

Friends In High Places by Jeff Strite

Luke 5:17-5:26

A few years back, Garth Brooks came out with a popular Country and Western song called: "I've Got Friends In Low Places"

How many of you have ever heard the song? (when most of them raised their hands, I stage whispered: "Pagans")

It has a catchy tune, but it is NOT a very nice song. It tells the story of a man who "crashes" his ex-wife's (or his ex-girlfriend's) fancy party. The words go like this:

"Blame it all on my roots
I showed up in boots and ruined your black tie affair.
The last one to know, the last one to show.
I was the last one you thought you'd see there.
And I saw the surprise and the fear in his eyes
when I took his glass of champagne
And I toasted you
Said, "honey, we may be through
but you'll never hear me complain."

'Cause I've got friends in low places
where the whiskey drowns
and the beer chases my blues away.
And I'll be okay.
I'm not big on social graces.
Think I'll slip on down to the oasis.
Oh, I've got friends in low places"

What's really depressing about this song is that the last chorus of the song is sung by a bar full of people singing the praises of spending their time in a "low place where the whiskey drowns and the beer chases" their blues away.

Now I have no problem with people wanting to spend time with their friends. The problem isn't that they want to spend time with their friends, it's that they want to spend that time in a "low place"... and they're quite content to STAY in that "low place".

ILLUS: A few years back I had reason to go into a bar. I didn't really want to go in there, but there was someone who I needed to talk to and they came outside with me when I

found them.

But I really didn't want to be in that bar.

So I walk into this bar (long pause) and to call this place a dump (pause) would be an insult to garbage dumps. It was dirty, it was disgusting, it made my skin crawl to be there. And I thought to myself at the time: why would anybody go to a place like this? It was truly A LOW PLACE.

ILLUS: One man once observed that "the bar is an imitation" of what the church should be.

It dispenses liquor instead of grace, escape rather than reality.

It is a permissive atmosphere.

It is unshockable. It is democratic.

It is very accepting and everybody can be included.

And you can tell people secrets there... and they usually don't tell others. In fact they really don't even want to.

The bar is a place where lots of people find relief from the pressures of the world. It's a place where many literally do chase their blues away with whiskey and beer.

Now, what's interesting is that Jesus spent His entire ministry with people in "Low Places." He didn't go to their "low places" to toss back a few drinks and tell a few jokes. He didn't share their "darkness" so they could feel better. Jesus came down to their low place in order to lift them up into a life they could be proud of.

Just a few verses after our story this morning, we're told "...the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to (Jesus') disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" (In other words, "Jesus what are doing down here in the "low places?")

Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Luke 5:30-32

That was why Jesus came.

He didn't come to rub shoulders with the powerful and influential.

He came heal people who'd messed their lives up.

Now, as I was preparing this sermon this morning, it occurred to me that this crippled man in our story had lived a very low place in his life. He was condemned to never walk, to never be able to enjoy much of the world around him. But he had one thing that made all the difference in his life: he had friends who were literally in high places. They

went up on the roof someone's home to help him be healed of his weakness. And there was something that Bible tells us about those 4 friends that got my attention. We're told "... Jesus saw THEIR faith." Luke 5:20

Now, here's the setting:

This is the 1st year of Jesus' ministry. Ever since the Sermon on the Mount, He's been out preaching, teaching, healing and casting out demons. And it seems that every time people know He's in the area, they surround. They literally mob Him.

It's hard for Him to get a moment's rest. Hard to find the time to be alone and pray. What seems to make it worse is that, when He heals people, it takes its toll on his body. In Luke 8, for example, we're told the story of a woman who had an illness but who feared to approach Jesus face to face. She touched His garment and Jesus "felt power go out from Him."

Every time Jesus healed someone, it took some of His strength, some of His energy. It tapped into His power and took from His reserves. This might have been part of what made Him tired all the time.

So, He's come to Capernaum and again He's surrounded by crowds. In fact He's teaching inside a home and it is packed with people.

And there's this paralytic.

As you read the story of this man and his four friends, you almost sense the desperation and urgency in their actions. They have GOT to get into see Jesus. They don't want to wait. They won't be put off. Because if they wait, they might miss Him... again.

