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**Scripture:** Mark 2–Healing the Paralyzed Man

Welcome to North Park, it's good to be with you. My name is Matthew Eckert, the Executive Lead Pastor. I am grateful to be together, to once again gather for this rhythm of our week. To gather every seven days together to perhaps ponder, to reset for a week going forward. It is a beautiful rhythm to be part of.

We are on this great series called *On the Way*. *On the Way*, looking at Jesus as he was on the way and how he stopped and interacted and engaged people. He never seemed to be distracted, always on the way, he was open to whatever came by him. As you look at your life and think about yourself, how good are you, on the way? How good are you at that? I have to admit that I am not a very good, on the way person. I am a distracted person. I just miss things that are right in front of me. I'm not really good on the way. Maybe you are married to one of those people who always seem to miss that thing. You thought they would see what you're doing and they just kind of were on the way and missed it. I'm working on it. It's a gap I have.

Because I'm always thinking to the future, if you hang around me a lot, much of my family and my friendship groups, you know, that we love engaging and talking about personality assessments. It's something that I just enjoy. It's something for me that frees me up to understand who I am and where I go to naturally. I'm trained in the Myers Briggs personality assessment. As a staff we use that a lot. It's a good thing to understand. Lately, though, we've been looking at one that's called the Enneagram. An Enneagram is a great way to engage it. My daughter actually is getting her own personal training in this. How do you look at yourself and why do you do what you do? What's the underlying motivation?

Now in the Enneagram, it talks about that people have three different orientations. They're either past oriented, they're present oriented or they're future oriented. My wife is a present oriented person. If you are with her she's an amazing on the way person. She doesn't miss what's going around. She will stop and she will pause. When she is with you, she is totally with you.

Nothing else gets in the way. I'm a future oriented person. Now that's probably a good thing, perhaps as the lead pastor at North Park where I always have to look forward. What should we do next week? Next month? Next year. It's a good thing to do. But unfortunately, in that future orientation, I often miss what's in front of me. You may be with me and for the first 30 seconds, I'm 100 percent with you. But then it might drop to 16 and I go back to 80 and then it goes back to 40. It's something I'm really working on. It's not an excuse. It's just my orientation.

I find this when, I'm praying with people on Monday morning with the guys that pray together. I'm there praying and someone else is praying then or into their prayer and hearing what they're saying and then they say something. I thought, oh, next year we could do that. For the next 20 seconds, I actually miss what they're praying. I've got to bring myself back. Anyone relate to this kind of distraction. Maybe your future oriented also. As we've gone through this series, it's actually been a challenge for me to understand how can I become a better on the way person and not miss what's in front of me and the beauty of the conversation that's right there, or the person perhaps that may need a word of encouragement.

So this morning, I want to look at another story another on the way story of Jesus. I love Pastor Paul's last week on the way story of Zacchaeus up

in the tree. Like last week, this week's story is very much a beautiful Sunday school story. If you grew up in the church world and some of you have some of you have not. But if you did and you went to Sunday school on a regular basis, you most likely came across this story, if not once, maybe a dozen times. It's one of those what I'll call safe kids stories you can engage in. The kids can really embrace. So what I want to do is just simply read the story to you first. Then I want to wander through it a bit and kind of bring up some of the cultural nuances that's going on in the story. But, then I want to look at four of the different characters and maybe see where do you land this morning? Which of these characters perhaps is touching you the most or represents you the most in your life?

