

# **Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

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Sermon manuscript

## **Sermon Series: BREATHLESS**

(studies in the Gospel of Mark)

### **Friendly Faith**

(Mark 2:1-12)

Study #3

#### **Introduction: Unintended consequences...**

You know how it is. You try to do something nice, something positive, and it all backfires on you. Social scientists refer to this unfortunate phenomenon as an “unintended consequence.”

When we are talking about unintended consequences, we are often talking about the world of policies and regulations. We know that when business or government makes a rule to regulate something, that rule will sometimes have a negative impact on something the rule-maker had never even thought about.

We could probably all cite examples of negative unintended consequences from American life, but one from Australia is safer, so let's go there...

Back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, British citizens living in Australia imported rabbits for hunting purposes. Sounds like a good idea, right?

Today, it is estimated that rabbits are the single most significant factor in the elimination of many native species of animal and plant life in Australia.

European rabbits have destroyed whole forests by eating the tender bark. They have caused serious erosion problems by eating native plants, leaving the topsoil vulnerable to being washed away.

Unintended consequences.

You are a thoughtful husband. Great - you have just made the rest of us look bad. You take good care of your house and yard. Thanks. You have just made more work for your neighbors who have to keep up with you.

Unintended consequences are normally negative results from an attempt to do good.

Well this morning, as we turn to Mark, chapter 2, we are going to watch as some good friends attempt to help their friend. And we'll see Jesus create an outrageously good “unintended consequence” out of their effort to help.

I'm betting that what Jesus does here will fuel a vision within each of our own hearts for helping, with a firm confidence that God will turn our faithful efforts to help our friends into something outrageously good, too!

Thus far in our study of Mark's Gospel there has been a lot of “immediate” action.

*A bit of review...*

Right off the bat John the Baptist has burst on to the scene, preparing the way for the Messiah by way of baptism. He even baptized Jesus, the Messiah.

Then, right after His baptism, the Spirit of God led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan.

After John the Baptist's arrest, Jesus called four fishermen to follow Him, which they all did.

And He immediately taught in a synagogue, cast out demons, healed diseases and then embarked on a preaching and miracle-working tour of Galilee with His disciples.

By the time we turn to the second chapter, Jesus and His followers have returned to the city of Capernaum.

## **A Splash in Capernaum (vv. 1-2)**

### **Jesus' Return to Galilee (v. 1)**

*[1] When He had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home.*

*A brief Galilean tour*

We aren't told specifically where they went on their Galilean tour. Nearby cities would have included Bethsaida, Chorazin, and Gennesaret. But they may have gone to a whole bunch of cities, towns, and villages.

And, while we aren't given a time frame, we can assume that the tour didn't last all that long. A week or two would be my guess.

But while they were on the road we can be assured that they had plenty of adventures. The disciples had the opportunity to listen to Jesus teach and preach in synagogues. They watched as He cast out demons.

As well, Jesus also probably used this trip to collect more disciples.<sup>1</sup>

Now there is one particular incident that occurred on this ministry tour. It is the healing of a man who was suffering from leprosy and it is recorded at the end of chapter one.

That interaction with the leper - and all of Jesus' interactions with those who suffer from leprosy - gives us a crystal clear picture of His love for the outcast, the needy, the lonely, the afflicted, and the ostracized. Jesus touched and healed the leper. One thing you NEVER did in the ancient world was touch a leper. Jesus touched. Jesus loves.

Mark includes this healing (cleansing) to give us a glimpse at the heart of Jesus and to provide us with a "for instance" of the kinds of things that happened on the Galilean trip.

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<sup>1</sup> After all, by the middle of the next chapter He is choosing the twelve out of all of those who are following Him.

But now He and His followers are back "home" - and that word may bring to mind a couple of images.

*Back home, again*

### At home in Capernaum

For one thing, He was back home in Capernaum.

Having been born in Bethlehem (in Judea, near Jerusalem) and raised in the city of Nazareth (not by the Sea of Galilee) He chose the beach-front town of Capernaum as His home base for ministry. Capernaum is now "home."

