



-- Introduction

-- What do these have in common?

-- Slides – (1) Buffalo Bills // (2) “Three” Musketeers // (3) Fantastic Four, // (4) Beatles // (5) Quealy Dome!

-- They are famous quartets.

-- Our passage today tells of a quartet even more outstanding than these.

-- Read Luke 5:17-26

-- Read Mark 2:1-12

-- Peter’s eye-witness account; this was very likely his house

-- Pray

This same narrative actually appears three times in Scripture: in each of the two passages we read this morning as well as in the ninth chapter of Matthew. We can be sure that any account of Scripture recorded three separate times, by three inspired pens, in three different Gospels should be regarded as extremely important and more than worthy of our earnest consideration. Thus, as we did last week, we will look again into this remarkably insightful passage. (In fact, don’t be surprised if at least part of it shows up again next week as well.)

First, before getting into the teeth of the passage at hand, let us briefly observe from verse 16 the edifying fact that our Savior found a quiet place where He spent a special time in prayer before engaging in the events about which we have read this morning. In verse 16, we read that Jesus had withdrawn to a lonely place in order to commune with his Father, and, as a consequence, He came forth from that prayer clothed with an abundance of healing and saving power. Of course, we understand that, as God in the flesh Himself, Jesus always possessed healing and saving without measure. However, I believe that it is largely for our sake that we see Him retreating to private prayer so frequently. In this consistent habit we learn from Christ that supernatural power will only rest upon us in the proportion to which we draw near to God. Thus, as Charles Spurgeon said, “Neglect of private prayer is the locust which devours the strength of the church.”

Now we come to verse 17, where we find Jesus teaching the midst of an enormous crowd that is packed in around Him like olives in a jar. It says, *“One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, who had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem, were sitting there. And the power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick.”* And verse 18 brings before our attention a man stricken down with a dreadful paralysis who is brought into the healing presence of Christ by a group of men. It reads, *“Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus.”* This remarkable confederation of mat-carrying men shall occupy our attention this morning, for in their example I think we witness an instructive display of how you and I, together as God’s people, ought to be reaching out and moving forward in faith. From these men, we learn that...

-- In order to move forward in faith, we must band together.

In other words, we can learn from them that an exceedingly integral aspect of reaching out with the love of Christ is teamwork.

The loaded station wagon pulled into the only remaining campsite. Four youngsters leaped from the vehicle and began feverishly unloading gear and setting up a tent. The boys then rushed off to gather firewood, while the girls and their mother set up the camp stove and cooking utensils. A nearby camper marveled to the youngsters’ father: “That, sir, is some display of teamwork.” “Ah, yes,” the father replied, “I have a system. No one gets to go to the bathroom until the camp is set up!”

In any event, the point is simple: Teamwork can be impressively effective. However, let us hope that in our labor together as the body of Christ we can be more humanely motivated than that family. But sincerely, we must realize that God has not assembled us together as a church by accident or without cause. Rather, as Ephesians 4:16 declares, *“Under [Christ’s] direction, the whole body is fitted together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.”* Thus, we move forward in faith best when we band together for God’s glory.

As you may recall from our reading of Mark’s account of this grand occurrence, it took four men to carry this paralyzed man to Jesus. Presumably, each of these men lifted one corner of the mat upon which he perpetually lay as they urgently ushered him into the healing presence of Christ. Thus, we see God banding together these four men and putting them to work in active charity. We can be

certain that God's design for reaching out through us is no different today. Granted, reaching out is not always about teamwork. There are, of course, many who are led to Christ by the individual efforts of one person. Just as Andrew found his own brother Simon, so any one believer, by his or her private communication of the truth, can become the instrument that the Spirit of God applies in the conversion of another. And we should not expect anything less, for such is the contagious nature of the Gospel of Jesus Christ—one convert will testify to another, and that convert will proclaim the Good News to a third, and so on.