So let's just listen to the story now. If you've heard it before, you'll know it right away, it won't be on the screens. I just want to read it to you. So here his story time with Pastor Matt. It says in

#### *Mark 2*

*After some days, Jesus went back to the city of Capernaum. Then news got around that he was home. Soon, many people gathered there. There was no more room. Not even at the door. He spoke the word of God to them. Four men came to Jesus carrying a man who could not move his body. These men could not get near Jesus because of so many people. They made a hole in the roof of the house over where Jesus stood. Then they let down the bed with the sick man on it. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the sick man, your sins are forgiven. Some teachers of the law were sitting there, they thought to themselves, why does this man talk like this? He is speaking as if he was God. Who can forgive sins? Only one can forgive sins, and that is God. At once, Jesus knew the teachings of the law were thinking this. He said to them, why do you think this in your heart? Which is easier to say to the sick man. Your sins are forgiven or just say get up, take up your bed and start to walk. I'm doing this so you may know the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins. So he said to the sick man, he who could not move his body. I say to you. Get up. Take your bed and go home. At once, the sick man got up and took his bed and went away. Everybody*

*saw him. They were all surprised and wondered about it. They thank God saying we have never seen anything like this.*

Maybe this is a familiar story to some of you, it's a beautiful story, right? It's got all of the components of a great story. It's got friendship, it's got a bit of chaos, it's got some conflict in the middle, and it's got home destruction. It's got everything you want a good story, right? It's got resolution. It's got a hero. But what's going on here? Let's wander through this and see perhaps what we can learn from this, on the way story. Because the on the way after some days, Jesus went back to the city of Capernaum and then news got out around that he was home.

See, on the way, Jesus was very busy and he was engaged in all kinds of ministry and he was tired, I'm sure. He goes to Capernaum and he goes home. We're not sure if this was his home or his family's home or a friend's home, but this was somehow home base. My sense is he went home to rest.

Now, you've probably had those days, haven't you? It's been a busy day at work. Maybe you've been away for a few days working or maybe just the chaos of life or school. You go home and as you're going home, you can already see what you're going to pull out of the fridge, right, and you already know what you're going to put on and you already can see that seat in the couch where you're going to just sink into, right. You know, these experiences, you're going home. You're ready just to relax and it's a place of peace, you know, you can recover and recoup.

Maybe that was Jesus, what he was thinking. He goes home and maybe he can see that chair and know the food he wants to enjoy. But news gets around. All of a sudden, many people gathered there. What was supposed to be a time of rest becomes a time of chaos. There's no more room, not even at the door. What does Jesus do? What does he do on the way? Because this is supposed to be a rest stop on the way. He's exhausted. But he knows why he exists, so perhaps he gathers the energy he has and he recognized Jesus was God, but he was 100 percent human. He did get tired. He musters whatever he has, perhaps, and he says he spoke the word of God to them. Now, I'm not sure what he's talking about here, obviously, if we talk about speaking the word of God that people now we talk

about Jesus, right, his death and his resurrection. Jesus was there, yet he had not gone to the cross yet.

This most likely was a Jewish audience, pretty predominantly, and so he was probably just opening up the scriptures, the Bible to them, maybe looking at passages that would have pointed to him. My sense is he was just giving them hope. That God was there, God was good, God loved them and there is a plan, there is a path. As he speaks the word of God to them, I'm having a sense that they were glad that they came.

But, as he's doing that, four men came to Jesus carrying a man who could not move his body. Now right away you have to stop here. Because here's a man who is disabled. Here's a man who cannot move, and in that time period, if you were disabled in any way, you were shunned. You are put away. You don't have any friends. At best, maybe someone would drag you out in the morning and put you at the side of the road or maybe people would give you some food or something or some money for something. We know throughout the Bible there are blind people that came to Jesus in the crowds, pushed them away, saying he has no time for you. There was a sense if you were physically disabled you were shunned. Yet somehow, somehow, this man still has four friends. Somehow they kind of perhaps went against what society did and maybe as kids they used to play together and maybe this man got disabled or paralyzed along the way. But they still hung together. Band of Brothers. They are going to do whatever it took to care for their friend. It's an amazing story. It's just that line itself shows something fascinating.

