

Carrier

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[0 : 0 0] Mark chapter 2, hear now the word of the living God. And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home.

And many were gathered together so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them. And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men.

And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him. And when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay.

And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, son, your sins are forgiven. Now some of the scribes were sitting there questioning in their hearts, why does this man speak like this?

He is blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God alone? And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, why do you question these things in your hearts?

[1 : 1 0] Which is easier to say to the paralytic, your sins are forgiven? Or to say, rise, take up your bed and walk. That you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.

He said to the paralytic, I say to you, rise, pick up your bed and go home. And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, we never saw anything like this.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. That is the word of the Lord. Please be seated. Thank you. Do you need this?

No, I still need it. Thank you, my brother, for those kind words. And definitely the history around New City has been a part of my experience in this denomination.

I've been ordained here for 25 years now. My wife likes to remind me she's been in the PCA for 30 years. So she was here before me.

[2 : 2 4] And so it's a real privilege to be with you guys today. I'm sorry you had to work today, Kevin.

Just even a little bit of work. It's near impossible as a pastor to come back to your church and not do something. Yeah. You know why? Because you actually have joy over these people.

I know that about you. You love these folk. I want y'all to know that, okay? And I'm talking pastoral talk. Like when he talk about y'all on the side, he loves y'all.

He really does. Some pastor's like, I don't like those people. But he loves y'all. He loves you guys. First Lady Sandy, thank you.

Had a great lunch with you yesterday. Thank you for your, you know, your presence in this congregation, what it means for you and your ministry and your kids' ministry.

[3 : 31] I want to honor you and give you your flowers now, sister. Thank you. And this rest y'all took was needed for you too. Thank you for what you do.

Yeah. Today we look at the story of a paralyzed man, man and four friends.

And Jesus is beginning to get, as you can tell, sold out audiences. Right? With him miraculously healing and feeding people along with his revolutionary and curious messages against the powers that be, Jesus has become hard to get next to.

And in our passage, there is a paralytic who needs to get to Jesus. Past the crowds, in order to be healed, in order to be helped.

And his dilemma matches in desperation some and much of what we may be going through or going on in and around us, doesn't it? Maybe because we are Christians or because we are touched by God's, you know, general grace as human beings, but all of us believe somewhere, somehow, there has to be more and better, that there has to be help and healing for ourselves and those hurting and suffering in this world.

[4 : 57] But like this paralytic, we are jammed. Jammed socially, spiritually, or circumstantially, and held up in our faith and shareability to get to or find that healing, to get to or find that divine help, to get to the deliverance we in our world so desperately need.

Well, there's good news from the Bible. From this passage for people like you and me, that God makes a way through carriers, I call them.

First, as we carry each other through the struggle. Secondly, as we carry everything to him. And finally, as he, Jesus, carries our faith.

We see first that we must carry each other through the struggle, which means we must be willing to engage in the struggle.

Look with me at verse 1 through 4 again. And it says, Jesus returned to Capernaum after some days, and it was reported that he was at home.

[6 : 15] And many were gathered together so that there was no room, no more room, not even at the door. Not even standard room only. That was my little addition.

There's clear hardship, right?

A clear struggle going on. This man can't get himself to a place in the person of help and healing. He is paralyzed. And on top of that, the Bible says the place, a smallish middle class house is too packed to get this man in, to be seen by Jesus and have Jesus see him.

He is held back by personal and social barriers. But the Bible shows us that his carriers engage in the struggle. Each taking one corner of the mat the paralytic was on, each equally bearing the weight and balance of his movement, carrying him through the streets, and then getting him to the house.

They don't drop the man because, hey, there's hardship and struggle, or imagine that this is it. We can't get you any closer. No, the Bible says, seeing they can't go through the front door, that they go to the roof.

[7 : 50] They had to be tenacious and creative to get this man's healing by any means necessary. Now, back then, these homes had an outside stairwell.