Our passage this morning, however, seems to demonstrate that there are some souls who will not be brought to Christ by the ministry of one. By God's providence, cases such as this require that there should be two, or three, or four, or more, working together in holy combination, who, with one heart, acting in one accord, and feeling one common compassion, shall determine to band themselves together as one for the benefit of another, resolving never to relinquish their holy alliance until their prayers are resolved and their friend is saved. The paralytic in our passage could not have been carried to Christ by one person acting alone, no matter how strong. Without the combined efforts of the four he would certainly not have reached the glorious place of Christ's healing. // Just as God called this blessed quartet forward in faith, so He calls us to band together for the purpose of reaching out to unbelievers in our community.

Let us, then, more carefully apply this principle to our own lives by examining some situations that we surely see happening all around us. First, consider the case of a father whose wife has long been praying for his salvation, and yet his soul lingers unsecured. Consider further that God has blessed this wife with two sons and a daughter who, along with her, rejoice in the fear of the Lord. Should not these four each grab onto a corner of this sick man's mat and labor together to carry this lost husband and father to the Savior.

Consider, in the second place, the case of a husband and wife who have both happily received Christ's mercy, but who are urgently praying for their son, who is as yet unsaved. Of course, as we have discussed recently at length, these parents should continue to pray to the Lord, to pray in faith, to pray, and to pray, and to pray without ceasing. Let them know that the Lord hears, delights, and responds to their humble prayers. Yet, consider further that this son is unusually and continually stubborn in his unbelief. In such an instance, as those called together in Christ, should we not band together to provide the extra help that is needed. Perhaps, in addition to the two concerned parents, the Youth Pastor will make a third and a redeemed friend from the youth group will complete a blessed quartet.

Let each one of them take hold of one corner of that young man's mat, and let each one lift his spirit high before the throne of grace. Perhaps, when home, church, and friends are all working together for the common purpose of Gospel redemption, the Lord will look down in love and save this lost teen.

Perhaps, right now, you are thinking about the lost condition of a particular person whom God has placed upon your heart. I certainly hope that you are, because—honestly—if you are not, then can I say this: You are simply not thinking carefully and compassionately enough in the Spirit. With that said, then, with whom has God burdened your heart? Perhaps this lost soul is someone to whom you have already presented the Good News of Jesus Christ. Perhaps you have long been praying for this dear person, and although you have already applied every conversion method you can muster, the long-anticipated transformation has not yet come. Oh, dear friend, I know your consternation, and I empathize with your angst. But do not give up. Continue to pray. Continue to share the truth with gentleness and respect. Continue to model the character of Christ so that these precious lost souls might see our good deeds and praise our Father in heaven.

But not only that, there is more. Let us consider any additional means by which God may be choosing to answer our appeals. Let us, then, seek more help. Perhaps you tend to speak too comfortingly to this individual: it may be you have not yet presented to him/her knowledge of that precise truth which the conscience requires. Let us, then, seek more help. God may desire to apply the particular knowledge and skills of a second believer to the situation. Perhaps this additional believer will provide biblical instruction where you have only spoken consolation, and perhaps that instruction will be a divinely-sent saving grace. Let us, then, seek more help.

Yet it could very possibly happen that this successive addition of sound instruction will not suffice any more than did the initial consolation alone, and you may need to summon a third. So be it. Let us, then, seek more help. Perhaps God will use this third brother or sister to articulate a stirring warning or a staggering admonition, which might rattle the sleeping conscience. This exhortation, added to the consolation of the first and the instruction of the second, may be the ultimate tool God uses to break through a hardened heart. Not any one person alone, but all three of you, working together, moving forward in faith, may prove to be mighty instruments in the Lord's hand.

Yet, even after you three have gladly combined, you may discover that this poor, spiritually-paralyzed soul still remains unwilling to repent and receive the life of Christ. Let us, then, seek more help. A fourth may be needed. Perhaps God

has in mind to add yet another believer to this blessed team who possesses a deeper affection or greater understanding than all three already assembled. Let us, then, seek more help. Perhaps this fourth helper owns experiences more suited to this particular case than that of the first three. Perhaps, then, by the Spirit's great power, this fellowship of four may accomplish what neither one, nor two, nor three were ordained to get done. Quite often, moving forward in faith requires that we seek help from our brothers and sisters in Christ. Let us, then, seek more help!