They take him there. But these men cannot get near Jesus because of so many people. So they do what every good friend would do they destroy a house. They made a hole in the roof of the house over where Jesus stood. Then they let down the bed with the sick man on it. You got to wonder what's going on here. Here's a picture of what these houses at that time looked like. You know, there would've been steps on the sides that could have gotten them up fairly easily and there was a plaster layer on the roof. They would kind of scrape away and there were these stone beams that would kind of cover up across that they'd plaster over so they would scrape enough aside and people underneath are looking what's going on? They would remove some of these stones just perhaps big enough and to get this bed

lowered down. I'm not sure if it landed right in front of Jesus and if you made a movie about this I'm sure it would it would be perfect. But maybe it was off to the side and Jesus makes his way over. I'm not sure what was taking place, but it was very disruptive. You got to think Jesus comes home to rest. And first, all these people come in, now they're taking his house apart or his friend's house or whoever's house.

Now what do we do? Now, what happens along the way? On the way? There's so many disruptions in life, aren't there? How do we, as followers of Jesus, respond to these disruptions? What's our mindset? What do we do? How good are you on the way? While it goes on in verse 5, it said when Jesus saw their faith, you stop right away again. Whose faith did Jesus see?

Not the man's. When Jesus sees their faith, He looks to the man. There's this beautiful theme throughout the Bible throughout the second half, the New Testament mostly that there's this thing about borrowing someone's faith when you don't have faith. There's actually a gift called the gift of Faith, a spiritual gift of faith, and I know some of you have this gift. Your faith is just so strong. It doesn't matter what happens in life. God is good, God is there. I'll understand, it doesn't matter, I'm in. Here's Jesus, maybe this man who's paralyzed and who knows how many years and maybe he's just kind of given up, he doesn't have much left to do, he's wondering, I guess this is my lot in life. Somehow he's got these friends that hang with him and they have faith. They say, don't worry, buddy. We got you. You hold onto our faith.

Maybe you're in one of those moments in life right now, you just need someone else's faith because you're not sure what life is throwing at you right now.

I love the story here. Jesus sees their faith. Because they have faith, He says to the sick man, son, your sins are forgiven. You got to go, pardon? Like, what did they bring him, there for? What did they bring him, there for? To be healed. Your sins are forgiven. It's like Jesus, time. Like, do you see what's going on here? But here's the fascinating thing, many times we come to Jesus with what we think we need. Yet, Jesus gives us what we actually need. We come to Jesus and we pray for what we think we need. But God gives us what we actually

need. Maybe you're in one of those moments right now, you've been praying and you've been praying and you have been praying. God is not showing up. Maybe he is showing up. Maybe he's giving exactly what you do need in the moment. You're just not seeing it. You see, the reality for this man is eventually he would still die. His body still would decay. He does not exist anymore. By the way, He's not 2000 years old and walking around the Middle East. He did die. What he did need at that moment was forgiveness of sins.

Because Jesus sees things in eternity, we so often, have such a narrow view, and it's a selfish view. Perhaps I need this now and God says no, no, you might need that now, but you need something far bigger. It comes to the question we all need forgiveness of sins.

I'm not sure what you think about sin or if you even use that term at all in your context or you walk around saying, hey, guys, I'm a sinner. Maybe it's not a term you toss around. But the reality is we are born sinners. The Bible is pretty clear in that piece. We're born like cars out of alignment. We're always going the wrong direction. Sin is simply turning our back on the life God has for us. We say, I got a better way. I got a better way to do things. I don't need that. I don't want that. I know how to do things. We trudge off in different directions. I was privileged this week to become a grandfather for the second time, a little baby girl born on October the 8th. Little Lucille Joy, seven pounds, six ounces of pure and amazing sin.

Now, that is not the greatest thing for a grandfather to say is it? May not win Grandfather of the Year award for that comment. But if you believe the Bible, if it is the text by which we go by. Unfortunately, she was born a sinner. She needs forgiveness of sins and those of you who are raising kids, you don't doubt that conversation do? Your kids are not perfect. Anyone want to raise their hands and say, my kids are perfect? Right. We're born this way and we need this solution for our lives. Have you had forgiveness of sins?

There was no doubt in this story, actually, everyone believed there was sin whether they were religious leaders, or the friends, or the man. This was a regular conversation in that time. There was not like, no, we're not sinners. They all believed that it was, what's the solution, for this is the question?