I'm sensing from their urgency that this paralytic had tried to get to Jesus before.

Perhaps, he had just missed Jesus days before when Christ had gotten on a boat and crossed over to the other side of Sea of Galilee.

But now, Jesus has come back. And this man and his friends know where He's at and they've rushed to the place where they've been told He'll be.

They've got to see Jesus. They CAN'T risk Jesus getting away again before their friend has had a chance to be touched by Jesus and healed. And here they've finally caught up with Jesus and they can't get thru because of the press of the crowd.

There's no room in the house. They can't even get close to the door. There are even people crowded around the windows so there is no way they can even begin to get Jesus' attention.

(Pause)

So they sit down together and they begin to talk.

There's no room in the house.

People are crowding the door and they are blocking windows.

"How are we going to get in there?" they wonder.

(Pause) Then one of them looks over at the house and says "well, there's nobody up on the roof!!!"

And everybody looks at him in surprise, because they all know what he's thinking.

"I wonder... if we could dig a hole in the roof, then, we could let him down in front of Jesus."

Another friend scoffs "... but we can't just drop him thru the hole! How are we going to lower him safely to the floor?"

Still a third says "If we had ropes... maybe we could lower him down through the roof.

Yeah, ropes would do it!"

And off they go in search of ropes to use for their friend.

Now you have to realize - this is a bold move on their part.

* Not only are they about to destroy the roof of someone else's home.

* Not only are they about to disrupt a session being taught by Jesus.

* But they are about to barge into a meeting of some very important people.

Luke 5:17 tells us there were "Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem... sitting there."

These are important people, and some may have traveled as far as a couple of days to get there. They've come because they want to know what this new teacher has to say. They want to know what His message is. This is a serious meeting with some serious people. And the paralytic and his friends are about to barge in...

But you know the paralytic's friends don't care.

They don't care if they ruin the roof.

They don't care if they upset the meeting.

And they don't care who's there in house with Jesus.

All they care is that they have a friend who's sick - and Jesus can heal him.

Nothing else matters.

So, they get up on the roof.

ILLUS: Now, if you were to try to cut a hole in my roof you'd have quite a task ahead of

you. It would be extremely difficult to open it up so you could lower someone down into my house. But the houses in Palestine weren't built like ours.

Scholars tell us that homes of that day had a unique flat roof made of wooden beams that rested on the walls of the building. These beams were placed about 3 to 4 feet apart and were covered with thick branches, brush, reeds, mud, grass and clay about 4 to 6 in. thick. And the whole roof was often topped off with clay tiles to channel away the rain.

So, while it would still be difficult, it wouldn't quite as hard to tear away the covering of their roofs in that day.

(pause) And those inside the house must have heard the racket up on the roof as these 4 men tugged at the branches and plaster and other debris to make a hole big enough for their friend to be lowered down through.

And you can see the crowd as the debris from the roof begins to rain down on them. You can see them clamor to their feet and struggle to get out of the way. And there on the floor in front of Jesus is opened up a space easily large enough for a sick man on a pallet.

The room is quiet now.

The crowd is silent - waiting to see what will happen next.

Sunlight streams down from the hole in the roof.

You can see particles of dust hanging in air. The room is filled with a haze.

And then - the stream of light is blocked as the friends swing the pallet over the hole and they begin to lower their friend into the room.

And there's Jesus.

Standing. Watching quietly until the palsied man lays on ground in front of Him.

And He looks up to see the anxious faces peering down through the hole in the ceiling.

And He sees their faith.

This paralyzed man had friends on the roof.

Literally friends in high places.

These were men who shared Jesus' passion for people who'd lived too long in low places (Pause)

and Jesus saw their faith.

These men BELIEVED if they could just get their friend to Jesus, Jesus could change his

life forever. And so, they were willing to do whatever they needed to do bring their friend to Jesus
And because of that – Jesus SAW their faith.

The question I want to ask you this morning is this:
Has Jesus seen YOUR faith?

Do you have a friend or a relative or a co-worker who is living in a low place? Somebody who is crippled inside

- o It could be they're spending all their time down at the bars – chasing blues away
- o Or maybe they're into drugs trying to do the same thing.
- o Or they could be consumed with bitterness – hard to get along with.
- o Or maybe they're an outcast, or a loner.
- o Or maybe they're a child who doesn't feel anybody loves them.