This same principle, I think, is evident in remarkable diversity of the Bible. Please do not misunderstand me here: we know that all Scripture is fully inspired by the same Holy Spirit, and we know that every individual message of the Bible is consonant with the whole revelation. However, at the same time, God has wisely chosen to reveal Himself and His will to us through a diverse assortment of authors, and I believe that in this revelatory dynamic, we witness yet again that moving forward in faith requires us to band together.

Allow me to explain what I mean. Upon reading Scripture, a certain man may encounter the epistles of Paul, and although Paul's clear doctrine will most certainly have enlightened his intellect, it may not yet have convinced his conscience. Perhaps he has also discovered the Psalms of David, and although the beauty of the poet's eloquent appeals will have surely warmed his heart, it may not yet have humbled his pride. Later still, he may have listened to the words of Peter, and although Peter's rough and cutting sentences may have broken his pride and convinced him of sin, still he may not have found the great joy and peace of sincere Christian belief. Finally, this man may need to experience the sweet and affectionate words of John, and His entire being will at last submit to the call of Christ. As it was with the quartet in our passage, so it often happens with Scripture: Only when that fourth, or fifth, or tenth person shall grasp the bed and give a hearty lift will the paralyzed person be laid in mercy's path.

Therefore, here, I believe, is the Lord's challenge to you: It is both my delight in the present and my enthusiastic hope for the future of this congregation that we might all be an active and integral part of little bands of men and women bound to each other by our collective passion to reach out to lost souls with the love of Christ. Oh that we would declare to one another today that reaching out to the lost is a cause around which we will ever remain united in a common zeal. Oh that we might promise each other today that we will pray without ceasing for the lost souls upon our hearts—for the unbelievers in our community, in our neighborhoods, at our workplaces, in our schools, and among our families. Oh that we will move forward in faith by uniting together in obedience to the Great Commission.

Do you not realize that there are many people of this congregation who are among us only occasionally at best and whose salvation is uncertain? Let not one of them be able to say, "Nobody at that church cares about me." Do you not know that there are hosts of unbelievers all around us every day, rotting and dying in their sins? Lord, forbid it that they could say, "No one there took notice of us." Let us shower these dear people with perpetual prayer and cover them with Christlike care. Let us, of course, meet together in humble prayer on their behalf. However, let us not be so naïve as to imagine that sincere prayer begins and ends with bowed heads and folded hands. Oh no, let us with conviction recall that praying without ceasing means acting according to those prayers by pursuing them with the strength God gives. We should certainly not imagine ourselves free from our responsibility to unsaved people until we have actively banded together to pick up their mats and carry them to Christ.

Will we respond to the challenge today? Oh, Lord, let it be! However, with all that said, I must confide honestly with you my fear that, while many of you will wholeheartedly embrace this challenge, far too many of us will not lend our strength to carry the spiritually sick. Most of us, I am certain, will agree that the plan is admirable, but too many of you will leave it to others to carry it out. So I offer you this additional challenge: Please prove me wrong.

But, remember, everyone who joins together in this labor of Christlike love must be filled with the Holy Spirit, and each one ought to have sincere affection for those they endeavor to bring to Christ. Remember that moving forward in faith requires people who will not shrink in the face of difficulty... people who will give their utmost to lift the precious burden... people who will persevere until they succeed. They need be strong, for the burden is heavy... they need be determined, for the work will test their resolve... they must be redeemed, for the power they need comes only from the Holy Spirit... they need be prayerful, for the glory belongs only to the Lord... and they must have faith, for without faith it is impossible to please God.

In our text, Jesus saw the faith of four men who would stop at nothing to get their dear friend into His healing presence. He saw their tenacity to move forward in faith, and He accepted their service. Where shall we, as members of First Baptist Church in Carmi, IL, find confederations such as this? My prayer is that the Lord will find them right here among this very fellowship. My prayer is that He will be pleased to find them in you and in me. May He establish these blessed groups of sick-bearers among us now and send us forth to the many poor and dying

sinner who lay spiritually paralyzed all around us. Let us band together and move forward in faith for the glory of our great God!