

Pastor Kyle Mercer
Jesus & People in Need

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Series: Unknown
Mark 1:35-45, 2:1-17

**BIG IDEA - JESUS CARES MORE ABOUT FOREVER NEEDS THAN
FELT NEEDS**

Good morning, Two Cities Church! How is everybody doing? I see you in the lobby. Welcome online and in here. Guys, look around. It's crowded. It's packed. Do you know that we have a Saturday night service? Look to your neighbor and say, "We have a Saturday night service, and you should go."

If you could go to Saturday night... I am just asking you. Don't make me beg. I'm asking if you would consider that. Here's why. This service is packed. It's overflowing in the lobby. I'd tell you to go to Sunday night, but Sunday night is packed, and 150 college students are coming here next week. It's exciting. Yeah, clap. "Other people should move to Saturday night." That's what you're thinking. Yeah, not you.

Here's the thing. We've had an incredibly busy weekend. Look at these pictures. If you're new, let me tell you about the Weekender. The Weekender is so significant. It's so important. It's so impactful. It strengthens our volunteers. It encourages our staff. It invigorates our groups. It strengthens our values. It really is a place for you to believe and belong.

We do nine of these a year. We just had 70 people go through this. I know what you're thinking. If you've been with us for a while, here's what you're thinking. Or if you've been to other churches and are new here, you go, "Kyle, I know what the Weekender is. Ha-ha! It's a theology class." No, it's not a theology class, though we'll teach you theology.

Then you go, "No, I know what this is. This is about being a member, isn't it?" You can be a member afterward. You can peruse through that, but it's not about being

a member. Some of you go, "I know what it is. It's a connections class. Ha-ha! It's about getting in a group and on a serving team." Well, yeah, you can do that too, but it's much more than that. It's about enfolding and engrafting you into the life of our church.

I don't know how to say this. Let me try to say this in the most humble, Spirit-filled, Christ-centered, winsome way that I know how to say it. If you're here and you're a seeker and you're a skeptic and you're checking out Christianity, you're welcome for as long as you want to be here, but if you're here and you're a Christian and your plan is just to consume, to get free childcare, sing some songs, and hear a sermon, we're not the church for you.

Come back when we get into the new building. We don't have room for you right now. We cannot have takers; we need givers. So, if you have just decided... I mean this in the nicest way possible. If you have just decided that you're never going to come to our Weekender because you're never really going to get connected, then I lovingly say we're not the church for you.

When we look at the gospel of Mark, we see a high commitment culture. We see all of the disciples being all in with their time, talent, and treasure, and we want to take as many people as we can with us. Here's why. Look at these pictures, guys. Here are the 13 acres we have downtown. We are moving some dirt around there. Isn't that exciting?

We are doing demolition. We are moving enormous amounts of dirt. We have removed 50 percent of the kudzu in two weeks. And guess what, guys? We found 15 copperhead snakes. That's right. We're about to be a snake-handling church. Some of you are like, "I'm not going to the Weekender."

When you see it, think of *this*. We are preparing the property for the building. There are two things that need to be prepared for this building. First is the *property*, because we're building a 50,000-square-foot, 1,200-plus-seat auditorium. It's going to be a home and a hub for ministry. We're super excited.

The property needs prepared. That's obvious. Move the dirt, put in the sewer lines, build the foundations, and do all that stuff you have to do. That's because you have to prepare the property for the building, but I also think we need to prepare the *people*, us. I just want to use this next year as a time to call us up. It's the same way I felt when... I have three kids.

Every time I had a kid, every time my wife got pregnant, I was like, "Grow up, Kyle. More responsibility. It's time to grow up. You need to mature in these areas." I would just say the same thing to us as a church. We need to be the godliest, humblest, most prayerful, most evangelistic versions of ourselves going into this

building, which is why we're in the gospel of Mark. So let me pray for us, and then we're going to dive into the gospel of Mark. Let's pray.

Lord, we just pray that you would use the gospel of Mark to invigorate us, to energize us, to encourage us, to strengthen us, to challenge us, as we look at the man, Jesus Christ, and we look at his ministry, his message, and his mission. Lord, what we're praying over the next year is that you would do something deeply *in* us before you do something *through* us as we get in this new building. We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

All right. You can type or turn to Mark 1:35. If you're new, it's a great time to be new. We are in the second week of a 20-week series going all the way through the gospel of Mark. We've been looking at Jesus Christ and focusing on his life. I don't know if you've seen the movie *1917*. It's a fascinating movie.

One of the things that made *1917* such a fascinating movie (you'll see this if you watch it) is it's a single-camera shot the whole time. You're like, "How did they do that?" I don't know, but it's one camera following one guy for two hours. You're like, "That's unbelievable." That's exactly what's happening in the gospel of Mark. It's one camera lens on Jesus, following him the whole time.