So, like a fire escape, sort of. And so they go around to the side, and Mark's account here says they removed the roof and made an opening to let him down to Jesus.

These roofs, which were strong enough to walk on back then, were overlaid with some sort of palm leaf. Let's call them all natural tiles, right? You know, of some sort.

It says this. They dug a hole in through the roof. One translation says they unroofed the roof. And then after they unroofed the roof, the Bible says they dug.

After removing the outer shell, whatever was serving as shingles or natural tile walking surface, they dug into the hardened mud pitch made most likely, as I studied, from animal poop and clay and dirt gunk, and they made a hole big enough to lower him before Jesus to be healed.

[9 : 08] And Jesus says this to them in verse 5. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, Son, your sins are forgiven.

Now, what I want you to see is he saw, the Bible says, their faith. This starts out first being about the four friends, the four carriers, if you will, for their part in getting this paralyzed man where he can be healed.

They get a faith credit, if you will, a thumbs up from Jesus, a this is how you do it for their work here. Faith to engage in a human struggle for another human being and being a faithful carrier of someone else's struggle through struggle.

There's always a struggle after the struggle, right? You go help somebody that has an issue, there's always an issue in helping them, right?

You know how many times as a pastor of a church, hey man, I just need to get a ride over here to get my medicine. Eight hours later. I've been to the grocery store, I have paid stuff I wasn't supposed to pay, I've waited for three hours.

[10 : 25] Yeah. There you go. You get it, brother. I'll be right back. I'm just giving Mr. and Mrs. a ride to get their medicine. Praise God.

That's what we're supposed to do, right? And this is what this passage is teaching. It is part of being human, much less a believer, for you and me to take faith and unknown result risk and take someone else's problems in life and shortcomings and inabilities or disabilities into our very hands and move for them with hope.

Making and building a community around them and for them in a hard and harsh world filled with boundaries to others. Maybe it's their sense of worth and dignity. Boundaries to them, knowing and seeing the love God has for them.

It is our call to get creative and dirty and to dig into crap and mess and the smelly, nasty realities of being separated from wholeness and health and spiritual fullness God has for people.

Jesus is calling for you and me. Especially you believers out there. Christians to be faithful carriers.

[11 : 45] To carry each other. To carry broken people in their broken situations where they can't go in ways they can't move or see for themselves. To have faith for them and use our strengths and abilities and community in our jobs and our vocation and concert for them in ways they are powerless to make a difference, to commit, to join in owning their struggles to be necessary.

so much so that if you don't, that if you drop your corner or your part they are done. Christ Central, the church we served for 20 years in Charlotte before moving to Atlanta, we made this instruction for structural, systematic oppression, maneuvering that for human flourishing.

The Lord has put some of y'all at the bank. others in retail, others in school, and many of us, most of us, in the voting booth.

Oh. Yeah, in the voting booth there is still a command to love your neighbor even before yourself.

Wait, maybe I shouldn't vote what I want? If you're carrying the struggle of somebody else in your heart that you're in community with, what if you were to pull the lever for them because if you don't, they may struggle in a sense of self-worth or dignity.

[13 : 27] Wow. No, we always go in the booth and vote what we want. Is anybody else on your mind? Are you in the struggle with anybody else but yourself?

You can't go to work alone. As a believer, you should be carrying a part of the mat for somebody. Well, let me prepare you.

being a carrier as they found out when they had to go through the roof and dig through the mud, poop, grout, and mortar is an automatic challenge. How this seemed to hurt the picture of orthodoxy.

Couldn't you see Jesus down there preaching? I mean, if I was like a filmmaker, you'd see Jesus and he always stands like this, right? Right? Right? Right? Right? Right?

Right? Right? All clean looking. And then all of a sudden, dirt goes in Jesus' hair and he's, in his mouth, all in his beard.

[14 : 36] I mean, this is messy. What are these people doing? They're messing up our perfect picture of Jesus in Christianity. It's not proper.

