could carry all five of us. Four of us climbed onto Jake's back and Vinnie led Jake out of the corral gate and went back to close the gate. When Jake heard the gate close he took off. Vinnie ran after us screaming for us to slow down. He caught up with us and yelled for me to grab his hand. I reached down, got his hand, but couldn't get him up off the ground. Finally, with all my strength I tried to pick him up but lost my balance and started sliding off Jake's back. I grabbed Tommy's hair and he started to slide off, he grabbed Freddy by the shirt and all three of us slid off Jake landing on Vinnie. We got up and started looking for Shlomo. We saw him and Jake heading to the river. By now Jake was running and Shlomo was holding on. But he fell off, hit the ground, and rolled over twice. When we reached Shlomo he wasn't moving and we all thought he was dead. He finally opened his eyes and we tried to get him to stand up but his legs wouldn't work. They haven't worked for ten years, until a week ago. I was at my place when Tommy, Freddy, and Vinnie came running up shouting about this Jesus man coming to town. I didn't know what they were talking about. Tommy asked if I heard the story about Jesus giving that blind guy his eyes back. Then Freddy told me about that guy who had that bad skin condition that Jesus cleared up? We all agreed that maybe Shlomo could get his legs back if we took him to see this Jesus. So we made a sling out of a quilt, a couple of tree branches, some rope and took Shlomo to see this Jesus man. The house where Jesus was speaking was packed. People stood at the windows and the front door. We didn't know how we were going to get in to see Jesus. Then Shlomo had an idea. "Let's go through the roof." So we ran around back, up the stairs to the roof and started tearing open a hole. Finally we got something big enough to lower the sling down to Jesus. We looked in and saw all sorts of faces*

*staring back up at us. And there was Jesus covered with dust. We knew it was him because he had a nametag. We lowered Shlomo down right in front of Jesus. He looked up at us, he looked down at Shlomo and said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven you." Then the boss Pharisee stood up shouted, "Only God can forgive sins!" Jesus looked at Shlomo and said, "Stand up, take your mat and walk home." Shlomo said, "Well, you see sir, my legs haven't work for..." Jesus touched his head and said, "Go on, you can do it." Then Shlomo stood up, picked up his mat and walked out of the house. All four of us were still on the roof looking in when Jesus looked up at us and said, "Well done good and faithful servants, and always remember, four of a kind beats a full house."*

Before he came to Capernaum word had already gotten out. "Jesus is coming." The news of His return brought many people to the city to hear him teach. The Pharisees and Teachers of the Law came hopping to hear something that would justify their opposition to this new teacher. They came from every village in Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. Jesus scared them.

Others came. Four friends came, not to hear the teachings of Jesus, but to bring one of their own whose legs did not work. We know nothing about the four men except they believed this one act would change the life of their disabled friend. When they came to the house they could not get in; the event was sold out. The people were crowded in every window and doorway. But that didn't stop them; they changed their tactics and went to the roof. They didn't care if they disrupted what was going on inside, they wanted to bring their friend to Jesus.

Now imagine the scene on the inside of the house. The Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting, or maybe reclining, listening to Jesus when the ceiling started to come apart. Those proud and proper teachers of the law were getting roof dust and debris in their eyes, in their mouths, all over their ceremonial robes, and at the same time trying to dodge the falling roof tiles. The destruction stopped and as the sun shone down through the hole it lit up all the dust particles that were still floating in the air. Everyone looked up, blinking their eyes, and saw this makeshift stretcher slowly drop from the hole in the ceiling. The whole scene must have been surreal.