We saw he had a busy first few weeks of ministry. He gets baptized. Big deal. John the Baptist preaches about him. Big deal. He goes out into the desert. He's tempted for 40 days. Big deal. He starts his preaching ministry. "The kingdom of God is at hand." He preaches all that.

He calls four of his first disciples, and then, if you remember (you can look at verses 32-34 in Mark 1), Jesus ends, after a very busy day, with a very busy night of healing a bunch of people late into the night. They go away. He goes to sleep, and now, in verse 35, we see what happens the next day. Look here.

"And rising very early in the morning..." For some of you, the reason you're at the 11:00 a.m. service is because you arise around 10:00 a.m. This is earlier than *that*. It says, **"And rising very early in the morning..."** That's the first clue that it was early. **"...while it was still dark..."** So, before the sun rises, Jesus... This is important. He gets up, he gets out, and he gets alone. That would be a good thing for *you* to do. "I need to wake up, I need to get out of my bed, and I need to get alone." Okay, good.

"...he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed." We don't know how long he prayed, but he prayed long enough for *this* to happen: **"And Simon and those who were with him searched for him..."** He prays long enough for other people to get up, look for him, not find him, and then eventually

find him and kind of be upset with him. That's what you hear here. Look at verse 37. **"...and they found him and said to him, 'Everyone is looking for you.'"**

Here's what I want us to see: Jesus had priorities. You have priorities. Here's how you know what your priorities are. Your priorities are the things you still do when you're busy. That's the definition of a priority. I'm guessing, for all of you, eating is still a priority, no matter how busy you get.

For Jesus, he had three priorities. You can memorize these. You can write them down if you need to. Jesus had three priorities, and they're the three priorities anybody should have if they're following Christ. His priorities were God, his Word, and the souls of men. You're like, "That sounds about right." Yeah. That's because those are the only three things that will last forever.

So Jesus gets up. He goes out. He prays. Now, here's what Jesus understood that maybe *we* need to understand: prayer is the place of *dependence*, prayer is the place of *intimacy*, and prayer is the place of *power*. I don't know if there's any greater motivation for you or me to pray than that the sinless Son of God needed to pray.

He's very, very busy. Would anyone want to raise their hand and go, "I'm busier than Jesus"? I don't think so. Would anyone want to go, "My to-do list is a little bit more important"? Could you imagine Jesus' to-do list? "Fight the Devil for 40 days in temptation. Check. Save the world. Check. Live with 12 guys for three years." Not great. Right? This is what he was doing.

So, he was a very busy guy, and he still finds time. What slips in your life when you're busy? I know, for me, my car starts looking like a mess. Our bedroom starts looking like a mess. I'm not sleeping like I should. I'm not spending time with my family like I should. I'm not running like I should. I'm not eating healthy like I should. Things slip.

We see, for Jesus, he has a priority of prayer, because he sees prayer as the place of dependence and strength. A lot of times, we look at Jesus' ministry and go, "Well, that was a great ministry. I bet if I was the Son of God, I'd have a ministry like that too." Well, maybe his ministry wasn't because of his status. Maybe it was because he actually went to God to get refueled and refreshed.

Where do *you* go to get refueled and refreshed? I'm not saying you go to all of these bad places. Most people go to their iPad and mindlessly scroll. If you're an introvert, you get time alone. If you're an extrovert, you spend time with others. If you like movies, you watch movies. If you like to eat, you eat. If you like to nap, you nap. People do a lot of different things to get refreshed and refueled.

When was the last time you had 15 or 30 minutes and just said to yourself, "I could do anything with this time. I think I'm going to pray"? It almost sounds strange in our culture to think that way. Say your spouse is gone, and they're going to be gone for two hours at night. Instead of watching the Netflix shows they don't want to watch, you could say, "What if I prayed for 30 minutes?"

I think we can learn two things. We need to move on, because we need to see Jesus' ministry, but I think we can learn two things from Jesus' prayer life. First, you need a *time*. Secondly, you need a *place*. It's so simple. When is the time that you pray? Just so you know, for most Christians throughout almost all of church history, it needed to be early in the morning.

Now, there are some Christians who can find another time of the day. There are some Christians who are night owls and do it at night, but I'm just telling you, church history testifies to getting up early. For me, it's as soon as I get up. Now, I do normally check my phone briefly. I make myself a cup of coffee. This time of year, I go right on my front porch. I need a time, and I need a place. Where is your place? Is it a chair? Is it a room in the house? Is it a desk? Where do you do this?

Here's my challenge to Two Cities. What if we just did this? What if we all turned our cars into portable prayer closets on wheels? We just decided if we were by ourselves...not with our kids, not with our wife or husband... If we're by ourselves and we're in the car, we're not going to listen to podcasts. We're not going to make phone calls. We're not going to listen to music. We're going to pray.