And it never fails, right? Helping people is always messy. And on the other side, carrying those who think they got it together is even more messy. Have you ever tried to help somebody who got it together?

Imagine if this paralyzed man said, leave me alone and I got it together. Well, he couldn't move. I don't know, but maybe you'd get tired of him arguing the whole way. I don't know. Whatever it is. But even carrying people who aren't mercy, ministry type material, right?

But broken and paralyzed and frozen in their pride and arrogance and ignorance, right? Or those who just have barriers and walls against religion and church, their lives, when you take hold and begin to go there, you will find are always filled with mess underneath mess, underneath mess.

Right? They got a nice outside tile, but underneath that tile is a lot of mess. Because the human struggle is a mini-series of brokenness.

[15 : 50] With many seasons and episodes, it sometimes takes the faith of many. Man, discipling, helping one person takes many people.

Right? You might need a community of people for one person sometimes, a community of people who are engaged in the struggle for someone else. Without a doubt, if you go to help or be faithfully involved, even doing it for Jesus, y'all, it's going to get complicated.

If you help people who have become paralyzed by fear and guilt and shame and who fear the church or fear help or fear being left behind or fear trying again, who fear simply being cared for, things will get dirty and almost impossible and the world and even God will appear at times to be against them in your best efforts.

Alright, y'all ready? How complicated could it get? How messy could it get? Kelly and I, as Kevin said, we're planning a church in a part of Atlanta that is 90% black.

A PCA church. Should I make that clear? I'm a middle to upper middle to upper class, mainly college educated black folks, alright, who primarily see the current president as complicit with anti-Christ policy and thinking.

[17 : 23] And they Christians. Uh-oh, it just got real complicated. They think the president that if my statistics are still right, that two-thirds of our denomination voted for is anti-Christ.

The way God has called us and even some of you in a multi-ethnic and multicultural church like New City have ways to Jesus that are crowded and distant and over-covered by so much mess by the pitch, right, and covering of class and ethnicities and values and political preference and fear and hardened history and cultic personality and political mess.

And we down in Atlanta, we got to dig through that. Who y'all with? The PCA? Oh, we know about them. That ain't Jesus. That denomination, they don't love Jesus because they voted for a dude in the policy that don't love us.

Carriers. and not, and apart from the evangelical Christian community, what about people who aren't believers? What do they see?

Oh, y'all in that conservative denomination, right? For people on the outside, our brothers and sisters are separated by the very foundations, y'all.

[19 : 26] Not foundations, the very foundations of the culture of evangelical Christian belief. Right? And affinity in our country.

It has gotten messier than ever to carry anybody to Jesus in the direction God has called us to carry him. It's crowded with mixed motives and this and that and, you know, like a roof, some good stuff, right?

But a lot of mess too, right? Money that has created security in ways that maybe it shouldn't and God's calling us to dig through and guess what?

It's going to get muddy and messy. As a matter of fact, we talked about church planning recently with a church planning expert and church planning used to take two to three years. Now it takes five to seven years. And in our situation, it might take ten.

You ever wonder if our digging, what is it going to mean if it even begins to shake and hurt the very foundation of our country?

[20 : 38] So that Jesus can be elevated. Will we go there? Will we be faithful if we have to unroof the roof of America?

The way to healing and reconciliation of Jesus, much less each other is crowded and covered with history and social and psychological damage and personal sin issues and lack of trust and fear and you will get dirty and you will have to be, hear me, unconventional in finding justice for each other.

I don't want to do this. I want an easier way to Jesus. In finding healed relationship with each other, you may have to walk and balance a little bit, you know, left or right or where you used to walk in.

They ain't supposed to walk up there and dig in the roof. That ain't an entrance. Right? They have to balance. Some of you, you know, you used to, you will have to give your time and resources and pride and hear this, values in ways that will stretch and strain you.