The other image of being "at home" is the actual house in which we find him.

### At home in Simon's house

We have already seen Jesus in the home of Simon and his extended family. It was there that He healed Simon's mother-in-law of a fever and it was to that home that needy people came flocking to Jesus for healing and to find freedom from the demonic powers.

Many Bible students believe that Jesus' home in Capernaum was Simon's home. (File that thought away as we continue with the story...

Evidently, even after returning to Capernaum, He was able to stay under the radar for a while, because it was several days after He returned before it became known that He was in town again.

But when word got out that He was back, crowds again came streaming to Simon's home.

### **Crowds Flock to Jesus (v. 2)**

*[2] And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, not even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them.*

The “word” that Jesus was speaking was the Good News that the Kingdom is NOW, God’s Messiah is HERE, and it’s time to believe! He might have developed that theme from any one of dozens of Old Testament texts, and the crowd was eating it up. He had an eager, enthusiastic, and large audience in the house.

I wish we had some idea as to how large Simon’s home was, but we don’t. All we know is that on this particular day it was standing room only. The people were packed in like sardines and had filled up every available space inside the house. They were even packed in the doorway and were spilling out onto the open area in front of the house.

While the crowd was paying rapt attention to what Jesus was saying, an additional group of folks made their way to the house. They have a friend who has a particular need for Jesus and they have brought their friend to Jesus.

### **Faith-full Friends (vv. 3-4)**

#### **Friends Bring a Friend to Jesus (v. 3)**

*[3] And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four men.*

We aren’t told anything specific about his physical condition except that he is a paralytic.

We don’t know the cause - and evidently Mark doesn’t think it is necessary for us to know the cause. We don’t know for how long this man has been disabled. We don’t know how old this man was. Nothing.

So, while we know very little about this paralytic, one thing we do know is that he’s got some REALLY good friends!

There may have been quite a few friends who have accompanied him to Simon’s home to see Jesus, but he is carried on a stretcher by four able-bodied men.

While these guys were really, really, really intent on bringing their friend to Jesus, they were initially stymied in their attempts to even get inside the house.

#### **Down through the Roof to Jesus (v. 4)**

*Stymied at the door*

*[4a] Being unable to get to Him because of the crowd...*

They tried to make their way to Jesus through the front door. Maybe they tried the back door, too. They couldn’t shove the pallet through an open window - people were sitting in the window sills.

The crowd was just too thick. Everybody who had a space was too intent listening to Jesus to give up their space.

So the doorways are all blocked. Well, as you’ve always heard, when God closes a door, He opens a... roof?

*Roofs, now and then...*

#### **Roofs in San Antonio**

It would be a terrific challenge to get into a typical San Antonio home through the roof. You would have cut out a square or more of shingles, tear up a layer of tarpaper, cut through some plywood, cut a rafter or two, drop the person or object through the rafters and then cut a hole through a ceiling into a room below.

But that’s not the way it would have worked in first century Palestine.

#### **Roofs in Palestine**

Roofs of Jewish homes were typically flat and were supported by beams resting on the house’s exterior walls. The beams were cross-hatched

by smaller poles and sticks, which were covered with thatch, which in turn was covered with a layer of mud.

The level roof functioned much as a deck does today in many of our own homes, offering relief from the stuffiness below and some access to fresh air. It was a place to dry laundry, eat, and even pray in solitude.<sup>2</sup>

The four stretcher-carrying friends had faith-full will, so they found their way to the roof of Simon's house.

*Where there is FAITH, there is a way...*

***[4b]...they removed the roof above Him; and when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying.***

These four friends hauled the paralytic up the stairs that were usually built into the outside wall of the house to the rooftop. (And this had to have been a harrowing ride for the guy on the stretcher!)

They set their friend down on the roof while they started scraping through the layers of mud and sticks and timbers to make an opening in the roof through which they could fit the pallet on which their friend was lying.