Could you imagine that? Every time you see one of those Two Cities magnets, you drive by hoping they're praying. "Are you praying?" "I'm praying." Most of us have 5-, 10-, 15-, or 20-minute commutes. What if you just did it on your commute to and from work? All of a sudden, you add 30 or 40 minutes of prayer back into your life.

Look at what happens when Jesus prays. Look at verse 38. Remember, they find him and say, "Hey, Jesus, everyone is looking for you." ***"And he said to them, 'Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.' And he went throughout all Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons."***

Here's what happens. Imagine this. This would be unbelievably tempting, I think, to any of us. The disciples find Jesus, and they go, "Dude, you're super popular. Everybody loves you here. You should stay here. Everybody is bringing their friends and their families and their neighbors. You're a local celebrity. You're a local hero. Why don't you just stay here?"

But because of prayer... Here's the other thing prayer does. Prayer is intimacy, prayer is power, and prayer is *clarity*. Communion with Christ leads to clarity. Some of you need clarity. You need clarity about your kids. You need clarity on your business. You need clarity on your struggle with sin. You need clarity on your finances. Clarity comes out of communion with Christ.

Jesus realizes, "Wait a second. I didn't come to heal." Now, he heals secondarily, but what did he come to do? "I came to preach." Jesus understood he came to preach the kingdom and purchase the kingdom. That's it. "I came to preach the kingdom of God with my mouth, and I came to purchase the kingdom of God with my life at the cross." He understood his ministry there.

Here's what we have to understand. This will hopefully make the whole book of Mark and all of the Gospels come more alive to you. Jesus cares more about forever needs than felt needs. He cares about felt needs. We're going to see he's going to heal a leper, and he's going to heal a paralytic. He's going to always help all of these different people, but he cares more about forever needs than felt needs.

He cares more about ultimate needs than what might be your obvious needs. You know your obvious needs. "I need more money." That's an obvious need. An ultimate need is "I need to be forgiven. I need to be reconciled to God. I need to be back in relationship with God." Jesus cares more about spiritual needs than temporal needs.

Here's why I'm spending time on this. The rest of the book of Mark, we're going to see miracles. Whenever you see miracles... You might even want to write this in your Bible. Miracles aren't the point...they are pointers. That's what miracles are. They're not the point; they're pointers. The reason he does miracles is to authenticate the message. The reason he does miracles is so that people will listen to him and know that he has authority. Miracles are not the point...they are pointers.

What I want us to see today is three interactions. The first interaction is going to be with a leper. (Not a leopard. A leopard is a wild animal. If you see a leopard, run.) The second one is going to be with a paralytic, and the third one is going to be with a government official, a tax collector. What we can learn, and we *have* to learn... Jesus is God in the flesh. We need to look at his life, we need to look at his ministry, and we need to say, "I want to be more like that." So, let's learn from Jesus together.

01 JESUS AND THE LEPER (MOVING TOWARD PEOPLE)

Here's the first interaction with the leper. ***"And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, 'If you will, you can make me clean.'"*** Leprosy was a horrible disease. It still exists in certain places in the third-world countries, and there are still leper communities, and it's horrible. It's a skin disease. There are about 72 different types of skin diseases under leprosy.

If you're interested in understanding the Bible's take on leprosy, you can read Leviticus 13 and 14. Leviticus 13 is basically what leprosy is, and Leviticus 14 is what you do if you come in contact with a leper. Leprosy was a social death sentence. As soon as you got leprosy, you'd go to the priest, and then if it was real leprosy, they'd say, "You're isolated."

It's hard for us to understand what it's like to be a leper. I hate talking about COVID, but I still do every week, I guess. Here we are. I think COVID is a great way to think about, on a very, very small scale, what it must have felt like to be a leper. Remember the whole "You need to quarantine for 14 days. You need to tell everybody you tested positive. You need to keep your social distance"?

You heard a lot of sad stories, whether it was "We can't see Grandma in the nursing home; she's isolated," or "Mom has COVID, so she's going to be in the master bedroom, and the kids aren't going to interact with her for two weeks." We just saw what happens with six feet and two weeks and how heartbreaking that was.

Well, the leper... It wasn't six feet; I think it was 50 cubits. And it wasn't for two weeks; it was the rest of your life. It wasn't tell people you're positive. It was yell "Unclean!" if you come near anyone. Now, leprosy is an image, a metaphor, a picture of sin. Like leprosy, sin spreads.

What would happen was you'd get leprosy in one area, and you'd go, "Oh no! This is going to infect and affect my whole life." That's what sin does. If you don't deal with sin, if you don't repent of sin, sin doesn't stay small, obviously. Sin grows bigger. Almost every person I've ever met who got caught in some type of sin... Guess what? They've been doing that sin for years. Almost every time they've been doing it for years.

