

The Long Haul



Ryan Gray

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by Ryan Gray

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Whatever It Takes To Get To Jesus

"Ugh, Jim, I take it back; you're heavy! What's your aunt been feeding you?"

"Aw, c'mon, Simon, we've been hauling Jim around the city all afternoon looking for this guy; of course, he's gonna be heavy now."

"You two pipe down back there. While you're jabbering away like a couple of old men at the market, I'm trying to keep from bouncing his head against the cobblestone."

"And Jon, you've got the lightest part of Jim, so I don't wanna hear any of your whining!" Simon grunted. "Especially when I feel like *my* shoulders and fingers are gonna fall off!"

"Guys, can I just say something?"

"What?!" The three snapped at the man they were carrying.

"I think we need to go that way," Jim pointed to a vast crowd pushing its way into a house that looked as if it might burst at any moment.

"What are they doing there? Giving away free bread stuffed with gold? This is madness!" Exclaimed Simon

"Looks like the whole town showed up." Jim thought allowed. Judah exhaled in disappointment, "This is more than our town; this is the entire countryside, ahhhh, shoot!" He groaned. Judah was a big fisherman with a booming voice and best friends with Jim. "Ok, let's set him down here."

All three lowered their mate, Jim, down onto the walkway. They had made a makeshift stretcher with two ropes wrapped under a stiff mattress, then harnessed it around the back of their necks.

"You know, Simon, all this extra rope you made me carry around keeps falling off my shoulder and onto the ground, making me trip. I kinda want to smack you in the head with it, you cheapskate!"

"Waste not, want not. I ain't cutting this rope for one-time use! First, we see this teacher guy inside that house. Second, Jim gets healed. Third, we all go home praising God, and bonus, I get to keep my rope intact and save some coin!"

"If it works," exhaled Jim, sadly.

Simon dismissed his comment, "Jim, you're a good man and have always tried to please God. If anyone deserves to be healed, it's you."

"I dunno know, Simon. All these years, I've had plenty of time to think. Walking just isn't as important as it once was, and anyway, I know I've sinned too much. Now, I just want...."

"What!?" Snapped Judah, "What do you want that's more important than walking?"

Jim looked into the distance, deep in thought, "I don't know, I just don't know! But, I want something more."

Judah's eyes bulged, and he stuck a finger into Jim's face. "Listen here, you sack of ungrateful dung heap! I didn't drag your sorry carcass all over town looking for some 'super' teacher if I didn't think it wouldn't result in your healing."

Simon attempted to calm down their frustrated friend, but the powerful Judah pushed him aside with ease, bent down, snatched up Jim by the collar with both hands, lifting him in their air until they were nose to nose. "We have been friends longer than I've known my brothers. I have been carrying you around longer than I've sailed on water. If this is our one chance, I will tear the legs off someone else and stick them on your body if necessary. But you, my brother, will walk today, even if it kills me!" Judah dropped his paralyzed friend back onto his mat, harder than usual.

"Ouch!" Jim winced as he hit the mat, "Not necessary, *BROTHER!*" Jim snapped back sarcastically.

"Well, today, you're just a brother and not a friend, the way you're getting all negative on me, like a taxman looking for something I claimed wrong. Huh, you're always trying to find a reason why everything will go wrong for you!" Judah shook his head. "Nah, not today... no siree! You're gonna see this teacher, healer guy, whatever he is, and you'll see, you will walk!"

Simon looked into Judah's eyes. They looked crazed, like a starving dog in search of a bone; he was *not* gonna let this go. Simon spoke cautiously, "Ok, well, we can't get in through that crowd. Unless we wanna bust some heads?" Simon chuckled at his own joke, but Judah's icy glare stopped his smile in its tracks.

Judah surveyed the scene with intensity. The crowd was a mass of pastel colors pushing and shoving to get into a single home. It was a nice, large home. But, only half the size needed for this mob. But then the big fisherman saw something, which just might work.

"Look just over there, behind the house, you see it?" Judah pointed.

"What, the stairs? What you thinking?"

A crooked smile grew on Judah's weather-worn face. "I have an idea!" He stated.

The men hoisted Jim up once more, pushing around away from the mass of townspeople to the back of the large home. They snuck up the stairs and onto the roof.

"Now what?" Asked Simon.

"Now, we cut through."

"What?!" The others exclaimed in unison.

"Listen, we cut through, then lower him down. We can use all this extra rope; the old cheapskate, Simon, has had us carrying around all day. It's like God planned for this very moment. All or nothing. Are we all in to see Jim prayed for or not?"

"Wait," Jim cautioned, "Think about this; they could put you guys in prison. I don't know who owns this house, but it's nice, and I'm sure they're important or at least well connected. Brothers, *please*, think this through."

Judah panted heavily and wiped a bead of sweat from his forehead, then grinned. "I have."

The others nodded and smiled. "You're worth the risk, Jim."

Luke 5:17-26 (19-25)*

"And let him down through the tiles with his stretcher, into the middle of the crowd, in front of Jesus.

Seeing their faith, He said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven you."

The scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, "Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?"

But Jesus, aware of their reasonings, answered and said to them, "Why are you reasoning in your hearts?"

"Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins have been forgiven you,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?"

"But, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,"-He said to the paralytic -"I say to you, get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home."

Immediately he got up before them, and picked up what he had been lying on, and went home glorifying God."

What I have missed from this story every time I heard it were the real heroes: the paralyzed man's friends.

Their faith, through their actions, allowed for the lame man's prayers to be answered. The Bible says that Jesus saw the friend's faith, and then He responded.

This challenged me.

Who cannot carry themselves to Jesus but is hungry enough to be carried?

Am I crazy enough to take action?

Would I pray for my injured friend aloud at soccer practice for healing?

Would I sit and eat lunch with the one kid at school no one else wants to talk to?

Would I stand up in front of my entire class to explain my faith?

Will I risk looking like a maniac, doing whatever is necessary and possible, to get my friends and family to Jesus?

To be perfectly honest, I don't know how far I would go.

Do you?

* New International Version

This short story is a work of fiction based, loosely based on the story from Mark 2:1-12, Luke 5:17-26 where Jesus forgives and heals a paralytic.