

Bringing Friends to Jesus – Matthew 9:1-8

Introduction: I read a story about a man who was taking a course in first aid. One day, he actually had the opportunity to use his first aid training. He went to class the next week and told the class about it. He said, *“There was a wreck in front of my house. I could tell that the driver was hurt badly. But because of my training, I knew exactly what to do. I sat down on the porch and put my head between my knees so I wouldn’t faint.”*

That reminds me of many Christians. We know the cure for sin, but we fail to apply it to help others. We have become too stingy and selfish with the gospel. Today, we are going to read about four friends who were not selfish, but used their means to bring their friend to Jesus. Let’s read about it and learn some principles we can apply to our lives. **READ Matthew 9:1-8**

Now what happened in this story tells us a lot about Jesus and can tell us a lot about ourselves. From this story, I want to share five principles we can apply to our lives today. First:

1. Real Friends Bring Friends to Jesus.

These four men had a friend with a need. They believed Jesus could help him, so they took it upon themselves to bring their friend to Jesus. We don’t know their names, but we can know something of their character. At least one, if not all had to have **Love**. So, we’ll call the first man:

Mr. Love was probably the motivator of the group. He was the one who got the others together and said, *“Listen guys, our friend is in need. And if we love him like we say we do, then we just can’t sit around and do nothing. We’ve got to do something. We’re all gifted in some way, but if all we do is just give our stuff to the poor, or even if we move mountains and we don’t show our love we’re just wasting our time.”*

Mr. Love was a kind man. He never got jealous, boastful or proud. He was never rude or self-seeking, and he had all kinds of patience. You couldn’t make him mad because he cared for people so much, any criticism that came his way, he just brushed it off. He didn’t hold grudges either. Mr. Love didn’t like it when people committed sin, but when people did what was right, he threw a party. In fact, when Mr. Love was carrying this stretcher, he probably had most of the load, because I read where he bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things, Mr. Love didn’t know the meaning of failure.

But also, everyone carrying this stretcher had to have **Faith**. So we’ll call the second man:

Mr. Faith believed God could do anything. So he was eager to team up with the other three and take his friend to Jesus because he believed that this Jesus was God's own Son and had the power to do a miracle for his friend. You couldn't discourage him. You couldn't deter him. And you couldn't scare him. Mr. Faith might not have known all the facts, but he didn't wait until he understood everything – he just lived up to his name - faith.

And also, everyone carrying this stretcher had to have **Hope**. So we'll call the third man:

Mr. Hope. Now Mr. Hope and Mr. Faith and Mr. Love must have grown up together. They have seen lots of the same things and had experienced God doing so many things for them. But this friend had been paralyzed for years. Medically speaking, there was nothing that could be done for him so that he could walk again. It was an impossible situation. But Mr. Hope didn't believe in impossibilities. He believed in possibilities. He just knew Jesus could do something for his friend.

Mr. Hope knew that all things were possible with God. And because of that, he didn't depend on what he could do, but on what God can do.

Mr. Hope, while carrying the stretcher for his friend, probably sang his theme song all the way: *“My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.”* Mr. Hope knew if he could get his friend to Jesus, he would be much better.

And also, everyone carrying this stretcher had to have at least a little **Works**. So we'll call the fourth man:

Mr. Works was the backbone of the group. Mr. Faith, Mr. Hope, and Mr. Love could have the greatest ideas in the world, but without Mr. Works, all they would have would be good ideas and good intentions. Mr. Works was there showing people what the others were trying to say. Whatever needed to be done he volunteered to do it.

But he will be the first one to tell you, that he takes orders from the other three. In fact he works so close to Mr. Faith that without him, Mr. Faith would be dead. When the other three showed up, Mr. Works was always there too.

In fact, he was the one who told the others they could take this man to Jesus, they knew Jesus could help the man, but it was Mr. Works who spoke up and said, *“Let's go do it!”*

Now, let me ask you some questions this morning:

1. Do you know someone who needs to know Jesus?
2. Do you love them and care about them to go see them?
3. Do you have faith to believe Jesus can make a difference in their life?
4. Do you have the hope that says, if I can just get them to Jesus, He can change their life?
5. Are you willing to do whatever it takes to bring them to Jesus?

You see, you can do a lot of things for your friends. You can give them food when they're hungry. You can give them a coat when they're cold. You can give them money when they're needy. But if you don't bring them to Jesus, you're not doing enough. The very best thing you can do for a person is to bring them to Jesus. Why? You can feed someone, and they'll get hungry again. You can give someone a coat, but eventually that coat wear out. But Jesus can meet a need that will last forever.