Jesus came to seek and save... those people.
Jesus came to change their lives so they didn't have to live in low places all their lives.
And when you care enough for those people to do whatever is necessary to bring them to Jesus... Jesus SEES your faith.

In other words: Jesus is impressed.

In Romans 10:15 we're told how much that impresses Jesus.
"How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

One of our primary purposes as Christians is to bring the crippled and the maimed and hurting to Jesus because He can fix what's wrong with them.
That's the job of the church.
And, who is the church? (You are!)

There are people who believe that why I'M paid. They figure it's my job to go out find the crippled and hurting and bring them to Jesus. But folks who think like that rob themselves. They rob themselves of Jesus seeing "their faith" and being impressed with them. Folks who think like that want Jesus to see "MY faith"... and I'm ok with that. I love the idea that Jesus would be impressed with my faith. But that's not how things are supposed to be!

Jesus wants to see YOUR faith. He wants to be impressed with YOUR faithfulness in this.

But how are you going to do this?

How are you going to bring someone to Jesus?

Well, the interesting thing about Christianity – it's not designed to be a "lone ranger" kind of religion. God doesn't expect to do everything all by yourself.

Think about this:

How many men were healed by Jesus that day (that we know of)? (ONE)

How many friends brought this cripple to Christ? (FOUR)

It took four men, working together, to bring this one man to Jesus.

That's a Biblical pattern.

When Jesus sent His disciples out to preach how did He send them out? (2 by 2)

When Paul went off to start churches he always took friends with him (Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Luke, etc.)

My point is this you don't have to bring people to Christ all by yourself.

ILLUS: Years ago I was teaching a Sunday School class and we began talking about how to reach out to others in the community. A businessman named Paul looked over at his friend, an auctioneer named Duane, and He said "I tell you what Duane, I'll challenge you to a contest. I'll invite 5 people to church this week if YOU'LL promise to invite 5 people."

And they did!

And people came because they made a friendly challenge to each other.

So here's what I want you to do.

I'm giving you an assignment. Homework if you will.

I want you to think right now of a friend here in church you can make a friendly challenge to either invite the same number of people you do... or ask them to pray and focus on inviting one person that you both know who needs Jesus to church.

How many of you have friends in the church?

If you don't, you're free to ask me to be your partner in this. And we'll pray about and go visit someone you know.

THEN I want you think about someone who needs Jesus.

- Someone who spend their time down at the bar to wash away their sorrows

- Someone who has a problem with drugs
- Someone who's bitter at life
- Someone who's hard to get along with
- Someone who's a loner or an outcast

In other words I want you to find someone whose life is crippled - who's living in a low place - and then get with the person you've picked out and go invite them to church.

ILLUS: I used be in sales, and they told me that for every 100 people you contacted, you'd find 10 who'd listen to you. Out of those 10 you'd usually make one sale. Now that's a secular model. It works for folks who work hard to make a sale in their markets. But, as Christians, we have an advantage a secular salesman doesn't have. You have the Spirit of God working for you. In John 16:8, Jesus said the Spirit's job is to convict men of sin, and of the need for righteousness and of the fact that there's a coming judgment. If you and your friends pray before asking someone to talk about Jesus with you or before inviting them to church... the Spirit will get there before you do and will begin softening them up for you.

CLOSE: Jesus saw the faith of these four men because they cared enough to take their friend to Him. They didn't think about how embarrassed they'd be. They didn't think about how inconvenient it would be. They just focused on doing WHATEVER needed done.

And Jesus was impressed.

I've heard people say "you're the church with the new construction going on." But folks don't come to church here because of the construction outside. And they don't usually come because of radio advertisements or TV spots, or because your preacher is handsome (I struck a pose). People come because somebody cared enough to invite them.

A famous evangelist named J. Wilbur Chapman once observed that the New Testament tells of 40 people - each suffering from the same disease - who were healed by Jesus. Of this number 34 were either brought to Jesus by friends, or He was taken to them. In only six cases out of forty did the sufferers find the way to Jesus without assistance. He then noted that - of the vast number of people who find their way to Jesus today - most of them reach Him because their friends cared enough to bring them to Him.