The story is almost always the same. "I thought the sin would stay small. I thought I'd be able to manage it," but it spreads. Almost every time, generational sin happens, which is a big idea in the Old Testament especially. Generational sin. It's like, "My kids struggle with materialism." Why? Because Mom and Dad never repented of it.

"My kids struggle with overeating." Why? Because Mom and Dad never repented of it. "My kids struggle with alcoholism." Why? Because Mom and Dad never

repented of it. "My kids idolize entertainment and sports." Why? Because Mom and Dad never repented of it.

Then it isolates you. See this? It spreads, and then it isolates you. That's what sin does. Sin wants to have a man or woman by himself or herself, and the deeper you get into sin, the more you isolate yourself. First, because you'll need more extended time in that sin to get the same result.

Secondly, you will be very unlikely to go to Community Group, to go through a Weekender, or to be known by anyone else because you don't want this dimension of your life to be seen. For our purposes and the point of this passage, what sin is like is it is that which, just like leprosy, defiles us and makes us unclean.

So, there are many things sin does to us. The first thing sin does to you is it makes you guilty. That's probably what you've heard. If you've been in church, you hear, "You sinned, so God is mad, and God is going to punish your sin. There's a real place called *hell* where you will go if you don't repent. You are under the wrath of God." You go, "Well, that was very clear. Thank you. I understand that." So, sin makes me guilty.

There's a second thing we don't talk about that's really pastorally helpful, and it's that sin makes you dirty. This is why men and women who look at pornography will often talk about needing to take a shower afterward. They'll look at pornography, and they'll feel like they need to take a shower. Or they'll look at pornography, and they'll feel like they need to clean their room or organize their house. It's their soul telling their body, "Something is not right. This is not clean."

It's also very pastorally helpful, because sometimes you feel dirty because of something *you've* done. Other times, you feel dirty because of something someone did to you. You were a victim. There was trauma. Your ex-whatever, your dad, your uncle, your grandfather... What's so important when you understand the gospel is that Jesus doesn't just forgive us from sin; he cleanses us from sin, both the sin we do and the sin done to us.

This picture of Christ and the leper is a picture of cleansing. Look at what happens here. It says in verse 41, ***"Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, 'I will; be clean.' And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean."***

Jesus has something that I want us all to grow in, first and foremost myself. Jesus has compassion. It's the same word...*pity, compassion*. Now, you can't have compassion if you're overly busy. You can't have compassion if you're self-absorbed and self-consumed about self-fulfillment and self-expression and self-actualization.

Compassion comes when I see something, and then I feel something, and then I do something. Those are the three moments of compassion. I see, so I have to be awake. And I feel. A lot of us are afraid to feel. Then, because I feel something, I respond. See, here's what happens with compassion. Here's when compassion will happen for you.

It can happen when you see a certain homeless person. It can happen when you see a disabled person. It doesn't matter. You see somebody, and you recognize the humanity of that person. You place yourself and say, "What if I were them?" That's the beginning of compassion. Humans can uniquely do this.

It's the only reason we watch movies. Movies wouldn't make any sense... We wouldn't be able to watch them. Think about it. We pay to watch movies, and we watch an enormous number of streaming services. Why? Why do you get scared at a scary movie? Because you place yourself there, and you feel the emotions of that person as they're in the house alone.

Why do we cry at the end of certain movies when certain things happen? Because we think, "What if that were me? What if I lost *my* husband?" It emotionally impacts you. I saw this with my own family. A small picture of compassion is... My 8-year-old son... I can't even remember. This was a while ago. He did something, and we had to take away a privilege. It's either dessert or TV usually.

We just said, "William, we're taking this away for a day or two." I can't remember what it was. He was fine with it, because he actually knew what he did was wrong. We're telling him this (this was at the dinner table), and my 5-year-old son starts crying. "Elon, what's going on?" He goes, "I feel bad for William."

What he was feeling for a moment was he felt compassion. That's the power of this. We can feel this. Sometimes we forget to feel this, but a 5-year-old can feel this. My 5-year-old son looked at my 8-year-old son and said, "That's really sad to not be able to watch TV for two days."

Jesus has compassion on this man. Look at what he does. It says he touched him. Do you know that Jesus doesn't always need to touch people to heal them? There are times where people come and say, "Hey, listen! My friend..." or "My servant..." or "My daughter is in a different place, and she's sick," and Jesus will just say, "Go home. She's well." It's like, "Okay. So you didn't even need to be in the same place at the same time."

So why does Jesus touch the leper? Jesus touches the leper because the leper needed touched. It had been months. Maybe it had been years. Nobody touches a leper. As soon as you're a leper, you're isolated. You haven't had human touch.

You haven't had a hug. You haven't had a handshake. You haven't had an arm around your shoulder in years.