You may have to walk on the left a little bit and walk on the right a little bit but that is faith that carries each other to healing that is right in the middle which is Jesus.

[22 : 03] But the paralytic friends were not only ones who exercised faith. Jesus said he saw their faith. Here's somebody who's forgotten. the faith of the paralytic too.

You ever thought about this? He had to be faithful in being carried by four people. I would have said put me down.

Y'all ain't taking me up no roof. Crazy. I go through the front door but I'm not going up the side. I didn't, they may not have had like the handicap access back then.

Right? You gonna walk up. As desperate as he might have been must give weight to that. He still had to trust and go along with four people possibly strangers to carry him to Jesus up the side of a building and through a roof y'all in ways here this that he couldn't control.

Here's a call to faith for our healing and wholeness for many of us in this country more so on the competent, well educated, affluent, overachiever, successful, and more ready to give mercy ministry than feel they actually need it.

[23 : 23] I ask you, do you have the faith to be the paralytic in the story?

Do you even accept or see yourself as the paralytic? Have you always been the carrier? Are you willing to be carried?

That means are you willing to display and be the center of mercy and attention? Nobody wants to be that dude. Like this paralytic in front of Jesus lay down in your exhaustion admitting you don't have what it takes to get where God would have you to go by yourself on your own strength that you can't love your husband or wife or friends or parents or kids or you can't do business right or you're in depression or you can't get past the mental and emotional mess you're in or your anxiety or stoic rigid sort of unemotionalistic mechanical nature got you kind of twisted or you can't handle your work demands or environment on your own are you willing to admit a big sin among people like us are you willing to admit defeat financially I don't have no savings I got plenty of debt help me nobody want to say that we more willing to say yeah I need healing for this harm but we not willing to say I need healing because I overspent man in some circles if you don't have no savings it's like a sin you don't you don't have any savings shoot man for my setting I'm like you got savings right savings what's that will you be carried do you even think you need to be carried will you be let down through a roof not through the front door will you let someone else take and own your brokenness will you let someone else dig into your mess which means keeping still being faithfully paralytic submitting to the process faithfully being admitting and owning weakness and helplessness for the first time in your life saying and declaring I need two friends no I need three friends no I need four friends all that the church got to handle me and my problem to bring me to Jesus to bring me to healing and holiness that's me let me ask you in here where do you lie on the mat think about your life where where are you being carried where is your faith in this way

I'm going to say something that might sound a little harsh there's no way you're getting to God or have ever gotten to God being whole and strong and stand the way God created and calls you to be if you don't or didn't have a community of carriers for your life and soul because it don't work that way Jesus came for the carried and the carriers and not for those who only come and stay and get through on their own the question is not how are you staying on top of your game but how are you staying on top of the mat you can't be about mercy ministry even reconciliation ministry racial stuff that requires love forgiveness and grace and all those nice words and concepts if you haven't been carried in mercy love and justice yourself that's why these justice multi-ethnic city church models fail we create a caste system of those who carry and those who only and always need to be carried

I mean we pastored a multi-ethnic church for 20 years and people would join because they know they would only be carrying other folk but years I've never seen them carried oftentimes they got secret carriers outside that congregation you know you hear later well you need some help with something what's going on in your marriage yeah but we have a group of friends we go see in the mountains every year what what what what you got folk here no I don't I don't need no you mean the person I took to get their medicine last week they can't help me why not here's a hard one where are your faithful friends do you have any where are your faithful caregivers your soul caregivers who is and can take and carry you beyond your fears beyond where your faith can take you but where you desperately need to be and go for healing and wholeness think about four names of people who will tear the roof off for you four what about three two one this is what authentic relationship in gospel community is all about faithful companionship and carrying but why you carry one another and what you hope to give get in in it is also important isn't it isn't it which brings us to this we carry everything to him when we carry each other to him so they go through all these struggles to carry this man and this man has entrusted his life to these four people relinquish control and they finally get to