You see, this paralyzed man wasn't able to come to Jesus on his own. Someone had to bring him because he was physically bound to his bed. We're surrounded by people who are spiritually bound. They can't come to Jesus on their own. 2 Cor. 4:4 tells us the devil has "*blinded their minds*" so they cannot see the truth. If you don't bring your friends to Jesus, they probably won't come on their own.

Now, how do you bring your friends to Jesus? The best way is to introduce your friend to your best friend by telling them what Jesus has done for you. They might not know Him until you tell them about Him. They might have an idea of who Jesus is, but they won't know what a difference He can make in their lives until you share with them in word and action how He has changed your life. So, by all means, tell your friends about Jesus!

But another way you can bring your friends to Jesus is by bringing them with you to church. In Scripture, the church is compared to the Body of Christ. When you bring a friend to Church, you really are bringing them to Christ.

You see, in the church is where they are going to experience the body of Christ in worship and at work. Jesus is alive and well and living in His church today, so bring your friends to church!

The next principle, we see can learn from this story is:

2. Bringing Friends to Jesus Involves Overcoming Obstacles.

When these four friends got to where Jesus was, the place was packed, and there was no way to get in. Now here is where a lot of us would have stopped. Someone in our group probably have said, *“Well, we tried, but we can’t get in. Let’s just go back home.”* Someone else might have suggested that we find the back door, but when no opening was to be found, they would have said, *“No luck today! We’ll have to try again next week.”*

But these friends didn’t a little obstacle like finding no way in stop them. Instead of giving up, they got creative. They came up with an idea to get their friend to Jesus. They climbed up on the roof and began to dig away their way through.

Now if someone in our group suggested that a hole could be dug in the roof, someone would have protested, saying, *“Whoa man! You just can’t go around destroying other people’s property like that!” Besides, who’s going to pay for having it fixed? Not me!* But these men didn’t think that way. They had enough faith hope and love to do whatever work was necessary to overcome any obstacle so they could get their friend to Jesus. That’s all that mattered to them.

You see, if we decide that bringing a person to Jesus is more important than anything, then you can be sure there will be obstacles. Satan will throw you a roadblock. He will try to get you off track. He will try to entice you with other things that seem to be equally or more important.

How many times have you made a commitment to Christ, only to have something else come up to keep you from doing it? How many times have we allowed our own pursuits get in the way of bringing folks to Christ? How many times have we even invited folks to church, and they come, but then we’re not here? Huh? It happens doesn’t it?

What I’m trying to say is that if it’s important to the kingdom of God, then the Devil doesn’t like it. And when we don’t follow through with bringing people to Jesus, we’ve given him the victory in that battle. So just know that if you decide to make it your priority to bring folks to Jesus, there will be obstacles.

The third principle we can learn from this story is:

3. In Bringing Friends to Jesus, the Main Objective is Forgiveness.

When these four friends dug up the roof, and proceeded to lower their friend in front of Jesus, amid all the protests and finger pointing, the crowd was also waiting to see what Jesus would do. Would He rebuke the men for tearing up the roof? Would He heal the paralytic? What would He do?

Well, vs. 2 says that when Jesus saw the faith of the four friends as well as the faith of the paralyzed man, Jesus looked at the paralyzed man and said something completely unexpected. He said, *“Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.”*

Who said anything about needing forgiveness? This man couldn't walk. Everyone could plainly see that this man's needed healing. So, why is Jesus telling him that his sins are forgiven?

It's because Jesus is able to look beyond the symptoms and to see the real problem. Like a good Doctor who knows how to correctly diagnose the problem, The Great Physician was treating the real problem. You see, this man was like many people of that day. He believed that he was paralyzed because of some past sin in his life. Now, while that can be true, it is not necessarily true all the time. People can and do suffer physical infirmities and have to deal with broken bones and other disabilities because of sinful habits or wrong choices they have made. But it is not always so. Sometimes, despite the best we can do, we can get sick or have an accident. That's just a part of life.

This man wasn't a paralytic because he was a sinner. We are all sinners - and whatever our physical condition, we need forgiveness. If you recall the very first word that Jesus spoke from the cross was, *“Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing.”* (Luke 23:34)

So, while Jesus eventually heals the man, He first, correctly diagnoses that His greatest need is for forgiveness. Physical healing only lasts a few years but forgiveness lasts forever.

So when we bring our friends to Jesus, they may need food, clothing, shelter, money and health. They may need someone to talk to. But while we're talking to them, don't lose sight of the fact that their greatest need may be for forgiveness. That's why the best thing you can do for your friends is to bring them to Jesus, because He is the only one who can do anything about their greatest need. The fourth principle we can learn from this story is:

4. Real Friends are Stretcher Carriers, not Sermon Critics or Sitting Consumers.

When Jesus said that he had forgiven the man's sins, the critics spoke up. They didn't speak it out loud. Matthew says they "*said to themselves. 'This fellow is blaspheming!'*" What they were doing was questioning Jesus' authority to forgive sins. While his friends were bring this poor man to Jesus, and Jesus was helping him with his greatest need, they were sitting there silently calling Jesus a blasphemer because He claimed to be able to do something only God could do – forgive sin.