Here's what I want us to learn from this. This is really important. It would be shocking if you were a Jew reading this, because here's what Jesus does. He breaks the ceremonial rules of the day. Let me say it a couple of different ways. He breaks the social norms of the day. He does what is unsafe. He does what is unacceptable.

Let me just tell you, if you are going to have any impact, meaningfully, for Christ, you're going to have to cross the line. I don't even know what that means for each of you. Let me tell you one line we're going to have to cross: that invisible line you've been told your whole life, especially if you're over 40, that "We don't talk about religion and politics." It's like, "Well, sorry. We're going to have to talk about these things because they're the most important."

I know this is easy for me to talk about. What I want to talk to you about right now is you taking some risks and crossing the line and maybe even breaking some "rules" at work occasionally at the right time in a winsome way to share Christ. I know you look at me and go, "Well, that's easy for *you*, Kyle. You work at a church." We think all of our staff are Christians. We're pretty sure.

Here's what I mean by this. A friend of mine told me this. A friend of mine who's in our church and in the business world said, "Kyle, I'm on these Skype calls. I'm on these Zoom calls, and we're talking all business. Guys get off, and I end up on a Skype call with one or two guys, and it gets personal." He said, "Every once in a while, a guy will open up and say, 'Dude, my marriage is just... We're going through a divorce.'" Or one guy he knows said, "My son is really sick." Young son really sick.

Here's what he said to me. He goes, "Kyle, I cannot be helpful unless I'm explicitly Christian." "Good luck" isn't helpful. A generic spiritual answer isn't helpful. He said, "Kyle, I have to decide in that moment I'm crossing the line. I'm doing something I shouldn't do. I'm breaking the social norms. I don't know how he's going to respond, but I can't be useful unless I do this."

Here's what we learn from Jesus. I hope we embrace this as a church culture. Jesus moves toward the mess. Most of us have designed our entire lives to avoid the mess...the places in the city we go, the houses we buy, the schools we send our kids to. Fair enough. Most of us have spent our whole lives avoiding the mess, because what do you do with the mess? Jesus moves toward the mess.

The reason we're building this facility in downtown... It would have been way cheaper and way easier just to go find 15 acres in Advance. We're not against

churches that do that. We think it takes all types of churches to reach all types of people.

But we just looked at the center of downtown, and we saw an under-resourced and up-and-coming area. We saw a place with spiritual and financial poverty, and we said, "We want to head right into the mess even though it is messy." Look at what happens here. Jesus touches the leper, and look at what happens in verse 43.

"And Jesus sternly charged him and sent him away at once, and said to him, 'See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them.' But he went out and began to talk freely about it, and to spread the news, so that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town, but was out in desolate places, and people were coming to him from every quarter."

Here's what happens. Jesus heals the man, and then (this is a picture of substitution) Jesus and the man trade places. Do you see that? He heals the leper, and the leper can go. He can go anywhere. He can go everywhere. Because the leper tells everyone about Jesus, Jesus can't go anywhere. He's now isolated. He's now in desolate places. That was where the leper was. This is a picture of the gospel. Jesus trades places with us.

So, first, we see a leper who comes to Jesus because they have a need. Let me tell you what happens in any ministry in any city. How does the church grow? Like, conversion growth, people coming to Christ. I can tell you how it happens. Every year, there are different people who are uniquely suffering, and it brings them to Jesus. That has happened every year we've been in church.

Someone got the cancer diagnosis. Someone's marriage is falling apart. Someone's finances are out of whack. Someone's kid is breaking their heart. God honors it. What happens with the leper is... Sometimes this happens, less and less in America. Sometimes people look at them and say, "I need Jesus," but we're going to see in the second story there are certain people who can't come to Jesus themselves, and they will never come to Jesus unless somebody else brings them...*you*.

02 JESUS AND THE PARALYTIC

I want us to see the story of the paralytic. Here's what it says. Chapter 2, verse 1: ***"And when he returned to Capernaum..."*** That was Jesus' headquarters. ***"...after some days, it was reported that he was at home. And many were***

gathered together, so that there was no more room..." This is like a Sunday morning Two Cities service.

"...not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them. And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. And when Jesus saw their faith..."

I love this story because it's a picture of a guy who couldn't come to Jesus by himself, and it's a picture of four great friends. Wouldn't you love to have friends like this? Wouldn't you love to *be* a friend like this? There are a couple of things I think we can see from this story so far.

First of all, these men were aware of other people's needs, especially those close to them. How unaware are we, often, of the needs of those around us? We're self-consumed, and we're self-absorbed. Have you thought at all about how inflation might be affecting people in your Community Group?

Are you aware at all of anything about the spiritual condition of any of your neighbors or any of your coworkers? Just anything. Have they ever been to church? Are they interested in Jesus? Do they have a spiritual background? We are so often unaware of the needs around us. These men see this man's need. *They* don't need to go to Jesus for a miracle, but *this* man needs it.

