



BORN OF FOUR

- **Mark 2:3** And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four.
- Imagine what life was like for this paralyzed man – his whole life lived on a mat 3 feet by 6 feet. Someone has to do everything for him; he will never know independence.
- Nothing can be done medically. There is no way to contribute to society. He has to go through life as a beggar. He dreams of a healthy body sometimes, but always has to wake up to his limitations. He knows he will never be free.
- Even today, people who wrestle with physical challenges say that the most difficult obstacles they face are the attitudes of so-called normal people. This is a fast-paced world, not very friendly to the handicapped. But the ancient world could be even harsher.
- Aristotle: “Let there be a law that no deformed child shall be raised.” 5 BC Rome statute: “Quickly kill a deformed child.”
- In Israel, they let the handicapped live, but they suffered from a horrible stigma. It was a common assumption among the religious that if someone was suffering physically, they had brought it on themselves by their sin. (disciples about blind man blind: “Master, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”)
- This man only has two things going for him: his friends (without them he never makes it to Jesus, never gets healed, and never gets forgiven), and his willingness to be vulnerable.
- He must have wrestled with his sense of dependence sometimes. After they had been together, his friends could walk home and he could not. Sometimes he was jealous of them, sometimes angry at them, but always dependent on them.
- It’s a troubling thing to have someone carry your mat, because then they see you in your weakness. They could hurt you if they drop you. It’s a very vulnerable thing to make the mat public.
- But here is the truth: **everybody has a mat!** Whether you call it human brokenness or genetic imperfection or personal weakness, it is what you most desire to hide about yourself.
- Have you ever bought something “as is”? That’s each of us!
- Maybe your mat is a temper you can’t control. Maybe it’s an addiction you can’t control. Maybe it’s a fear you can’t control. Maybe it’s a lust you can’t control. Maybe it’s a tongue you can’t control. Or just maybe it’s a terrible secret from the past that you can’t control.
- Some people spend their whole lives pretending that they don’t have a mat. They appear so healthy and strong that people around them assume they could walk anywhere they want to. Their primary goal in life is to hide their brokenness from others, and they’re good at it!
- But you can’t even have a deep friendship by always being the strong one. You’ll never have a strong marriage if you hide huge parts of yourself from your spouse. You’ll never be an effective parent if you’re most interested in projecting a perfect image that says “I’m never wrong.” And you can’t get to Jesus when you can’t even get off your mat!
- What you need are some friends that care more about getting you to Jesus than they care about their own convenience. (When these guys came to pick up their friend, they really picked him up!)
- Have you ever felt like Jesus was so close, but you just couldn’t get through to Him? That’s the way it was this

day; they're shut out of the action by virtue of a mat! That is, until one of his friends gets a strange idea: "Let's make a whole and lower him through the roof!"

· The four friends are so desperate to get this man to Jesus that they won't let anything get in their way – not even a roof. Ironically, many of the barriers that keep us from Jesus are surprisingly fragile (like this roof of reeds, branches and mud). It just takes some irrational friends with some irrational determination, and some irrational vulnerability on our part.

· Harry Stack Sullivan (pioneer in interpersonal psychology): "It takes people to make people sick, and it takes people to make people well." That's not strictly true, because every one of us is responsible for our own sin before God. But we are shaped more by people than any other force in life. Maybe we could say it accurately this way: "Satan uses people to make people sick, but Jesus uses people to make people well."

· Imagine for a moment that you are the man on the mat. You are about to go through the roof; this is the biggest risk you have ever taken in your life. Can you trust your friends to keep you safe? When they carry you at ground level, a drop would hurt a bit; but this time, a drop could be fatal. What about the crowd? What about Jesus?

· Lying there, you have a decision to make. If you willingly go through the roof you could get dropped, you could get ridiculed, you could get rejected. But if you don't go through the roof, one thing is certain: you will never get healed!

· "When Jesus saw their faith ..." Church, do you have any idea what the faith of one person can do for a friend? Jesus looks at the man and sees not only a broken body but a broken, fallen soul. And he forgives his soul (the deepest healing) before he heals his body!

· What sins can a paralyzed man do anyway? Jesus understood that the deadliest sins – resentment, arrogance, judgmentalism, envy – are the ones we can commit without lifting a finger.

· There were other paralyzed people in the room that day! They were the religious, who were upset at the roof-crashers for interrupting the lesson, upset at the man for intruding on their service, and upset at Jesus for offering him forgiveness!

· They had arrived on time to get good seats, they were familiar with the order of service, they had the most seniority in the religious community, they were supposed to be the most spiritual ones ... but apparently did not have a single person they cared for enough to bring to Jesus. To them, church was about them and them only.

· What preoccupies you? Where does your mind drift when you're not doing anything? What do you daydream about?

- o An entrepreneur eats and sleeps business
- o A great coach is always scribbling plays on napkins
- o A young mother worries constantly about her children
- o A sports enthusiast has his mind on the next big game

· What does God think about all day? We can know because He came in the person of Jesus. He was always thinking about people ... obsessed with lost sheep, lost coins, and lost prodigal sons.

· We don't become more spiritual by attending more church services, but by reaching out to more people. That explains many of Jesus teachings:

- o Don't judge or you will be judged.
- o If you don't forgive others, God will not forgive you.
- o If you don't love your brother who is visible, you can't love God who is invisible.

· Jesus is not saying that God withholds forgiveness to get back at you. He's making a profound observation about human nature. It is psychologically impossible to really live in God's forgiveness and not want to experience that with other human beings. **PEOPLE WHO DON'T LOVE PEOPLE CAN'T LOVE GOD!** It's impossible!

- The Bible teaches that love is the ultimate expression of God's law; it's equally true that lovelessness is the ultimate expression of sin. The spiritual descendants of those crowded into that room are still with us; they are self-righteous, critical, judgmental, negative, and disapproving. But the spiritual descendants of those four friends are still with us as well! They will endure any inconvenience, embarrassment or sacrifice to get someone to Jesus!
- BORNE OF FOUR: tabernacle furniture carried by four men; typical of the plan of salvation.
- People's mats are sometimes heavy and awkward, and there's always a roof of busyness or fear or conflict that needs to be crashed through. There's usually even a crowd of religious people around that feel greatly inconvenienced by the interruption.
- But those who find their way to Jesus expand their little 3 by 6 world to brand new horizons! Both physically and spiritually, that man suddenly became the healthiest guy in the room, because he was the one that had most recently touched Jesus.
- Where is that man today? And where are those friends today?