Once the man was lowered in front of Jesus things began to happen. Looking down at the man on the stretcher Jesus broke the silence, *“Friend, your sins are forgiven you.”* This was not the response that the Pharisees or the four friends expected, and the paralytic probably felt let down for the second time. The four friends and the paralytic expected healing words that would bring life back to dead legs. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law didn’t care about the paralytic, they were angry. Jesus had the guts to say that this man’s sins were forgiven. In their eyes only God could forgive sins. And here was this person claiming to forgive someone’s sins, which to the Pharisees meant that Jesus was saying he was God. The Pharisees shouted, *“Blasphemer! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”*

Now, Jesus wasn’t fooled for a minute. He knew what they were up to. He answered their question with two questions. *“Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier to say? Your sins are forgiven you, or stand up and walk?”* Jesus basically told the Pharisees that their belief system was paralyzed and that paralysis affected their ability to be open and responsive to the presence of God in their lives and their ministries. For the first time in Luke, Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man when he says to the Pharisees, *“But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the one who was paralyzed—“I say to you, stand up and take your bed and go to your home.”* Jesus looked at the Pharisees and said, “You’re paralyzed.” Then he looked down at the guy in front of him and said, “You’re not. Go home.”

So I ask myself what would I rather be, a criticizer of teaching or someone who helps to carry the stretcher? I confess to you now brothers and sisters, I think that there are times that I am a criticizer, someone who is set in their ways, someone who is paralyzed. But I would rather be someone who helps carry the stretcher and has enough faith to believe that what I am doing is what God made me for.

Yesterday Emilee Rose, Kathy Baldwin-Heitman, Kathy’s son Amol, and I helped out at Hope Faith Ministries. I spent time with 8 homeless men as they picked out used clothing for themselves. A couple of the men had job interviews and needed something

nice to wear. For each of those men, I carried the plastic bag that held the clothes they picked out. I introduced myself to them, made sure I knew their name and spent the short time I had with them just talking, helping them, and carrying their bag. I got to be a stretcher carrier. I also learned more about Hope Faith Ministries and their mission to the homeless in Kansas City. It is an awesome ministry here in our own backyard that we have been invited to be a part of. Hope Faith Ministries is moving to a new building that will open up more possibilities for them and the homeless people they serve. My hope is that I can do more with them and encourage all of us as the body of Crossroads Church to get involved.

There are many in this congregation who are stretcher carriers. Who of you out there has worked as a Sunday School teacher or Sunday School Shepherd since 1999? Please stand up. Look around you ladies and gentleman; these are the people who in one way or another have helped our children come to know God. Thank you, teachers and shepherds. Would the youth who have gone on mission trips please stand up? These are only some of our young people who have gone to serve in some way to the poor in this country and in Guatemala. Please stay standing. Now would any adults who have gone on mission trips with our youth please stand? These are the adults who have stepped forward to take a week or more off from their schedule to be with our youth and other youth from all over the country. All of these adults and youth have made a difference in someone's life.

There are people in this congregation who are closet stretcher carriers; people who do things that we sometimes don't see or know about. Joseph Ward has this really beautiful Mazda car. Sometimes I see Joseph outside wiping down that car and making it shine. Joseph is also the one who cleans our building. Yes he gets paid for it but there is much more that he does that makes this building shine like that little Mazda car of his. Joseph touches the life of the people who come into this building. How many of you put together little hygiene bags for the Hurricane victims in Haiti? You touched the life of someone in that country.

There are others who work under our radar here in our little community making a difference for someone. You all are stretcher carriers.

The four friends were stretcher carriers, carrying their friend to the feet of Jesus. These men dared to do the difficult. It was hard work toting this disabled man and his bed to where Jesus was teaching. Then finding the house bursting at the seams they took him up the narrow back stairs and tore a hole in the roof of the house to lower him down.

These men dared to do the unorthodox. They could have waited outside the house until the event was finished. Then they could have waited until the crowd dispersed and tried to see Jesus. What the men did was totally out of the ordinary.

These men dared to do what was costly. Think about it, someone had to repair that roof or at least pay to have it repaired. Most likely it would have been the four friends.

These men, the four nameless friends, had faith that their little act of helping would change someone's life. A life was changed. Their paralyzed friend stood up for maybe the first time in his life, he picked up the cot or bed he was on, and walked home. They made a difference in a life.

Benediction:

Physicist Edward Teller once said, *“When you come to the end of all the light you know, and it's time to step into the darkness of the unknown, faith is knowing that one of two things shall happen: Either you will be given something solid to stand on or you will be taught to fly.”*

And Jesus said, *“Remember, four of a kind beats a full house.”*