And again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house. Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them. Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying.

5 When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven you.” (Mark 2:1-5)

The phrase "through the roof" is one that some may remember was a famous phrase back in my early days, though it doesn't have the same recognition now as it did then. The '90s were good years, as were the early 2000s, and it was in that climate when the phrase "through the roof" became famous. What does the phrase "through the roof" mean? It means that something is exceptional, it exceeds expectations, it's beyond the normal level or normal assumption, it surprises, stuns, and takes people by surprise. You may or may not know this term, but it's right up there with "raise the roof." Does anyone remember the saying "Raise the roof"? I know, I'm likely showing my age at this point.

We think of the term as a good thing, and we use it with regard to profit, sales, grades, and personal achievements of all kinds. When I was a teenager in high school, I went to see a dietician who wanted to put me on some dieting and exercise program. After I'd been on the program for some weeks, I was called in to weigh and see if my levels had gotten any better. True enough, they had. My levels were so excellent that I became the poster child for the program; when others were considering the program, my test results were shown to them so that parents would see just how great of a program it is to help overweight teenagers. Yes, my health levels were "through the roof," levels that exceeded expectations. Looking at the numbers, one could say that the dieting program was a huge success. My new levels and weight loss surpassed expectations of "ordinary" success. My results even stunned the dietician! That's what I mean by "through the roof" as an idiom. This expression is considered to be a good thing, a positive, something that's so great that you want to share it with everyone. When something is "through the roof," it's Just. That. Good.
Today's text is all about something being "through the roof," or something that exceeds expectations. The text places us in one of Jesus' miracles, as He is in Capernaum healing a paralytic man who cannot walk. In verse 1, we're told that "and again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house." The verse assumes that Jesus had been to Capernaum before Mark 2, and Mark tells us in Mark 1:21-28 about the nature of Jesus' prior visit to Capernaum. In His first visit, Jesus went into the synagogue and taught the people; while there, He healed a man who was demon-possessed. Jesus amazed those standing around who saw Him cast the demonic spirit or the unclean spirit out of the afflicted man because even the demons knew who Jesus was and were afraid of Him. So here in chapter 2, Jesus has entered Capernaum again, and we find that Jesus is once again doing miracles. This occurs some days after Jesus heals the demon-possessed man, but the miracle Jesus does here some days after the previous one is no less spectacular and wonderful.

"It was heard that He was in the house" reminds us of Jesus' fame, that Jesus was one whose miracles were told and retold by those who'd seen and heard them, and, as all successful companies know, word-of-mouth can accomplish a lot where money spent on advertising often can't. Jesus, then, had word-of-mouth fame that spread by ordinary people. Successful or famous people often get attention, and when their names are dropped, people listen. I remember as a student at seminary that whenever we had chapel (we had chapel 3 days a week, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday), a pastor or preacher from a church would be invited to speak to the student body. I remember that for a few weeks, there were preachers and pastors invited to speak in the conference that weren't famous; they hadn't written any books, weren't names dropped on a regular basis for their work in theology, missions, or biblical research, and didn't have any groundbreaking accomplishments. These preachers didn't catch the attention of the seminary student body. However, I remember the day that John Piper was invited to speak; on that day, chapel was so packed out that you'd thought the seminary was having its own homecoming service. Few names attracted crowds quite like John Piper. Famous people, renown in their fields, even in pastoring, preaching, teaching, and writing, often get the attention of crowds, and Jesus was no different. When "it was heard that He was in the house" (somebody say "Jesus in the House"), the crowds came to see Jesus and see the miracles that were being done.

In verse 2 it says "immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door." As soon as it was made known that Jesus was in the house, in a split second, the crowd gathered to see Jesus, with so many coming around the door of the house where Jesus was that "there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door," the text says. In other words, the door entrance of the house was blocked; there was no way to get in because there were too many people at the door. Not all of those at the door would get to see Jesus, and of those who would, only a few would get to
request a healing of Him. The number of people gathered was "through the roof," it exceeded normal expectations because someone extraordinary was present in Capernaum: our Lord.