Ah, but Jesus knew what they were thinking, just like knows what you're thinking right now. Are you thinking: "*Man, I wish he would hush and let us get to B.J.'s before they get crowded!*" or maybe you're thinking, "*That guy sure can't preach!*" Come to think of it, I'm glad I don't know what you're thinking, because if I did, I'd be so distracted, I couldn't keep my train of thought.

The point is, besides the paralyzed man, there were three kinds of people there that day: The stretcher carriers, the sermon critics and the sitting consumers: Which one are you? Are you bringing people to Jesus? Or do you just come to church to find fault. Do you show your love and compassion and your faith and hope by going out of your way to bring a friend to Christ? Or do you just come Sunday after Sunday, and enjoy the free show?

I'll tell you this: if you are actively bringing your friends to Jesus, you won't have neither the time nor the inclination to bring up one iota of criticism toward the body of Christ. And you won't have time to just sit on the premises either. You're focus will be on what's important. You're passion will be to see folks saved and baptized and disciplined.

Jesus' response to these sermon critics leads us to the last principle I want to mention today. And that is:

5. Bringing Friends to Jesus Results in Changed Lives.

Jesus knew the thoughts of the critics so he called them to question. He asked them in vs. 4-6, "*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.*'"

Jesus did claim to be God. He demonstrated it not only by forgiving the man's sins, but also by healing the man from his paralysis. Jesus used this healing miracle as a teaching tool to demonstrate to the people present

that He was God.

Now when Jesus told the man to get up and take his mat and go home, He was telling him to do something he had not been able to do for years. In his own strength, He was powerless to get up and walk. So learn this lesson: Jesus will never give something to do without giving you the power to obey Him and do it.

This man was suddenly given the supernatural power to get up, pick up his mat, and walk out of that room. Luke says in 5:25 (NIV) that, "*he went home praising God.*" That means that he didn't leave quietly. He had something to shout about. Not only had he been healed and set free from a condition that had him bound for many years, but he had been forgiven and set free from the shackles of sin that had him bound all his life. I can't imagine him quietly tiptoeing out of that house. I can see him hugging Jesus so tight that he almost cut the circulation off. I can picture him leaping and praising God and giving everybody high-fives on his way out. I can see Jesus looking up through ceiling and seeing four faces with grins from ear to ear. I also see all the critics with their jaws dropped to the floor in disbelief, can't you?

What made the difference in this man's life? It was Jesus. It wasn't just the man's friends and their love, faith, hope, and works that cured the man. Although God certainly used those men and honored their determination, ultimately, it was the power of Jesus to change lives that made all the difference between a paralyzed man being carried in on a stretcher and that same man getting up and walking out praising God. Ultimately it was the power of Jesus that changed this man from a belief that his sin had sentenced him to confinement in bed, to a realization that his sin had been forgiven, and now he was free. That one encounter with Jesus changed this man's life. And his life became a testimony to the power of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion: Most of us who have been saved have been changed by Him because someone loved us enough to care for our souls. Someone had enough faith to believe that Christ could make a difference in our lives. Someone held out hope that our situation wasn't impossible for God. And someone actually corralled all that faith, hope and love into action and brought us to Jesus – the one who could change our lives.

You need to go to that someone or those people and thank them for their witness. Thank them that they loved you enough to bring you to Jesus. Thank them for their faith and their hope. Thank them for not giving up on you.

Then thank God that He brought about the change. Thank Him for His forgiveness. Thank Him for setting you free. Thank Him that Christ and Christ alone has made the difference in your life. When you do that, you will leave here today praising God.

And if you are here today, and you haven't met Jesus yet; this could be your day to have a personal encounter with the greatest Friend you'll ever know. You may not be physically paralyzed, but you are bound by sin and you need to seek Jesus for His forgiveness. Jesus is here today in this crowd. He knows your needs and He cares. If you will come to Jesus in faith and say, "*Lord, I am in bad shape. I've got lots of problems. I can't help myself but I believe you can help me. Will you help me, Lord?*" If you'll do that, He'll say to you, "*Friend, your sins are forgiven.*"

Finally, there may be some here today who can't honestly say they've been stretcher carriers. Instead, you've been either sermon critics or sitting consumers. You haven't brought anyone to Jesus in years because you've just been basically coming, sitting, listening griping, and going home. May we all be convicted to the point where we're not content to just sit around on padded pews. May we all become stretcher carriers, bringing our friends to Christ – the only one who can make a difference in their lives.