When they had dug a sufficiently large hole, they lowered him down (with ropes?) right in front of Jesus.

They prove here that necessity is the mother of invention. It is a very creative solution - and a very messy one.

People down below - including Jesus - would have been showered with dirt and mud and sticks as this poor lame man got lowered down on top of them. They all would have been covered with debris.

They've made a mess of the house - but they must have felt pretty gratified with the result. Their friend was lying right in front of Jesus, the Healer, the One who could make their friend walk!

(And isn't it interesting that Mark doesn't give us Simon's response to his house being ripped open...)

However dirty He might have gotten, Jesus was not in the least offended. What He saw, in fact, greatly encouraged Him. He saw FAITH!

### **A Great Unintended Consequence! (v. 5)**

#### **The Presence of Faith**

*The evidence of faith (v. 5a)*

***[5a] And Jesus seeing their faith...***

We believe that Jesus can see the invisible, but seeing their faith here was not miraculous. It was as plain as day to anyone who was looking.

It was displayed by their sweat-popping trip to the house, their anxious seeking of a way into the house, their panting trip up the stairs and their frantic clawing through the roof to get their friend to Jesus.

They believed that Jesus was able to do something for their friend - and so they brought their friend to Jesus. That's faith!

And Mark tells us something very intriguing about Jesus faith-noticing ways here. He says, "***seeing THEIR faith***" - to which we might ask, "*Whose faith?*"

*Whose faith?*

Well, it is not the faith of the paralytic, although the friends probably didn't bring him against his will.

The faith in view is the faith of the friends. It is the same "they" in view who brought the paralytic (v. 3), removed the roof (v. 4a), and lowered the paralytic through the opening.

And seeing THEIR faith, Jesus gave to the paralytic a priceless gift.

#### **The Response of Jesus to Faith**

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<sup>2</sup> See Acts 10:9.

*[5] “Son, your sins are forgiven.”*

There is tenderness here. But it also clearly shows Jesus’ grasp of the situation. He is in command here. For a grown man to say to another grown man, **“My son”** is to speak as an authority figure.

And Jesus’ words speak of a truly commanding authority. He forgave the paralytic’s sin.

### **On Forgiveness...**

Forgiveness of sins is a prominent theme in the Bible, and it is stressed in a couple of ways.

In several places, Jesus tells us that we who follow Him are to be forgivers. It can be a challenge to forgive and I have long believed that granting forgiveness is the high water mark of Christian discipleship. To forgive someone who has purposefully, intentionally, even cruelly wronged you is evidence that the love of Jesus flows through you.

But let’s not think that Jesus is forgiving this man a wrong he committed against Him, personally. As far as we know, Jesus and this man had never met.

Jesus was forgiving this man’s sins in a cosmic way. He is granting him forgiveness for all of his sins before God.

Let’s be sure that we don’t soften the force of what is happening here. Jesus has authority to forgive sins - not just those committed against Him, but sins, generally.

This is enormous!

And beyond enormous, it is surprising...

When these friends brought the paralytic to Jesus, they were certainly hoping that Jesus would do something for him. But, to their way of thinking, their friend’s greatest need was healing from his paralysis.

Jesus knew better. Jesus knew that this man’s greatest need was not the ability to walk, but freedom from the power and penalty of sin. He needed a right standing before God. He needed forgiveness.

It is tempting to think that a lame person’s greatest need is to walk, that a cancer patient’s greatest need is the tumor gone, and that a poor person’s greatest need is more money.

It is tempting to think that, but it is wrong-headed thinking. It is a mistake to focus more on the problem of pain than on the problem of sin. God says that our sin is a greater problem than our pain.

Here is a diagnostic that you might run to test if you are thinking God’s thoughts on this matter.

Ask yourself if you felt just the slightest tinge of disappointment when we read, **“your sins are forgiven”**? Did you think to yourself, *“Yeah, but he still can’t walk!”*?