Here's the second thing I think we see from these four guys. It takes four guys to carry this guy. One guy couldn't carry him. It might be because of the distance. Two guys couldn't carry him. I'm assuming three guys couldn't carry him. It took four guys to carry this guy.

Here's the principle: sometimes it takes a team effort to bring one person to Jesus. This is what I've seen. Very rarely does one person just lead another person to Christ who has never had any other Christians in their life. What you normally find is you meet some guy, and Joe leads Bob to Christ. What you realize about Bob is Bob had Christian parents also who had been praying for him, but Bob rebelled.

Then you realize in college, Bob was part of a college ministry on and off. He wasn't super faithful, but there was a guy or two who invested in him there. Then Bob went through some hard times, and Bob's older brother, who's a strong Christian, walked him through those times. They read some of the Bible together, but Bob wasn't really ready to commit. Then Bob goes to work, and Bob meets Joe, or whoever, and Joe leads Bob to Christ. You look back at the whole narrative, and you're like, "It was a team effort."

Now, here's what I love here. It says Jesus *saw* their faith. Do you see this? It doesn't say Jesus *heard* their faith. We're really good at that. We're really good at Bible studies. We're really good at talking about our faith. We're really good at just having conversations and doing devotionals and being a holy huddle and all of that. But it doesn't say Jesus *heard* their faith. It's that he *saw* their faith.

This is interesting. When your faith moves you, that moves Jesus. That's what we see here. Jesus is moved when he looks and sees that people's faith moves them. What I love about this story is these four guys... Who knows who they are? We don't even get their names. They're anonymous. But something happened.

My guess is one of these four guys... I don't know at what point. They get there. It's super packed, and they want to get to Jesus. They've already taken their friend the half mile or mile. Can you imagine this? One of them says to the other three guys, "What if we rip a hole in this house?" The other three guys are like, "I don't know. This is not our house."

By the way, these houses had flat roofs. Those roofs were often used as porches and decks and third spaces. They did have steps so you could get up to it. But think about it. These guys are like, "We are going to go and rip open this roof. We are going to create a scene. We are going to create a mess. This is going to be expensive. When it rips open and everybody looks up at us, it's going to be unbelievably awkward."

Here's what I love here. They want to do anything short of sin to get people to Jesus, and that's what we want to do. We want to do anything short of sin. We don't want to sin, but we want to do anything short of sin to reach people who are far from God. That's the posture of our church. We want to take personal risks to bring Christ to every relationship.

By the way, that's the story of the history of Christianity. The apostle Paul... In every city he went in he took risks. At one point, he even did things that seemed foolish to his culture. At one point, he shaved his head, which Jews never did, to go reach this group. He was like, "I need to become like them," so he shaved his head. Timothy, at one point, to reach the Jews, got circumcised...as a grown man. Some of you go, "I'm not that committed." He was.

I want to show you a picture of George Whitefield, one of the leaders of the first Great Awakening. You can see him out there preaching to the crowds, and if you look closely in the tree, you can see a guy with a trumpet blowing, because he had a lot of critics.

What I want to show you is what he did was so unique, because he went and said, "Guys, we need to go preach outside. People aren't going to come to church. I

need to go to them." Everyone said, "You can't preach outside." They didn't have a Bible verse. They just said, "You're not allowed to preach outside." He was like, "Why not?" So he built this little stand that he would carry with him everywhere, and he would just take it outside, and he would stand and preach.

He got very emotional when he would preach. They said, "You can't get emotional when you preach." He would tell a lot of stories, and they would say, "Don't tell stories when you preach." He would call people *Christian* instead of *Baptists* and *Methodists*, and that was a big deal back then. The story of the gospel advancing is people taking risks. This is why we love missionaries.

What does a missionary do? A missionary has compassion on a people they've never met. They're like, "Well, how would *you* like to live in North Africa and have no access to the gospel?" You think about that for a while, and you might get emotional, and you might say, "If I were in North Africa and I wanted access to the gospel, I would want someone to come and tell me it."

Okay. It's time to move toward the mess. It's time to learn a language. It's time to cross an ocean. It's time to do things that look unbelievably foolish. Do you know how hard it is for people to become missionaries, in large part because they have to tell the grandparents? Do you know what they're saying to the grandparents? "I've got to rip the roof off the house. You're not going to see your grandkids for a decade." It's very, very hard.

I want you to see what happens. Jesus looks at this man who finally gets to him. He doesn't rebuke them for ripping the hole. He says this: **"And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'"** Interesting. Again, Jesus deals with his deepest need, not his deepest desire.

We live in a society that's very aware of our deepest desires. We're told to think about those all the time. Jesus knows his deepest desire is to have his legs healed. His deepest need is to have his sins forgiven. So he says, "I forgive you." This is interesting. This is one of Jesus', what we call, *indirect claims of deity*.

