



WHFC Summer
Part 4 – Helping People Meet Jesus
Pastor Ted Cunningham

Today we're talking about helping people meet Jesus. I have to be honest. I've been preparing a series called *Law and Order*. Do you think that's a fitting time to deliver it? I wanted to give it today and go through... So far, it's two Sundays where we got verse by verse through Romans 13 where we look at the primary role of government and then our role and responsibilities as citizens. I can sum the whole two parts up for you in one simple statement. The primary role of government is to restrain evil... and all God's people said... amen. So, there it is. You don't even need the series now. I gave it to you from Romans 13.

I'm shocked at some of the conversation I'm having with Christians today who want to rethink all of that, but we want to go straight to scripture with what God ordained government is supposed to do and it is supposed to restrain evil and punished evil doers. Then my job is to submit to authority and – this one I know you wouldn't want so you're probably glad I'm not doing it today – pay your taxes. Something has to pay for all this. Oh, there's where I lose every republican in the room, but it's biblical, my republican friends.

Today, I'm going to a text. If you have your bibles, turn to Luke 5. I've been going to Luke 5 quite a bit since the beginning of all of this in March. Because we were needing to find creative ways to minister to people. Then when we started to open back up and regather on campus in May, it required more extreme measures to figure out how we were going to do that safely. Now, we're at a place with about half of our people regathering on campus each week and another half at home watching right now. We have to get creative again. How can we stay connected as a church family, but also how can we continue to invite people to Jesus and reach people?

Today is a call to our church family to live out one of the five purposes of the church, evangelism, in new and creative ways. A lot of us think about telling people about Jesus, but the story we're going to see today is more than just telling people about Jesus or pointing people to Jesus; it's actually carrying people to Jesus, helping people on their way to Jesus. You've been creative though this time, church family. We started with these crazy meetups from Chick-fil-A to Andy's to Crispy Crème, graduation drive-throughs, Mother's Day drive throughs. We've tried everything.

I have a friend... I wasn't planning on sharing it this morning, but it just reminded me. I want to share with our church family that you have been ministering not to just one another, but to others in this community and around the world. I mean people are watching, people are noticing and it's making a difference.

I love going into restaurants that we purchased gift cards from as a church and having the owner come up to me, or the bar tender say, "Hey, thank you." Not just for the money or the little bit of help, but way beyond just the money, it was being supported in what they were trying to do to provide for their families. I don't want you ever to underestimate how much you did during that time, but I hope you know we're in this for a while longer and we have to continue to find creative ways.

I have a pastor... I don't know if you know this about pastors, but we often don't share one another's online posts or social media posts, but we text each other behind the scenes. "Oh, good one, man; I really liked that." I had an Ohio friend text me yesterday and go, "Man, I really wanted to retweet what you said, but my wife told me I couldn't." He's a Wesleyan pastor; they're a little more timid than we are.

I have a pastor friend who took his life during this pandemic, and I was reading through the other day... We connected on fishing and on ministry. Probably more on fishing than we did on ministry. I just smiled when I looked at my last text that I got from him. This is what he said: "Brother, your church is killing the social media game..." Killing is a good term for you seniors. "You are killing the social media game with communicating, connecting to your church family, and keeping them outwardly focused."

I'm grateful to Woodland Hills during this time and for those of you... many are coming back. I've met several today that it's their first day back. I'm going to let everybody know online we're still practicing social distancing here in the Castle and in the Chapel. Every other row is closed. I briefly mentioned that last week, so people were surprised by that. They felt good about that. They thought we were just coming in here being crazy, but people are spread out. This is the most crowded service, obviously, at 10:00. You'll feel even safer at 8:30 and 11:30.

Matthew 28: 19-20 starts us off, and this is one of the purposes of our church, one of five purposes. Jesus said, ***19 "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..."*** We are going to be getting a baptism on the calendar soon. I know many of you... We obviously cancelled that from Easter on, but we will be going back to that soon. ***20 "...and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."***

I want to jump into this story because this story is a story of extreme measures. It's a story of teamwork and cooperation and I love the picture that it paints for us as a church. We read in Luke 5 the story of four guys that bring a paralyzed man to Jesus. The gathering where Jesus was speaking was so crowded that they couldn't get this guy into see Jesus, but they didn't stop. They took extreme measures to get this man to Jesus.