[29 : 56] Jesus oh man you see the story and the guy's legs are messed up and all of that and you're really zeroing in on that and they get there and oh man it's awesome right and they got four people there relinquished the man's relinquished control and they finally get to Jesus and Jesus says to the paralytic almost comical here your sins are forgiven what he pulls that I'll pray for you mess right it's like going with that bill right that red one that they about to cut it off y'all don't know about that but that one that's that color you know and you're like hey I need help God bless you what no I need some cash Jesus here he is boop your sins are forgiven what he don't see right not dogging that but it's often what we don't want to hear when we have a you know a bill due or a husband or wife are leaving right now right or we just got a bad report from the doctor our boyfriend or girlfriend has broken up with us or we got fired and need a job or have been abused in some way but Jesus has a reason for doing this in that order look again you know

I'm not going to read through it all look at what's going on so there are people there and the bible says they're questioning in heart whether Jesus is truly God and they're trying ways to trap him and all these kind of things there's Pharisees there there's disciples there there's people who would be followers of Christ there so the room is intense y'all so what Jesus does according to his calling and his ministry matters and he knows what it is I'm not going to delve too much into the whole sickness sin belief thing in this sermon but Jesus was using the faith of this man and his friends for his agenda and not only healing this man and declaring his power and personhood to the world he was healed that he was God in the flesh because he could heal and forgive sin but to tease out the hypocrisy and challenge the teachers of the religious law these teachers dropped in on Jesus to make sure he didn't step out of bounds according to their law that he didn't get out of control or go beyond according to what they would ask or think or ask God that things could be judged as right or wrong but they didn't know or accept that this Jesus was God coming to flesh and in using this situation to first forgive sin and back it up with healing that's exactly what Jesus was doing and they judged him as off out of order with God's way and God's plan so what is the point here with this there is a temptation to only carry with our expectations of what and how and when and why the Lord will do what he does when we carry or are carried to him we won't expect one thing and Jesus goes out of order and he does more than we have imagined or thought and faith does not work like that it's better than that faith is not bringing to God in hopes that he will do what we have deemed right according to our expectations faith is dropping in me they thought they had faith just to get them there to be healed but Jesus was like let's bring it a little further right because faith is dropping and being dropped into God's care right driven by turmoil yes real circumstance but expecting

God to do what and how only God has imagined and decided it you don't know what story you entering in right when we carry our carry to the Lord to Jesus we carry everything see Jesus don't just take the healing he takes everything when you bring it to him when you're brought to him you know the story and the results of our carrying to him we are saying Lord we have this request but faith says more than anything we expect and often times we'll learn that you are Lord this is what he's declaring here I'm not a healer I'm Lord which you know underneath the sub point there's healer right what and who we carry we submit not only our kind of myopic small minded though important issues but to your divine cosmic purposes and glory and that Lord is way better and best than what we could have ever imagined or thought as we were carrying people to you this heart and thought is so important if you're carrying or a carrier because the result of direction or the timing the cloudiness and the crowiness and the unexpected and it seems like and sometimes it seems like it went wrong or fell short or it's tougher than expected it's not because

God is not faithful it is because he is God right and he is declaring to be the best I mean this is what Jesus did to be the best for and the Lord of what you have been faithful in great you've been faithful in carrying great you perfected justice and mercy and racial reconciliation and all that multi-ethnicity stuff great but I am God of that faithfulness let me tell you this from being carried and a carrier I typically have to be corrected not to judge the Lord remember all the people there the disciples the carrier the paralyzed man and the Pharisees oh yeah I've been the Pharisee most of the time look these people did good Lord and you went ahead and forget no just heal don't try to step up and be the Lord just heal because when you start trying to be