Well it says some teachers of the law were sitting there, they thought to themselves. Why does this man talk like this? He is speaking as if he is God who can forgive sins. Only one can forgive sins and that his God and I love how this whole conversation is being set up. See Jesus chooses his words wisely. He's a master at cornering people who think they have all the answers. He forgives his sins. Religious leaders start to ponder this stuff and they don't realize that they are being backed into a corner that they cannot escape from. They're about to be exposed. Jesus is the master at this.

Verse 8

*at once, Jesus knew the teachers of the law were thinking this. He said to them, why do you think this in your hearts? Which is easier to say to the sick man. Your sins are forgiven, or just say get up, take your bed and start to walk? I'm doing this, so that you may know the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins,*

As soon as he says the Son of Man, then backs go up. They say only God can forgive sins, you can? Then Jesus says, yeah, I'm God.

Where does a Son of Man term come from, what's it all about? They knew their Bible just so you know, these religious leaders would have memorized maybe all of the Old Testament that we call right now. They knew their scriptures. They would, quote, things on and on. As soon as he said the Son of Man also, they realized he just called himself God. Listen to what it says in,

Daniel 7, a prophecy from the first half of the Bible, the Old Testament. Here's what it says. It says,

*I kept looking in the night dream and saw one like a, Son of Man coming with the clouds of Heaven. He came to the One who has lived forever and was brought before him. He was given power and shining greatness and was made king so that all the people of every nation and language would serve him. His rule lasts for ever. It will never pass away and his nation will never be destroyed.*

A reference to the Messiah that was to come. Jesus stands there and says, Yeah, I'm him. I'm Him. You can see they're still getting more frustrated and

crazy. How dare he do this? See what Jesus is doing here. He forgives sins and they said only God can forgive sin. Something's going on here in this conversation because they're teaching their theology, their way of life is that's sickness is tied to sin. So if you are a bit sick, you've had a bit of sin. If you are really sick, you have really sinned. If you are paralyzed, your sin must be huge. They tied the two together. Jesus didn't, by the way, just so you know, but he's going to play their game. Here they're pushing back on him. If he can forgive sins, that means the man can be healed.

I think the friends up top weren't frustrated when Jesus said your sins are forgiven because they knew this teaching as well. As soon as Jesus says your sins are forgiven in their minds, they're saying, yes, he's going to be physically healed because the two go together in their way of thinking.

So he says to the sick man.

*I say to you. Get up. Take your bed and go home. At once, the sick man got up, took his bed and went away.*

In their minds, the sins gone. Because he can walk. Now that religious leaders are stuck. Either they have to change their theology and separate sin and sickness, which they can't do because they teach it all the time, or they have to truly believe that Jesus is God which they don't want to do. Now Jesus, in the way he orders the conversation he has with them, backs them in the corner and they have nothing left to do. They've been exposed, for the false teachers that they are. See, they had locked down God so tight they knew exactly what he was supposed to do. But because their version of God is a version that kept them in power. It's the version that gave them what they wanted. They structured the God that they wanted for their lives and when God actually showed up, they couldn't even see him. They couldn't even see him. Because it wasn't the God that they wanted, because this God disrupted their life. Maybe that's you today.

Maybe you are missing God right in front of you because you've locked him down so tight. God is supposed to do all these things for you. God is standing right in front of you doing amazing things you can't even see them. You can't even see them.

The sick man gets up and goes away and everybody saw him. They were all surprised and wondered about it. They thank God saying we have never seen anything like this. It must be God, because he's healed. It's an amazing story, isn't it? It's got such beauty and it's got such fun in it, it's got such controversy in it. It's got healing. There's four characters in the story. There's actually five. Jesus is the fifth, but I'm not going to relate myself to Jesus. I can't forgive sins. So, I want to be more like him for sure, but who are these characters?

Four icons, it may help us remember who they are.