The situation painted here tells us that Jesus was well-known, and that the crowds wanted to be near Jesus. Don't you find yourself like the crowd, wanting to be where Jesus is, where Jesus is preaching, where Jesus is doing miracles? Some say that the church is the place where Jesus heals and does miracles, and, while this is true, it isn't always the case that EVERY church is doing the work of God. But, wherever we can be sure Jesus is, we should want to be there if possible. It sure would be nice to see Bible-believing churches packed out on Sundays, wouldn't it? It's sad to say, but it's often in times of need that we see churches packed out. My grandfather and I were talking about this just this past week: if you offer free food, church folk will show up. Offer a barbecue event, cook chicken, turkey, steak, mashed potatoes, gravy, green beans, buttermilk biscuits, and some Red Velvet, Chocolate, and Coconut Cake, with some Sweet Potato Pie, and you'll get the church folk to come. If you offer no food and only offer Jesus and the gospel, watch how few attend. It's a sad reality, but it's often that we have to give food or some incentive to "manipulate" people into coming to church. And yet, our Lord simply offered His time and His miracles. That was it. Just the fact that Jesus was in the house was good enough for the crowds to come. They didn't always need to be fed to come close to Jesus. Perhaps they teach us that, if Jesus is in the house, He's really all we need, isn't He? We really need nothing else if Jesus is close by. We should be "through the roof" just to have Jesus in our midst when we gather to worship Him, right? Is Jesus not more than enough for us? He should be more than enough for us, but for discontented and dissatisfied humans like ourselves, He is often insufficient in our hearts and minds.

At the end of verse 2, it says that Jesus preached the word to them, reminding us that Jesus never gathered the people without giving them the word, without teaching them about the kingdom of God. I've been privy to services growing up that do not have preaching in them. These services are called musical programs or musical services where the only thing done on the service is music and songs performed by choirs and musicians. Though I've been a musician for over two decades now, I've often wondered what the point of musical services was. "Do we not get enough music in worship services?" I always asked. And yet, some never got enough singing, so much so that these musical services or programs could last for hours. And I mean, HOURS. I heard once that a person went to someone's funeral at 10am and stayed until 3pm. Yes, you heard that right: the person attended a five-hour funeral! The shocker in all this is that some of the people that attended the 5-hour funeral would have abandoned the pastor's sermon on Sunday if it had lasted any longer than 20-30 minutes. Why do we prioritize 5 hours celebrating the life of another human being, but won't celebrate the Word of the Lord for 5 hours? Is not the Word of the Lord far more important than learning trivia about the life of a deceased individual? Why is it that some of us would give 5 hours to a deceased person but won't give 50 minutes to a sermon about Jesus? If we follow our Lord's example, we will put the Word of God and sermons above a lot of other things in our worship
services and lives. After all, the Word is the only thing that saves us; why give more energy and effort to the things that can't save us, that are fleeting, temporary, ephemeral, here today and gone tomorrow?

In verse 3, the paralytic enters into the scene: "Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men." Four men brought a paralyzed man to Jesus, we're told. He had to be on a bed, otherwise they would've had a difficult time carrying this paralyzed man, and the text tells us that he was on a bed. We don't know the relation of these men to the paralytic, to the paralyzed man that some seem to think was a paraplegic, but we know that these men were determined to carry the paralyzed man to Jesus.

These four men were bringing the paralyzed man to Jesus, they were seeking a miracle for this man instead of themselves. Many of us would've also been there to see Jesus on our own; we wouldn't have had time to usher in a paralyzed man to Jesus because we would've been too preoccupied with our own troubles to bring someone else to Jesus. And yet, these four men didn't come to Jesus for themselves, but rather, for this paralyzed man. They wanted this paralytic to receive a healing. Rather than focus on themselves and their troubles and their desires, they desired to see another man healed of his paralysis. This is what we call unselfishness, love for one's neighbor. Jesus told us that the first greatest commandment on which all the Law and the Prophets hang is "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and might or strength," but the next greatest commandment is to "love your neighbor as yourself." If you were paralyzed from the waist down, would you not want to be healed if you heard that Jesus was in town? Would you not pray that your friends would take you to the house where Jesus would be so that you could be healed by the Lord? If you'd want to be healed in such a condition, how about someone else?

