

### Study Guide for the Central Church of Christ 9-3-17

September 3 we will study Ephesians 1:18b and Mark 2:1-12. Discussion questions are:

1. Mark 2:1-12 – Who do you most identify with in this story?
  - a. How might the paralyzed man have felt as his friends carried him down the street?
  - b. How might he have felt as he was lowered through the hole in the roof?
  - c. How might people crowded into the room with Jesus have felt about the paralyzed man being lowered into the room?
  - d. If this event happened in a church building how would the roof maintenance committee react?
2. As you have tried to bring a friend to Christ what obstacle caused you to lose hope?
3. Describe a person who wishes a friend would come to Christ and a person who hopes a friend will come to Christ.
4. Ephesians 1:17 is a prayer for God to give the Ephesians a spirit of wisdom. What specific results would such a spirit create in the Ephesian church?
5. Ephesians 1:18 – What are the 2 aspect of hope Paul is concerned about?
  - a. 18b – inheritance (2:6-7)
  - b. 19 – Power (2:1-5)
6. If you personalized the prayer to “know the hope” how would it change you?
7. After God shows Abraham the Promised Land, why does he have him walk through it?

#### Sermon: *On Knowing the Hope*

They were really frustrated. No one said a word. They didn't have to. The look on their faces telegraphed their emotions. Four men who had carried their heavy burden some distance were hot and tired. Their arms and shoulders ached from carrying that weight. You know what it's like when 4 of you carry a heavy load. Perhaps you start with each of the 4 carrying the load with just one arm until the weakest of the 4 complains, "I can't go any further." and you lay the burden down and switch sides so everyone can use a different arm until someone complains again. Then you lay it down and everybody grabs a corner with both of their arms and now it's more difficult to walk because you are all walking sideways. These 4 men likely went through

those same contortions and now at the point of exhaustion they are finally at their destination and can lay their burden down. They came to lay their burden at Jesus' feet but to their dismay and frustration they find the crowd so large they can't get into the room where Jesus is. One man by himself would have great difficulty squeezing through that tightly wedged crowd. It is impossible for 4 men carrying another man on his mat to squeeze through. If we had been there that day and asked, "How hopeful are you that you can get in to where Jesus is?" I wonder what they would have said.

Their journey began with a dream, a vision that the miracle worker could enable their paralyzed friend to walk. They hoped he could. They believed he could. They took action to see to it that he did. And now they come to an obstacle they cannot remove. How hopeful are you 4 men now? One of them looks at the impossible situation and says, "The stairs! Let's take him up the outside stairs to the roof!" And the other 3 exhausted men agree to give it a try. Perhaps they are wondering, "What good will it do to take him to the roof? There is no door on the roof leading into the house."

Up on the roof they lay their friend down. One of them likely put his ear to the roof to try and locate just exactly in the room where Jesus is. Finally they decide on the likely location and their tired fingers begin removing the thatch. Suddenly this crowded little room where Jesus is healing people changes. The holiness of the moment is disrupted first by a small beam of light coming through a small hole in the roof. Then dust begins to sprinkle the crowd and people begin to cough their objections into their hands. The room is filling with dust and when people look up they see 40 fingers digging away at the roof, making the hole larger and larger. Then the hole fills with fabric that has a heavy weight causing it to sag in the middle. Down, down, down comes the fabric and you begin to see the straining arms of men lowering the object right down in front of Jesus. Maybe you even see 2 men holding the ankles of 2 other men as they carefully lower their friend on a mat virtually onto Jesus' lap. The room is in shock as a paralyzed man goes to the head of the line and winds up right smack dab in front of Jesus. The only sunlight in the room illuminates Jesus and the paralyzed man in front of him. As if more drama was needed the paralyzed man is now illuminated as the center of attention.

And Jesus does the most interesting thing. He doesn't focus on the paralyzed man. He looks up and sees 4 heads peering down through the hole in the roof. And the Bible says, "*He saw their faith.*"

You have a friend who needs to get to Jesus don't you. Do you remember the dream you once had, the hope you once had of bringing that friend to Jesus. You started on the journey to fulfill your dream, carrying that burden every day, and then came the obstacle. It could not be passed by. You could not go around it. There was no easy solution. And what did you do? Did you lose hope? Did you lose the dream? Did you squelch the vision?

We're going to interrupt the sermon for a few minutes and sing some songs that remind us all to catch God's dream, to rekindle the flame that once burned so brightly in our hearts, and to make the decision this morning to let Jesus empower you the way he so desperately wants to. He wants to see your faith!

Do you remember that old song about the ant that wanted to eat the rubber tree plant? The song's title is "High Hopes." The punch line of the song is, "Oops, there goes another rubber tree plant!" You have to have hope to do anything. Without hope nothing ever happens. We use the word hope so glibly today that we virtually destroy its meaning. "I hope I win the lottery." I don't hope that. I wish it. Hope means you expect it. "I hope I get a raise." but if you don't expect it, it's a wish. "I wish I could catch a fish as big as the ones Burr Harris catches at Texoma." But I haven't put out a trotline and I haven't gotten up at sunrise to go check the trotline, so I don't hope to catch a huge Lake Texoma catfish. I just wish it would happen but I'm not going to put out that kind of effort.