The first character I want to quickly talk about with you are the crowds. The crowds, the ones that are looking, the ones that are always interested. Who is this Jesus character? What's he doing? What's this all about? They're always examining and as soon as he comes to them ah, Jesus is here. Right. What's he going to say now? What's he going to do now? The crowd is interested, they're intrigued. Trust it's going to move on a journey and come closer to him.

But the reality is the crowds in the Bible typically are in it for what they can get. If you were here two weeks ago and Pastor Oscar Muriu spoke from Nairobi, Kenya. He had this great conversation with us talking about are you simply a Christian, or are you actually a disciple of Jesus doing whatever he wants? I think he'd agree that the crowds may have been, yeah, we love Jesus, we are a Jesus follower. We love God. But are you really leaning in? I think so often the crowds represent those of us in their seasons, of my life for sure, I'm just, what can God do for me? What's he going to do now? What's the entertainment value today? Maybe that's you here. Grateful that you're here. You're on a journey. But eventually you've got to move from just being the crowd. You've got to really choose. Is he God? Will I really fully lean in or not?

The next people that are there are those religious leaders, right? They had everything locked down, right. They knew the rules. They knew all the questions and they knew all the answers to all the questions, at least the questions they created. They had it all figured out. They had God figured out. They knew what he was supposed to do and what he was supposed to be. They had him so figured out that they missed him when he was right in front of them. Because the God that they had created was supposed to validate everything that they wanted for

their life. They missed the beauty of who God really was. Maybe this morning, maybe that's you. Maybe you've gone through some ups and downs, you realize and hold on a second. God, you're not what you're supposed to be like, what just happened here and I'm not going to believe you anymore because you're not falling in line with what you're supposed to be falling in line with. You have enough curiosity that you can believe that God is God and the world is unfolding. God is over all eternity. God is not just London, Ontario, 2019. God is beyond time. His story is being played out. It may not fit what you want it to fit, but are you curious enough and can you be open enough to let God be God, and not miss him when he's actually standing right in front of you and wants to do something amazing in your life. But you're too busy trying to box him up, that you're missing the beauty, what he's doing in front of you.

Well, the third character is the man, the man himself, right? The man who's paralyzed, the man who can't do anything is like the wilted plants. He's just there's really no energy left. Maybe his faith is waning, what should he do? This could be you here this morning. You know, this is you, you're just kind of here, you somehow made it here. You're not sure how you got here. You got here. Your faith is kind of like, you know, 2 percent. We want to journey with you. As a church, this is what we do. We want to lend you some faith. Maybe there's people around you, you know, and you just need them to walk and journey with you. We all have these seasons, right? We all have them. I've had them. I don't have one now. I'm sure I might enter now the one with these moments of our life where we're just like, I got nothing left. Can someone just put me on a bed and carry me to Jesus because I can't even get there myself?

If you're here this morning, I want you know, we want to be with you and journey with you, and maybe when the prayer teams come up at the end, the service you have come for, just for prayer. Because we all have these seasons of wilt. We do. Sometimes we hide them really well. Oftentimes, as a pastoral staff, we'll hear about someone's situation two years down the road, we're saying, why didn't you tell us? I didn't want to bother you. I just walked through my life, wilted by myself. Please don't do that. Please don't walk wilted by yourself. Because finally, that's where I think we need to

really lean in, is the friends right? Is the four friends. I think we are all called to be those four friends, aren't we? We're all called to take people who are in that wilted state perhaps, and to pick them up and to carry them. In your life there are people who are asking and wanting to be taken and carried to Jesus

They're wrestling with questions of life and they wish, will someone just sit down with me and just talk this through. It might be a neighbor, it might be a family friend and might be a colleague at work as a classmate at school, would someone just take me somewhere? I don't know if I believe what you believe, but our Alpha program is great for that. Some people have brought friends to Alpha saying, I'll carry you to Alpha. Let's talk about this. I want to take you to Jesus. But some of you have neighbors or colleagues that just are struggling with life and just need some financial support or other support. Would you carry them?