Here's the story in Luke 5: ***17 One day Jesus was teaching, and Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there. They had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick.*** So, we're going to see two characters today interacting with Jesus: the pharisees and men who carry a stretcher. Obviously, the man paralyzed is the central figure of the story, but sometimes, in Mark 2, we learn that it's four guys.

We get a little more detail of this story in Mark 2 if you want to flip over there and study that later on today or this week.

18 Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. 19 When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd... I'll pause there and say – this is what we're going to talk about in a second – this is where most of us stop. This is why last week... I don't know about you, but Rene's message was a kick in the pants for me because I was kind of settling it, going, "Okay, the problem we have right now is 90% of our efforts are going to meet the needs and to minister to those on campus. And we've got to be reminded that over half our church isn't even here right now." I had a plan in place, we had a plan in place and now that changed.

I told Rene afterwards, "That was a kick in the pants for me to quit my whining. And all God's people said... Amen. We need less whining in these days and more productivity. It may look different and it may change, but we have to get after it, and that's why these guys carry a stretcher inspires me and it's why I've been coming back to this story because it's not that they're just carrying a stretcher; they rip a hole in the roof. When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd... Again, I just think so many of us have stopped. "This is how we've done business for ten years in Branson." "This is how we've done church for 20 years or for 30 years..." You know what? Now it's not working so let's just...

...they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat... Now, when you read it in Mark, the details there are they dig through the roof. Don't get lost in the whole was it tiles or was it a mud thatch roof. The bottom line is they created a mess. They did some things that I'm sure... We don't get this detail in the story, but you know these pharisees were looking up and there had to be at least one of them going, "Oh, this is ridiculous! Are you going to fix it when you're done up there?" Every church has that one guy. You're here right now in this service. We love you, but just hush it. That's all we need from you; just hush it. They open up the roof, ***through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.***

Here's the bottom line of the story that we want to go with today: **We need to overcome obstacles and use extreme measures to bring people to Jesus.** If ever there has been a time that we need to be thinking about this, talking about this, planning this as a church – dare I say community – it's now. Dare I say we need to start ripping some holes in this roof. We need to take extreme measures, but I think there are three types of people when it comes to obstacles in the church.

The first one is **the person who stops at obstacles.** I've heard this for years. "It'll cost too much money." This is the bottom-line person that allows the bottom-line of the church to drive the ministry. We don't want that. We've spent some money that I know some people would go, "Is that really worth it?" Yes. "It'll cost too much. It's too much work."

I have to be honest with you. When we started back services in May, we all gathered here on Saturday before our first service here in the building. On our first service, we had about 43%-44% of our congregation return to campus. We sat out there, volunteers and staff, on Saturday and we looked at that mouse maze, chasing the cheese thing we have going on out there, and I got in the car afterwards and I looked at Amy and I go, "Is it worth it?"

Some of you have had a lot of those thoughts lately in opening your business. Is it worth it?" And then we came Sunday. I cried a little more. I've been doing a little bit of that. It was an emotional day and we got out in the car on Sunday afternoon and I looked at Amy and I said, "Totally worth it." It was totally worth it. It was 100% worth it.

Some people would say **there's just a little of a return on the investment** and they stop. There are plenty of churches that don't have an impact in their community; they're not reaching people for Jesus, people aren't getting saved because the church has gotten so comfortable, inwardly focused, and it's about us and just staying with us that to think about spending money, spending the time, spending the energy, it seems to be too much.