The Bible is clear that the greatest need of every man, woman and child is that their sin be forgiven. There is no greater need than this - that the guilt of our sin be wiped away in the eyes of a holy God.

And Jesus met this man at the point of his greatest need by granting him forgiveness.

Each one of us here today can also have our sin forgiven by God as we place our trust in Jesus for salvation. The instant you transfer your trust FROM whatever you were trusting for salvation TO Jesus, God says, *“Forgiven!”*

And from that instant forward you can live in the light of knowing that every wrong thing you have ever done, every unkind word you have ever spoken, every evil thought you have ever had, and every sin you will ever commit has already been forgiven by Almighty God.

Jesus is lovingly inviting you to a grace-based relationship with God that is not related to how well you are doing. It is based on how outrageously gracious and kind God has been to you in Jesus.

And you can bask in that knowledge whether you are trusting Jesus for the very first time today or you placed your trust in Him years and years ago.

And let's notice something else here, too.

### **Faith's Rewards...**

Just listen as I restate what happened in this narrative: Jesus forgave the sins of a man because of the faith of his friends.

That's pretty interesting. Even provocative. What do we do with that?

Actually it is not unusual to see Jesus bringing blessing to someone as a result of someone else's faithful concern, request, prayer, or labor.

- Mark 5:21-43 - Jesus healed the daughter of a synagogue official because her dad made request for her.<sup>3</sup>
- Mark 7:24-30 - He cast a demon out of the daughter of a Gentile woman because her mom begged Him to help her.

It is clear from the beginning to the end of the Bible<sup>4</sup> that God will respond to our loving, faithful efforts to bring our friends to Him in super-gracious ways. He will use our attempts to bring God's blessing to our friends in ways greater than we would have ever dreamed.

No, I don't think that the lesson here is that your faith will save someone else. But I do think that God will see your faith and will be moved to work in the hearts of those who have no faith.

Just imagine what God might do in the heart and life of your friend as you lovingly, faithfully, seek to bring him or her to Jesus...

Well, while we are sitting here rejoicing over the paralytic's forgiveness, there are some in Simon's house who are not quite so overjoyed.

### **Follow-Up to Forgiveness (vv. 6-12)**

#### **Mental Objections by Scribes (vv. 6-7)**

*The presence of scribes*

**[6] But some of the scribes were sitting there...**

Later on in Jesus' ministry, scribes will be a major burr under His saddle. They will be among His most bitter opponents. But not on this day. On this day the scribes were there with everybody else listening to Jesus speak "the word."

Scribes were everywhere, scattered throughout Israel, and were very important members of any Jewish community.<sup>5</sup>

They were the men who knew the Law of God. They maintained biblical purity. They were highly respected pillars of orthodoxy - and I mean that in the best way!

They have come to Simon's house to listen to this young rabbi, Jesus. Of course, at the minute, they're covered with debris from the roof. But they've been listening politely.

And maybe they had been impressed with Jesus' presentation up to this point. But, after listening to what He had to say to the paralytic, their antennae are up. They are concerned.

*Theology 101*

<sup>3</sup> For a similar story, see John 4:46-54. See also Matthew 8:5-13.

<sup>4</sup> For another example out of many, see Genesis 18, where God shows Himself willing to spare Sodom and Gomorrah on the basis of Abraham's entreaty.

<sup>5</sup> See Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, for examples of how critical the scribe was to Jewish orthodoxy, especially during the Babylonian captivity, but also during the years leading up to the time of Jesus.

**[6] But some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, [7] “Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?”<sup>6</sup>**

Scribes - important spiritual leaders - did not presume to forgive sins. So, who does this Jesus think He is, anyway?!

They conclude that Jesus has committed blasphemy, claiming to do something that is the sole prerogative of God!

And you know, to be completely honest, I understand what they are thinking. I mean, how would you feel if you were an Elder here in our church and you heard someone say to someone else this morning, “*Son, your sins are forgiven.*”? You’d be concerned, right?

Well, Jesus had a few thoughts to share in response to that thought.