There are *direct* claims of deity when Jesus says, "I and the Father are one." That's a direct claim to deity. There are *indirect* claims to deity where Jesus says, "I forgive you." Jesus can forgive all sin because all sin is ultimately against him. That's the reason he can forgive sin. All sin is cosmic treason. All sin is divine vandalism. There's a horizontal component of sin, but there's a vertical component.

You can only forgive sin if it's against you. Imagine if we walked out in the parking lot and there were two guys fighting. One guy punches the other guy for no reason across the face, and the guy falls to the ground, and I walk over to the guy who

punched him and say, "I forgive you." It would make no sense. We're laughing because it doesn't make sense. "Who *are* you? You're not even part of this."

The reason Jesus can forgive is because all sin is ultimately against him. So, look at what happens here. He forgives. Of course, there are always the scribes and Pharisees there. Look at verse 6. ***"Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, 'Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?'"*** They're right. They understand that.

"And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, 'Why do you question these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk?'"

The answer is it's easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven." Why? Because you can't prove it. It's easy to say, "Your sins are forgiven. Go." It's like, "Well, did it work? Did it not work? I don't know." But if I say, "Get up and walk" and it doesn't work, it'll be obvious. So look at what happens.

"But 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, rise, pick up your bed, and go home." And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, 'We never saw anything like this!'"

03 JESUS & SINNERS (REBELLIOUS & RELIGIOUS)

Jesus heals the man, and then he has one more interaction. So, first, he deals with the leper, then the paralytic, and now a tax collector. Look at verse 13. ***"He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them."*** What you'll notice is Jesus is never as concerned with the crowd as he is with the individual. Here's what happens.

"And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth..." If you are a good Jew, you read this and are like, "No! Not a tax collector." ***"...and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he rose and followed him."*** I don't even have time to get into how much the Jews hated tax collectors. They hated them for many, many reasons. First, they often overtaxed them, but also, they worked for the government.

I'll try to bring this down for us today. This would be like, if this were written today, if Jesus Christ came to Washington, DC. As he's walking by the Capitol, there he sees Nancy Pelosi and AOC. He says to them, "Follow me," and we all go, "No!" Going a little farther (we have to pick on both teams), he sees Mitch McConnell. Mitch McConnell is hanging out with Ron DeSantis. Jesus looks at them and says, "Follow me." "No!"

The whole idea here is these were people who people had put in certain categories and had very strong opinions about. The picture here is that Jesus can change anyone's life. Your past doesn't have to define you. So, what he does is he calls Levi, who also in another gospel is called *Matthew*.

Look at this. Verse 15: **"And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him."** If you look at verse 15, it says they *reclined*. It's not just the word to sit down and eat. It's the word to relax, party, and have a good time. It's almost like you look through the window, and Jesus is having a drink, eating a meal, and telling a joke, or laughing at a joke with the tax collectors. That's the picture.

He is having a good time spending time with sinners. Jesus understands something that he teaches us, that we're to be in the world but not of the world. Christians are like ships. A ship is not meant to be on land. It's meant to be in the water (that is the world), but what ruins a ship is if the water gets in the boat. So, it's that tension that I need to be in the world but not of it.

Now, look at what he says here. **"And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors..."** Do you see the two teams? There are always two teams. If you watch *West Side Story*, there were the Jets and the Sharks. Right? There are people who love the mountains; there are people who love the beach. There are people who love Starbucks coffee; there are people who think Dunkin' Donuts is real coffee.

"...said to his disciples, 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?'" So, here's what's happening. On one side, you have the scribes and the Pharisees, and they are religious people. On the other side, you have the tax collectors and sinners. Guess what? The rebellious people don't like the religious people.

Why don't rebellious people like religious people? Well, they look at religious people and they think, "You're moralistic. You're conservative. You're primitive. You're old school. You're legalistic. You're rule following." That's how the rebellious people look at the religious people.

The religious people look at the rebellious people and say, "You're acting crazy. You're acting foolish. You're liberal. You're relativistic. You're progressive. You're alternative." Here's the other interesting thing about religious people sometimes. Religious people are often jealous of rebellious people.

Did you know that Nietzsche said most people who act like they're moral are just cowards? They're too afraid to be bad. They look at other people and say, "I don't have the courage to do that. I'd like to do that. I'd like to give in to those things, but I don't want to upset my parents. It's not that I'm a good person. It's that I'm afraid to be bad."

You have the rebellious, and you have the religious, and they both don't understand Jesus. Jesus moves toward the rebellious. He actually moves toward the religious too, but every time he moves toward the rebellious, the religious people get upset. Do you see that? Look at what he says in verse 17.