We never want to be a church who stops at obstacles. We want to be the church who overcomes them. We want to overcome obstacles. Our first socially distant service... We've grown from like 43% or 44% back to campus to I think we're back to 48%, which makes us one of the fastest growing churches in the United States of America, I think. I don't know if Outreach Magazine will back that up. I don't think they are doing their fastest growing church list this year. But I'm like, *Man, we grew by 5% in two months.* Anyway, I thought we can stop now and get comfortable with what we've done and wait. I think that's why last week I was so inspired by Rene. A lot of us just want to wait this out. We're going to wait the next year or so. Or, we're going to get creative and we're going to start ripping some holes. We're going to start bringing people to Jesus in new and creative ways because we definitely don't want to be this last group.

Those who are obstacles. Don't be that person. To be a person who stops is one thing, but then you can be the person that actually jumps in the way and says no. Here's the bottom line. **This church will stop at nothing to bring people to Jesus.** We looked at it last week. Our purposes haven't changed, but our strategies are changing like crazy. We have to get creative.

Not this past Friday, but the last Friday, about ten days ago, my dad called me at 8:30 in the morning. He said, "Can you get over here quick; I think I need to take your mom to the hospital, and I may need to call an ambulance." I live two streets over from my parents, so I jumped in the car and I raced over there. My mom was lying in bed and all I can say is her symptoms, to me, and I'm not a doctor, but it looked like a heart attack or a stroke. It was bad. And yet my mom said, "Something happened to my ear last night." So, I'm going to give you the end of the story first, so, as I walk through it, you don't think I'm a terrible son. It was an inner ear infection. I had no idea an inner ear infection could do what it did to my mom to where if she elevated her head just a little bit, she got violently ill. I can't explain it; it was bad.

I remember as a kid... The only other time I've dealt with this with a parent is when my dad had kidney stones and was dragged out of the house by two men. I didn't know kidney stones could do that. We learned later they can do that, but I remember my dad's feet dragging as these two guys carried him out. I remember, as a kid, thinking, *This is it. I'll never see him again.*

But my mom was sitting there and I'm like *what are we going to do?* I thought about getting the chair and I would take her, but I go, "Dad, we're just calling an ambulance." We called an ambulance

and...Elevating her slightly... I won't go into details. It was bad. They spend the day at the hospital in the emergency room, then clear everything up, they pass her with all the major stuff and it's none of that. It truly is an inner ear infection. They gave her a lot of medicine. My dad brings her home and she's laying down in the car. She still can't sit up without becoming violently ill. We're all standing out by the car and I go to push the seat up a little bit... and it's bad. I put the seat back down and we're trying to figure out how to get her in the house.

Now, I just want to tell you my dad, my brother, and I are standing around the passenger door, trying to figure this out. When it comes to practical solutions, my dad is brilliant. He's an engineer. He was coming up with nothing. My brother is a designer and a master craftsman carpenter. He's good with geometry and angles. He can build anything. He was coming up with nothing.

Leave it to the last-born comedian in the family. I look over in the garage and I said, "We're using the wheel barrel." They look at me like I've lost my mind. Again, they were coming up with nothing. So, I go over and I grab the wheel barrel. We put a blanket in it and put it at the passenger door. I go, "Mom, you're going to put your butt right here, I'm going to lean you back into this wheel barrel, and I'm going to take you into the house. Again, my dad and my brother are thinking I've lost my mind.

Now, here's the problem with how I come up with solutions. About halfway through implementing the solution that I have come up with, I think *maybe this wasn't such a great idea*. You have to picture me. My mom is in a wheel barrel with all appendages hanging out of the wheel barrel like this. I'm wheeling her across the driveway, and I think to myself, *what if a neighbor drives by right now?* I said to my dad, "Hey, you really want to get the neighbors talking, grab a shovel and follow me." And I'm making my way over to the front door. My mom actually says to me, "this actually feels good." Why? Because she was laid out flat.

I said, "Mom, you can't die now that the neighbors have seen us, or they will demand an autopsy."

Then we get her in the house. She's still not to the bedroom. My dad gave me the blessing. He spoke these words over me that I'll never forget. He looked at me, my engineer father, and said, "Son, this was a really good idea," and I said, "Thank you." And I took my mom into the bedroom and I tossed her on the bed like a load of mulch.