### Verbal Response by Jesus (vv. 8-11)

*Miracle #2 (v. 8)*

**[8] Immediately Jesus, aware in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, said to them, “Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts?”**

Wow! Let’s not miss the miracle staring us in the face. If the first miracle of this remarkable story is the forgiveness of the paralytic’s sin, the second miracle is Jesus’ response to the scribes’ thoughts.

I mean, how weird would it be to be sitting there thinking something - and have Jesus respond to your thoughts?

In response to their thoughts, Jesus asked them a very simple question.

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<sup>6</sup> The reasoning is that in any sin, God is the primary offended party. See David’s confession of his sin of adultery and murder. In Psalm 51 he writes, “**Against Thee and Thee only have I sinned.**” We think, “*Well, what about Bathsheba? What about Uriah?*” But David is right. God is the One most offended by any wrong/sin and thus He alone can forgive the wrong.

*A pair of questions (v. 9)*

**[9] “Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven’; or to say, ‘Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk’?”**

It’s an interesting question.

To say, “**Your sins are forgiven**” speaks to the invisible world of God and the spirit. For a human being, it is impossible to DO. But it is quite easy to SAY because it is unverifiable.

On the other hand, to say, “**Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk**” speaks to the physical world in which we all traffic. Again, it is not something that is possible for a human being to accomplish, but it is much harder to say because it is immediately verifiable. Say, “*Rise and walk*” and people will be expecting the lame to walk.

So, while Jesus has everybody scratching their heads and thinking about which of these two sentences is easier to say, He turns to the paralytic, now forgiven, but still lame and covered with dirt and branches, and speaks.

### Healed! (vv. 10-12)

*Words of healing (vv. 10-11)*

**[10] “But so that you may know that the Son of Man<sup>7</sup> has authority on earth to forgive sins”—He said to the paralytic, [11] “I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home.”**

He has said the “easy” thing; now He says the “hard” thing: “*Rise and walk.*”

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<sup>7</sup> The title “Son of Man” was actually a more lofty title than “Son of God” as the Jews would have understood it. The Son of Man was the Messianic figure of Daniel’s prophecy who would come back to earth from Heaven to establish His Kingdom. The “son of God” could refer to anything from angels to people as we speak today of “sons and daughters of God” when referring to believers.

And of course the reason for saying the hard thing was to prove to the scribes and all those watching in Simon's home that when He had said the easy thing, He wasn't just whistlin' Dixie.

Following Jesus' marching orders, the paralytic walked, to the amazement of everyone in the house.

*A walking paralytic! (v. 12)*

***[12] And he got up and immediately picked up the pallet and went out in the sight of everyone, so that they were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this."***<sup>8</sup>

And this still unnamed paralytic is now the one "*formerly known as 'the paralytic.'*"

Picture mouths hanging open in stunned shock. The crowd in the house has just watched Jesus do what only God can do.

### **Conclusion:**

Two thoughts surface from this powerful story that invite our action.

- First, notice that Jesus took some friends' efforts to help their friend and morphed it into something outrageously good.

Be **encouraged**. Jesus will turn your every effort to do something good into something GREAT. Meet someone's material need and He may use your gift to communicate love and care. Pray with them about a pressing emotional or relational problem, and God may open their eyes to a need for Jesus. The possibilities are endless!

- Second, this whole miraculous event occurred simply in response to the friends' act of bringing their friend to Jesus.

Be **emboldened**. Make every effort to bring your friends to the Jesus who has shown you grace and who is changing your life. Let your light shine. Talk about your Savior to your friends. When you bring your friends to Jesus, they'll recognize Jesus as the One rushing toward them with open arms.

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<sup>8</sup> Notice the very intentional tie-in between "*Who can forgive sins but God?*" and "*they were all...glorifying God.*" They were glorifying the only One who could forgive sins (God), and Jesus had just forgiven sins, as validated by the miracle of healing. In glorifying God, they were glorifying Jesus.