"And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician [or doctor], but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.'" The problem with the Pharisees and the scribes is the same problem that happens to most Christians after they've been in a church for about three to five years. They struggle the most with the sin that's hardest to see, the sin of self-righteousness.

You'll see this all the time. Churches will talk about sins that other people struggle with. They will preach repentance, but they will not practice repentance. Self-righteousness is when you think you're better than other people. Self-righteousness is when you think it's your job to look like Jesus instead of to look like somebody who needs Jesus.

Self-righteousness is when you think you've arrived, when you think you have nothing to learn, when you think you're above people, when you forget that we're all sinners who need God's grace. We never graduate, *ever*. No matter how much Bible we know, church we've been to, or good deeds we've done, we never graduate from being a sinner who needs God's grace.

Now listen. The world has its own version of self-righteousness. I call it *secular self-righteousness*. It's "I'm a good person, and I'm for the current thing. I shop at Whole Foods. I recycle everything. I ride my bike everywhere, and when I walk my large dogs outside alone, I wear a mask, and so should you." Secular self-righteousness.

Jesus says, "I can't deal with those people. I can't deal with the secular self-righteous, and I can't deal with the church self-righteous, because you have to know you're sick, and you have to be willing to go to the doctor." Here's the truth:

most people don't want to go to the doctor. Most men over 40 never go to the doctor. As I'm saying it right now, some of you wives are hitting your husband. "I told you! It has been 15 years since your colonoscopy."

Why don't men want to get a colonoscopy even when they should? Why don't men (I'm picking on the men specifically) want to get blood work? They don't want to have a general physician they see on a regular basis. We know why men don't want to: because they don't want to know what's wrong.

They would rather be like, "Let's just deal with it. I don't want to go and have somebody tell me my cholesterol is high or it's revealed that I drink too much; my liver levels are really high. I don't want that stuff." I think the real reason men don't want to do that is they're afraid they're going to go and it's going to be too late, and they don't want to know that. "I'm going to have something, and there's not going to be a cure. It's going to be too late."

The thing about coming to Jesus, the Great Physician, the Great Doctor, is that in this life, it's never too late, and there's always a cure. The cure for the sin and sickness of our souls is forgiveness. This is why Jesus says, "I forgive you." Forgiveness is the greatest miracle because it deals with the greatest need, it came at the greatest cost, and it lasts the longest. You know, the paralytic is going to die. The leper is going to die, but what lasts on the other side of that is forgiveness.

So, as we see these stories of Jesus moving toward people, I just want to ask you: Would you be part of what we're trying to do in this church? We are trying to move toward the mess, and we're trying to do anything short of sin to reach people far from God. It's hard. We're trying to take personal risks to bring Christ to every relationship.

Let me tell you why we're doing it. Here's what I think happened when the paralytic died. Years later, the paralytic dies, and the paralytic gets to heaven. He thanks God, and he thanks Jesus. As soon as he thanks God and thanks Jesus, he says, "You know what? There are four guys I have to see."

Think about this with me. There are two reasons the paralytic is in heaven. We sing and celebrate the first reason. It's the sufficiency of Christ. That's why. It's what Christ did for that paralytic in his life, his death, and his resurrection, and to that we say, "Amen." That's the first reason the paralytic is in heaven. Do you want to know the second reason? Those four guys.

Who is going to be in heaven because you took personal risks to bring Christ to every relationship? Who's going to be in heaven because you said, "You know what? I had to cross the line at work. I had to get a little awkward with my

neighbor. I had to do something I was scared to do, but this person is in heaven because I made that decision."

When Billy Graham died, that great evangelist, there was a big cartoon that went out the week after he died. It was a picture of Billy at the gates of heaven, and it was Saint Peter there. Saint Peter is there, and it's this picture. You can just see Billy. All he can see is Saint Peter. He can't see what's behind him. Saint Peter says, "Billy, welcome home. There are a lot of people who want to say, 'Thank you,'" and the line just goes forever and ever and ever and ever.

Who do you want to take to heaven with you? I heard a story of a dad. He told his kids from a young age... He would often say to his family, "I'd like us all to go to heaven together." Who will be in heaven because of, by grace, decisions you made on earth? Let's pray for that.

Lord, we pray for so much grace. It's going to take a lot of grace to not act like normal people do. It's going to take a lot of grace to move toward the mess. It's going to take a lot of grace to take risks that seem foolish in the moment. Lord, I pray you would just give us a vision; by grace we're able to see the future by vision, Lord, and you would just give us a picture.

We're all going to be in heaven in 100 years, those of us who trusted Christ. We think about being in heaven and walking around. We know that anybody is in heaven for one reason alone: Christ. But humanly speaking, we know that people also end up in heaven because other people are faithful to share the gospel. Lord, would you find us faithful? Would you find us fruitful? Would you encourage us? Would you challenge us? We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.