She gave me permission to share that story for some of you who are thinking... The only reason she gave me permission to share that story is because we have no pictures to prove that story happened. People accuse me all the time of making my stories up. I don't make them up; I live them out. That is how all the stories come to you.

Finding creative ways to help people to Jesus. Let's get back to the story. When this man now comes down in front of Jesus... **20 When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."** This is so important to see the order of events in this passage. You've heard people say, "If you want to do ministry, if you want to do missions, it's really good to go into a community and start by building a hospital, a school, and then a church." You hear people say that's the only way to do it. Well, that's a way to do it, but it's not the only way to do it.

In this text, we see that Jesus deals with this guy's greatest need first. He doesn't heal him first; he saves him first. There are a couple of reasons why we get this order in the text.

21 *The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves...* They are not saying it out loud, but Jesus being God goes to the inner man and he hears their inner thoughts. ***"Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy?"*** Accusing Jesus. Why? Because only God can forgive sins. ***"Who can forgive sins but God alone?"***

22 *Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts?"* And then in Verse 23, Jesus uses a riddle to teach them. **23 *"Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?"*** Here's what he's doing: if someone came down here right now in a wheel chair and they prayed to receive Christ and I were to say over them, "Your sins are forgiven," you'd be like, "Praise the Lord," but if after that, they were healed and started walking, you'd be like, "What?!" And Jesus forgives this man then heals him and all of it is to show that he alone has the authority to forgive sins. He can forgive this man. **24 *"But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."***

Here's what we see in the story and I can't think of a better time than during COVID-19 to the church for all of us right now to be reminded of this. **Salvation is man's greatest need.** Jesus goes to the greatest need, and I want you to hear this in this crazy COVID time. Your physical health is not your greatest need. But boy if you talk to Christians today, you would think that is the most important thing to discuss. No, salvation is your greatest need. Whether you live or die in the next year, not your greatest need. Your greatest need is do you know Jesus? Do you have a walk with Jesus? Your physical health is not your greatest need, but you hear Christians today getting passionate about people and helping people and serving people.

Never have I seen a verse quoted more online in the last couple of months than this passage right here: "Love your neighbor." Man, I'm seeing that everywhere. And it's on two primary issues. I'm going to talk about one you probably haven't discussed or you don't have an opinion on: masks and churches regathering. Let me say this upfront. When and how a church regathers is a non-essential issue for the church. I have pastor friends who love Jesus and their neighbors who are regathering this morning. I have pastor friends who love Jesus and love their neighbors who are not regathering. Many of them are choosing not to regather until Easter of next year. Both of them love Jesus and their neighbor.

Over here with masks. I've got friends on both sides of that issue that love Jesus and their neighbors. Can we stop all of the pious attitudes with this? There are a lot of ways to love your neighbor and if I can just say it, I wear a mask when I go into stores. I wear my mask when I go into restaurants. I wear a full hoodie when I go into Macadoodles. It's so great; I don't get it anymore. "Hey, pastor!" It's just "Hey, what's up?" I'm able to stroll... No... The Baptists are like *is he serious or is this a joke?*

Let's move back to masks. I wear my mask. I'm wearing a mask, but I'm not going to judge other people for their decisions they have around this. I'm just sad in the church that this is becoming so divisive. Never would I have thought churches would split over the issue of masks.

If I can just share with my friends who are passionate about this, I want to encourage you. I said it last year. Buying a pair of Toms shoes does not make you a generous person. It makes you aware. Where you buy your coffee or where you buy your shoes from a social justice mindset company, that's great, but don't be lulled into thinking... Here's what my fear is with this. We're dumbing down the idea of loving your neighbor. There are some people who think *wearing a mask alone is all I need to do to love my neighbor*. No, no, no, you love your neighbor? Tell your neighbor about Jesus before you post again. You love your neighbor? Start tithing to your local church and feeding your neighbors. Start reaching out to your neighbors in a lot of ways. Don't be lulled into thinking a mask alone is how you love your neighbor. I'm thinking that's where some people are stopping.