We often tell people who are sick or disabled, "I'll pray for you," but how many times have we actually done something, performed an action, to help them? We tell the person who needs a doctor's visit, "I'll pray for you," but why pray for them without giving them a ride to the doctor? We tell the unemployed, "I'll pray that God sends you a job," all while we refuse to even give them cash money, buy them a meal, or give them a check or a connection of ours that can get them a new job. If we love our neighbor as ourselves, then we'll give to them what we'd want ourselves. If you want a ride to the doctor from someone if your car ends up in the shop, then why not give the person in need a ride? If you want to get back on your feet after unemployment hits, why not help someone else do the same? Loving our neighbor as ourselves is all about loving others AS MUCH AS we love ourselves. We wouldn't neglect to clothe ourselves, so we shouldn't want to see our neighbor naked without clothing. We wouldn't neglect to feed ourselves, so we should want to feed our neighbor. We want to work and have a job, so we should do everything we can to help someone else get a job --- yes, even a drive to the interview is an action that God commends.
These four men put the need of this paralytic above their own. They wanted a healing for HIM, not themselves. Isn't that what love for our neighbor looks like? Even at this event, where they were "through the roof" that Jesus was among them, the love of these four men was "through the roof" for their neighbor. Their love for him exceeded expectations because most humans would've done the exact opposite that these four men did. After all, Jesus' return to Capernaum was likely unexpected (no one saw it coming), so coming to Jesus, every man looking for his own healing, was considered to be a "once-in-a-lifetime" or "twice-in-a-lifetime" opportunity. They couldn't know with certainty if Jesus would return to Capernaum ever again, so they wanted to make the most of the occasion. To worry about someone else, even a paralytic, meant that a person would have to put their own need, their own desire, to the side and see to it that his or her neighbor was healed first. These four men, knowing what sacrifice they'd make to get to Jesus, wanted this man to get His healing. They wanted the paralytic to be healed above whatever healing or miracle they needed.

Jesus is not physically among us today as He was in the day of Mark 2, but Jesus is with us in that He has given us His Holy Spirit and left workers of miracles in the church according to 1 Corinthians 12:29. In healing services, have we ever thought that, if we help usher a paralytic before the prophet or the person with the gift of healing that God will heal our own brokenness and take care of our own health problems? Growing up in good old Baptist life, I heard a song in church that says, "Pass me not, o gentle Savior/ hear my humble cry/ while on others thou art calling/ do not pass me by." And yes, when the Lord is passing through, we want Him to hear our cry as we call out to Him for deliverance. I believe this to be true. Yet, perhaps there's a healing for us when we seek the healing of others and look on the things of others rather than ourselves. We should want to be healed, we should want the Lord to deliver us and free us from our bondage so that we can serve Him, but it's often in our love of neighbor that we are given the blessings of God. Perhaps God blesses us when we bless others, He showers more of His love on us when we love on others and place their needs above our own. After all, Jesus sacrificed His life, and it makes sense that self-sacrificial love would bring blessing for the one who makes the sacrifice.

In verse 4, the four men encounter an obstacle: that is, the "through the roof" population in attendance, the large numbers of people who blocked the door, the entrance. As verse 4 says, "And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying." The crowd was the obstacle: they couldn't get near Jesus because of the crowd. And yet, some in their position would've given up. Some would've said, "The crowd is too large, there are too many people, we just can't get to Jesus, we'll have to stand outside the door and hope that Jesus makes His way through the crowd to us, or hope and pray that we can get close to Him at all." Some would've questioned the possibility of even getting near Jesus. And yet,
these four men didn’t. Rather than accept that the door was blocked and give up, these men decided to get creative and go “through the roof” (somebody say, “through the roof”). They didn’t let their current obstacle determine their fate. They didn’t let the obstacle prevent their friend, the paralytic, from getting healed. As the saying goes, “where there’s a will, there’s a way,” so these men found a way to get what they wanted: they would go “through the roof.”

There are many today who have a “by the door” kind of faith that says, "This is how we are to believe, this is what we are to do in order to trust God," and so on. There are many who need a "manual" kind of faith that tells them certain steps to do in order to believe, in order to trust God, in order to get through their trial or temptation. And yet, these men got creative when the door wasn’t an option. These four men were so determined to get to Jesus to see the paralytic healed that they decided they would bypass the door and go through the roof if need be. Their faith was "through the roof" because it didn’t match the normal expectations of the reader, both then and now. Let's approach it through twenty-first-century lenses: if it were us, we would've given up at the door. Life often presents trials and tribulations that make us give up "at the door." If we apply for a job and we don't get it, then we give up at the door and say "that's it, the door to this job won't open, so I'm giving up." If we were working hard to get our credit up for that house we want, and we get declined for the house the first time, some of us just give up and would rather buy a cheaper house instead of working and praying for the house that we want --- trusting that God will help if we keep the faith instead of running away. The "by the door" faith says that "This is the limit, and if it doesn't work out like the way I want it to, then I'll simply stop trying."