Lord you complicate things for yourself and Christianity ain't that something Jesus could uncomplicate Christianity if he would stop acting like the Lord in things in making people wait in doing other things a different way if he would just click click heal he would be much better accepted he'd be easier to work with some of us have lost faith and left the faith or refused to get involved in the lives of people because we brought someone or something to God or we were submitted to and brought it we had no idea that we were giving Lord access to everything and it didn't work out right he will be the Lord of everything and treat everything and everyone like he is Lord which is way better than your immediate expectation you see the true carry in the story is

[37 : 29] Jesus what we bring to the Lord and are brought to Jesus takes and he carries us in it where we could not possibly go this man came for healing oh what a small request before the Lord he transcends the limits of human imagination and the constraints of sin he removes the barriers he tears the roof himself he removes the barriers of human possibility and claiming to be the son of man in verse 10 Jesus carrying the whole room and there are different levels and versions of disbelief and faith paralysis everybody in the room is paralyzed right providentially the whole room drops in is paralyzed somewhere in their lives and beliefs and through the faith of these few people Jesus picks up and carries the whole room the legalistic the unbelievers the desperate those just dropping in those eavesdroppers of religion the hurt the undeserving beyond the barriers to a grace and mercy and love and relationship with God beyond what they could or would or even dare ask for there was a belief back then that sin of a person or their family caused them to be sick again sick and again don't have time to tease out how this is true or not true but to couple this man's healing with forgiveness is to give the paralytic and possibly their friends more than what their faith or sin could have ever dared them to know or ask for themselves do you see it it's easy to miss in the action look at verse 5 again and when Jesus saw their faith he said to the paralytic son your sins are forgiven Jesus calls the man child or son God's child God Jesus picked up with their limited ability and faith to know or ask or think or go there deep sin history root cause brokenness and carried them beyond the touch of his hands for healing but into guess where he ended up into the loving arms and relationship and rightness and joy of being a child of God y'all they couldn't have done that even if he wasn't paralyzed he couldn't have done that even his friends had the power to heal they couldn't say son and it transformatively means something see being a child of

God Jesus brought them to an impossible place for many of us to demand of God and earn from God a forgiveness that makes us children and people of God that calls us to a worship and praise and amazement that we could not have seen or known and experience a life with God and others that we were blocked from right all because the son of man Jesus came and carried our sins away and carries us to him you see when Jesus died this is so incredible he himself was carried God humbled himself to be carried in and on a death blanket and laid in a tomb so that when he rose he could announce and promise to us take up your mat son daughter take up your mat get up from your paralysis of belief come out of the alienation of not being a son or daughter of trying to manage your own brokenness and righteousness alone and walk in new life and his power and his providence and his sovereignty and his loving guidance and at the end of the passage it says that they were amazed and praised

God exclaiming we've never seen anything like this before I think it's kind of confusing on purpose because I'm not sure they're talking about the healing even though that is fantastic but a man who was deemed an outcast and his friends were called sons or son of God what there's a scripture later in the Bible that says this may you experience the love of Christ though it is too great to fully understand then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God now all glory to God who is able through his mighty power at work within us to accomplish hear this infinitely more than we can ask or think do you know the amazement of such beauty such love of such affection of being a child of God of the drama of being surprised by the broadness and unexpected more than we could ask or think here's how we get here carry be carried be carried by

Jesus let's pray heavenly father thank you that you're willing to carry us as we are carried and carry others that the command to do so is not wrapped up and ends with the limited works of human beings a human goodness a human mercy but your mercy and your grace and your power I pray for this congregation that has historically been faithful to carry those who couldn't carry themselves who have historically been faithful even in its founding to dig through the roof to not come the regular way to declare diversity and multi ethnicity and mercy and justice and help of the poor and changing of community

[44 : 24] Lord really revolutionary ways of carrying Lord we thank you for the faithfulness of this congregation who have gone against the status quo and Lord look what you've done people of different races worshipping together Lord what an amazing thing people who have been poor and caught in all kind of distress have been helped but more than that oh Lord people have been called sons and daughters wow how did you do it Lord continue to create a congregation of carriers this we ask and pray in Jesus name amen amen Thank you.