Do you hope to bring a friend to Christ? Do you have a dream to bring people into the kingdom? To have hope you have to have a dream. If you don't have a dream, how is God going to make your dream come true? In your Home Team do you have a dream of using your weekly meetings as a way to bring a friend into the kingdom? If you don't have a dream, how is God going to make your dream come true? Without a dream, there is no hope!

Hope is expecting something God has promised will certainly happen in God's good time. Hope is a choice. People who are depressed are people who have lost hope in some area of their life. They have come to believe that some area of their life will never improve. One of the great challenges of counselling is to help people rediscover their hope.

Hope is based on the belief that God is working in your life. Do you believe that God knows about the pain in your life, the pain in your marriage, the problems with your job, the challenge you face with your child? Do you believe God is so intimately concerned with you that He bothers to maintain an inventory of the number of hairs on your head? If he knows something as insignificant as how many hairs are on my head, he surely knows about the important things in my life. If God knows me intimately then there is hope for the fulfillment of my dreams for bringing a friend into the kingdom.

It is hope that gets us up out of complacency and leads us into proactivity. It is hope that cause you to stop wishing and start working toward seeing your dream fulfilled. Four men who have a paralyzed friend refuse to allow circumstances to control their dream. Their friend is to get their paralyzed friend to the healer. Whatever it takes, however long it takes, we are going to get him to Jesus. You cannot stop a man with a dream. We used to think it was impossible to break the sound barrier until Church Yeager took his dream and climbed into the cockpit of the experimental Bell X-1 and did it. We used to think it was impossible to run a 4-minute mile until a dreamer named Roger Bannister laced up his track shoes and did it. We used to think it was impossible to fly non-stop across the Atlantic Ocean until Charles Lindberg lived out his dream and climbed into the Spirit of St. Louis and did it. We used to think it was impossible for a man to walk on the moon until Neil Armstrong's put his dream into action as he stepped out of Apollo 11 and onto the moon. You cannot stop a man with a dream.

So today's text from Ephesians is not even an entire verse. It's just part of a verse in Ephesians 1. It is Paul's prayer where he says, "I pray that God will open your eyes so that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you." Why is his prayer for them to know their hope?

Why is hope so important for the Ephesian church? Because without hope the church will never get off dead center. Their great challenge is to find a way for their Jewish members and their Gentile members to function as brothers and sisters. Paul wants them to become a flagship church for churches all around the Mediterranean.

There is a wonderful story about hope in Genesis 13. Its right after Abraham and Lot split their property and divide the land and Lot takes the land that looks like the Garden of Eden. Abraham allows Lot to take first choice while he apparently is left with inferior land. And then God says to Abraham the most challenging words. “Raise your eyes now, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. – Genesis 13:14-15 Abraham lifts his eyes and looks in all 4 directions with the words of God’s promise ringing in his ears. He is at the critical point in his journey where he must choose between wishing and hoping. He can stand there and look at all that real estate and say, “I wish that were mine.” or “I expect that to be mine.” To help him get out of wishing and into hoping God does something you need to do. It’s recorded in vs. 17, “Rise up, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you.” Why does he want him to walk through the length and breadth of Canaan? That’s a pretty good hike. Because He wants him to have a dream that is real. He wants him to see it, to taste it, to feel it. He wants him to lay down at night with aching legs wondering, “How far is it to the border of my new land?”

God wants you to have a vision. He wants you to walk through your vision for the kingdom of God in this city.

Auguste Bartholdi traveled from France to Egypt in 1856. There he met another visitor to Egypt named Ferdinand de Lesseps, who was there to sell an idea. His idea was to dig a canal from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean. His dream so inspired Bartholdi that he decided to design a lighthouse for the entrance to this canal. It would be no ordinary lighthouse but rather would be a symbol of light flowing from Western civilization to the East. Over the 10 years it took to build the Suez Canal, Bartholdi worked on his dream, drawing plans and molding clay models. When the Suez Canal finally opened it did so without Bartholdi’s lighthouse because no one was willing to pay for it. Bartholdi returned to France convinced he had just wasted 10 years of his life. Back in France, the French government decided they wanted to give a gift to America and they chose Bartholdi’s lighthouse which now stands in New York harbor, and is called the statue of Liberty. Great dreams eventually find the right open door.

There may be so many people in the front door you cannot get in but great dreams climb the stairs and come down through the roof.

You may be a bit like the paralyzed man this morning. Perhaps someone brought you here today. Like those 4 men someone brought you to a place where you can be exposed to Jesus. If you would know more about this man Jesus, the purpose of this next song is to give you an opportunity to make that known to the people gathered in this building and, more importantly, to make it known to God.