You see, that's what we're called to do as a church. I think the example of the friends are so beautiful to me. I love that line when Jesus saw their faith, He looks at the man. I think many ways perhaps that if we pull that longer, Jesus is looking to us. Will you be the faith for someone so, they can find me. Are we so distracted that on the way we miss the people around us. That on the way there's someone hurting beside here, on the way someone just wanted to ask a question. On the way, we are so driven to do what we want to do and we've packaged God as to who God is supposed to be. We're missing the people right in front of us who are crying out. Can you take me to God?

As a church we have sponsored close to 100 refugees to come to London. They come and they land in Toronto. As soon as they land in Canada they're no longer refugees, they lose the status. They're now newcomers and they get to start a new life. Many of you have stepped into these moments and you've become the friend to these individuals, these families that have come here to London, to North Park to be with us. In the next four to six months, we're going to have another couple of dozen refugees flying in and landing here in London, Ontario. As a church, we need some more people, some more individuals, some couples, and some families to become one of the four friends for these people coming here. We're asking you, who will step forward for this? You see, as they land

here, they need people to pick them up and to carry them to the bank to show them how things work here. We need people to pick them up and carry them to the grocery store to understand how this strange North American grocery store works. We need to pick up their kids and take them to school and become an advocate for them to the teachers and the administration so they can get a start. They need someone to carry them to an ESL class, need someone to carry them to doctor's appointments. They need people for that first year to come alongside them. Because when they get here, they're paralyzed.

Many of you stepped into this. We need many more people to step into this moment. Could that perhaps be your moment right now to become with one of the four friends? Let me tell you up front. It will not be a simple romantic journey for you. It will be difficult. It will cost you. It will cost you your time. It'll cost you in frustration. It will cost you in resources. You see, being the friend is not a simple thing to do. It is always inconvenient. Yet it's what we are called into.

So what is God calling you into today? You see on the way Jesus went home to find some rest and the people found him. So he gathers his strength and he speaks the word of God to them. Some friends come along and break down the house and lower a friend in front of him and on the way, Jesus says, okay, I'll deal with this and I'll deal with the religious leaders while I'm doing it. He forgives sins, what the man really needed, and he heals him physically. On the way, we're going to have people come in our lives and God's going to ask, what will you do? Will you be a really good on the way person? Are you going to be just, on your way? Living a life that's all about you and not about what God is calling you into?

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you. For the beauty of this story, simple yet is complex and so amazing. Jesus, I pray for us God right now. I pray for those in this room who are the paralyzed man. They're the wilted plant, God, I pray for them right now. First of all, God, I pray that your peace, the peace that surpasses understanding would guard their hearts, their minds in Christ Jesus Lord. I pray right now they would just sense an energy from you, a strength in their lives. God, I pray for friends to come around them. I pray that as a church, we could do what we can do,

but right now, give them a sense of hope. A sense of hope. God, for those of us who have just kind of boxed you in so much for missing what you're doing right in front of us. Open our eyes, to see.

Maybe will be willing to put aside our conceived ideas of who you are and to accept you for who you really are. God, may we become the friends. May we become the friends that you are calling us to be that bring people to Jesus. May that be your reality? May that be our reality? Amen.

### **Points to Ponder**

#### **On The Way ~ Healing of the Paralyzed Man**

#### **Mark 2**

**With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.**

1. Are you a past, present or future oriented person? How does this impact your ability to be present for "On the Way" moments in life?
2. Do you have any memories of the story told in Mark 2 from childhood? How as this story impacted you in the past?
3. If this was a new story for you, what stood out to you? How did it impact you?
4. Look at the four types of people represented by the icons—crowd, religious leaders, sick man, 4 friends—what are your thoughts about them? Do you relate to one of them at this time? How?
5. What do you believe God is calling you into? Is there someone you need to be a friend to and lead to Jesus for healing? Do you need to release some pre-conceived thinking about who God is to you don't miss what he is up to right in front of you?