We're regathering, and this is such a divisive issue. I hear pastors say, "We're not regathering because we love our neighbors and want to keep them safe." Assuming that people who are regathering are not worried about their neighbors and not keeping them safe. We are regathering and social distancing because we love our neighbors and I just want to encourage a group of you right now. I feel like this could be the time. It may be early, but please hear me. If you have symptoms or underlying health conditions, please stay home. But if you went to Applebee's on Friday night, we'll see you next Sunday. If you strolled The Landing and you felt safe at The Landing, can I tell you something? I feel safe here. And I just think for some, you need to stay home. Please stay home. But there are a lot of you who've just gotten into a new habit. I just encourage you, as your pastor... And we just got off the fastest growing church list right there, Greg, with that. But it's time for you to step up, develop some new habits.

If you want to feel safe, there's the 8:30 and 11:30 and we're open at the Chapple. You will feel safe here. Maybe not at 10:00. These people feel safe in this room, but they're a little more conservative and we just kind of push them to the side a little bit when we're making decisions. It's a joke, people. I'm trying to relieve the anger I just caused online, okay? Let's see how many people just tuned out. We can figure that number out right now. But it's true. I see some of you out on the town and you're like, "Man, I can't wait to get back to church." Get back to church. You were sitting right across from me at the restaurant, you can sit right across from me here at the church. Regathering together. Loving your neighbor. We're all passionate about saving lives, but, church, we're called to save souls. And man's greatest need is salvation, not physical health.

25 Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. His sins were forgiven, and he was healed. 26 Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."

It's all worth it when one finds Jesus. We say it around here all the time. Do for one what you can't do for all. And when I think about the money that we've been spending to do the outside stuff and all that... It was a lot of money in May and June. We would sit down and look at it and go, "Man, this seems like a lot of money. Is it worth it?" To continue to tell people about the good news of Jesus, yes, it is. Here's what I want you to get from the story and decide for yourself who you will be. **There are those that carry stretchers and those who critique sermons.** Which one are you going to be? Because our challenge today is that every single person in here would be carrying stretchers, carrying people to Jesus.

Critiquing sermons is easy. I'm sure it's happening online about this sermon right now. This part is easy; carrying stretchers requires teamwork, cooperation, strength, perseverance. This takes a lot more, and I'm here to tell you that it's worth it.

One of the things we've been doing during this time is these crazy meetups. We have another one planned this week to bring our online community together. You'll feel fully safe because you don't have to leave your car. You can leave your windows rolled up and the air conditioning on. This Thursday night from 5:00 to 7:00 pm, we're going to the zoo. Can you think of anything better for our crazy times than to spend a little time in a zoo as a church family? We're going to do the drive-thru at the Promised Land Zoo from 5:00 to 7:00 pm, so let's line up the cars down Shepherd of the Hills. Let's go through. Don't honk; that scares the animals. At the beginning of it, when you get started on it, we're going to give you a gift certificate to get ice cream for you and your family afterwards, but we would love to see you there. This is an opportunity for us to connect our online community and our on campus community.

As we close, if you've never placed faith in Jesus, the story we have today of man's greatest need, salvation, being met, but then the story of four guys who carried him to be with Jesus. I want you to know that this is a church that desires to do just that – carry people, spend time, spend energy, spend resources, spend money to get the good news of Jesus out there so you can hear it. If you've never placed faith in Jesus, as I pray to close out the livestream today and these services today, that you would take this opportunity to confess your sins and invite Jesus to be the Lord of your life.

Father, it is in the name of Jesus that I pray for the one right now who is far from you that today that they would be able to leave knowing their sins are forgiven and that Jesus is their savior.

I'm going to give you a moment right now. You can pray, "Father forgive me of my sins. I ask Jesus to be my Lord and savior. I confess with my mouth that he is Lord and I believe in my heart that he has been raised from the dead." In that you are saved.

Father, thank you for how you continue to use Woodland Hills. Continue to grow this church, guard my heart and my mouth as I continue to preach, teach, lead, and as our teaching team teaches and preaches... I pray all of this in the name of Jesus. Amen.