My sister always tells me of the story of she and my brother-in-law, how they were working, preparing their credit, and praying for their brand new home they’ve now had for over 5 years. When they were trying to get the home, they had a number of things go crazy: my brother-in-law lost his job during the process, which is never the ideal, and their credit wasn't the greatest. My sister told me that she remembers going to the bank for the loan, and being denied, being told that she and her husband would have to have two jobs each in order to meet the loan because there was no way they could afford it. And then, God does what He always does: He opened up a way for them that wouldn’t require them to have two jobs. They now have that beautiful home, with one job each. See, the Lord doesn't live by the words "limit" and "finite" because He’s unlimited in His power and infinite. He specializes in miracles, He specializes in the impossible, He specializes in showing man that He's sovereign and genius and brilliant and the Almighty. When man says "No," God says, "Not yet"; when man says, "Declined," God says "it's only delayed"; when man says, "Don't even think about it," God says, "Yes, think about it, pray about it, dream about it, because the only one that can stop it is Me." Yes, the Lord specializes in doing the impossible, and, as the song says, "He can do what no other power can do." When you have a "through the roof" kind of faith, a faith that penetrates, a faith that presses on despite the obstacles and odds, a faith that never relents, a faith that never gives up, a faith that gets creative when life restricts, a through the roof kind of faith that does what a certain widow
did in Luke 18: Jesus says that a widow in the same city where an ungodly judge was went to the judge and told him to get justice for her from her adversary. The judge feared neither God nor man, Jesus says, but because the widow kept coming to him and she wouldn't give up, the judge gave her what she wanted.

A through the roof kind of faith says that, though one way is blocked, there's always another way. A through the roof kind of faith says even when the crowd is pressing in one direction, I'll go and stand out so that I can receive that which I've asked of the Lord. A through the roof kind of faith penetrates the situation, goes beyond round 1, doesn't give up, but keeps coming back, keeps trying, keeps hoping, even when the odds seem impossible. A through the roof kind of faith is a penetrating faith, a "built to last" kind of faith, a "made for hard times" kind of faith, a faith that doesn't buckle under pressure but grows under pressure.

Yes, these four men teach us today to have a "through the roof" kind of faith, not to let the doors that slam in our face deter us from getting that miracle, or that blessing. These four men wanted the paralytic they were carrying to get to Jesus. The situation was perfect: Here Jesus was, back in Capernaum, in the house, a fact that made them "through the roof excited"; the people were gathered together to see Jesus, through the roof excited about His presence and His Word. But then, the numbers of those gathered were "through the roof," beyond expectations, so the four men had to use their "through the roof" kind of faith to get to Jesus. By taking the paralytic to receive his healing above their own, they were showing "through the roof" love for their neighbor, a kind of love that's rare in the world. Jesus then heals the young man; on account of the faith of the four men who carried the paralytic's bed, Jesus says, "Son, your sins are forgiven you," which indicates that the paralytic could've put himself in his condition because of sin. Jesus told the woman caught in the act of adultery to "go and sin no more" in John 8; He told the man at the pool of Bethesda to "sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you" in John 5. Jesus didn't always tell those He healed to "go and sin no more," but His words to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you," tells us that the paralytic's condition was likely self-inflicted in some way, that the paralytic bore responsibility for his own paralysis. We get the idea here that his condition wasn't like that of the man born blind from birth in John 9, that the paralytic didn't have this condition from birth, and that he caused his own condition by sin. And yet, Jesus healed this man, despite his sin being the cause of his tragic condition. You have no sin in your life so permanently binding today that God cannot heal you. Your sin is no so great that God cannot or will not save you. He's willing to heal, willing to deliver, and willing to save.

I challenge you from this week forward, to have a "through the roof" kind of faith. Never give up, never throw in the towel, never say "never." Trust in the Lord, and never doubt, and He'll surely bring you out.