

The Joy of Seeing Lives Changed

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[0 : 00] Thank you so very much. What a beautiful song. If you have your Bibles, look with me this morning to Mark chapter 2. And let me just tell you what we're going to do.

We're going to look at the first five verses. I'm going to do a hurried exposition of this passage. And then after we do that, we're going to stand back and notice some things about the focal principles of this passage we're dealing with today.

If I were to give the message a title, it would be the joy of seeing lives changed. When you read Luke's Gospel, chapter 15, there are my three favorite parables in all the Scripture.

It's the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and then the prodigal son who returns home. And the teaching in all that is clearly this, that there is joy in heaven over that which was lost being found.

It's a joy, isn't it, to see something that's lost discovered again, to see something that's lost purpose and meaning in life, and it's just going down the tube, so to speak, suddenly to be renewed and to find new life and vitality, to see someone's life change.

[1 : 08] Man, it just doesn't get any better than that. In fact, I can tell you with assurance today, the greatest joy I ever had as a pastor was not in seeing a building packed with people. That's exciting.

It's invigorating. But what really and truly is exciting and what really and truly is joyful is to see somebody whose life was out of order and suddenly see them come to know Christ and see the huge difference He makes in their life.

Well, if you've never had that joy of witnessing that, I hope you will in the days to come. It's something you're going to see in the story we look at this morning. So if you have your Bibles, turn with me to Mark chapter 2, and let's begin our reading in verse 1.

When He entered Capernaum, and He is referring to Jesus, Capernaum is the home base of His Galilean ministry. He lived, grew up in Nazareth, a stone's throw from Capernaum.

But when Jesus begins His ministry, He works in and out of Capernaum. He leaves Capernaum, comes back to Capernaum. And so verse 1 of chapter 2 says, When He entered Capernaum again, after some days He's been away, and if you read the chapter prior to this, you know He's been preaching, He's been healing, doing all kinds of miracles.

[2 : 23] It was reported that He was at home. Some of you may be using the King James Version this morning, and I typically use other translations, but I want to tell you, I like the way King James Version puts verse 1.

It says, It was noise that Jesus had come home. I like that term, it was noise, because it tells you it wasn't a computer, it wasn't something on Facebook, it was something that people said to one another.

It's a little bit gossipy sounding, isn't it? In other words, this person told that person to tell, this person who told yet another person, and pretty soon all over the region of Capernaum, word has gotten out, Jesus is back home.

He's come back to Capernaum. Well, it stirs up all kinds of excitement, and we see that in verse 2. So many people gathered together, that there was no more room, not even in the doorway, and He was speaking the message to them.

I mean, when word got out, the whole area wanted to see Jesus again. They'd heard of these miracles He'd done on this Galilean tour, they'd heard about His preaching, all kinds of things were happening.

[3 : 40] Everybody wanted to come and hear Jesus. So when they hear He's in this local house, there in the town of Capernaum, everybody rushes there to see Jesus. It was a standing room only crowd, what we call an SRO crowd, standing room only.

Now, we've got a good crowd here this morning, but we are, what we Baptists like to say, comfortably filling this room, right? You know what that means, right? There's enough room for you to lay down and take a nap beside somebody else.

This place was packed. If this had been the room that He was in, and I'm confident it was a much smaller room than this, probably less than a third the size of this room.

I mean, they're jammed in there, tree to tree, treetop tall. There are people everywhere. There were people behind Him, people in front of Him, people to the side of Him. I dare say Jesus probably had to stand there as they, in all likelihood, sat or kneeled or maybe lay on their side on the floor if there weren't chairs available to them.

And they just jam-packed that place, so much so, you could not get one other person in that room.

Now, we who attend Baptist churches, that's kind of hard for us to imagine, right?

[4 : 55] And I've only seen it one time in my life. I've seen at Easter huge crowds, assuming the church I pastored, where we had to bring in chairs, we had people on the floor, we had people behind us in the choir loft.

But only one time in my ministry, when I first started preaching, Western Avenue in 1978, we had truth come to our church. Some of you will remember that group.

They were a wonderful, wonderful singing group, and we advertised all over town that truth was going to be there. And I'm going to tell you, I got there about 45 minutes before the performance started.

We had one of these old churches that had a wraparound balcony. Remember those? How the old churches were, had a wraparound balcony. I was fearful as I stood there on the platform thinking, I hope nobody falls out of the balcony.

They were leaning over the rails of the balcony. It was really a scary situation. All the floor space was taken. The choir loft was filled. We had two vestibules in the back of the church. Both of those were standing back.

[5 : 49] People standing in the stairwell. Every place is taken. Fire marshal shows up. A few minutes before the performance, he got word of it. He comes down there, takes a look at it, comes to me and says, you let one more person in this building, we're going to close it down.

It was genuinely a standing room only crowd. Well, that's what's taking place here in Capernaum.

It's a standing room only crowd. They're packed to the max.

Well, look at verse 3. Verse 3 says, Then they came, and we don't know anything about this group called they. And then they came to him bringing a paralytic carried by four men.

All we know is their number. We don't know their relationship to the paralytic. We don't know anything about their paralytic. We don't know their name. We don't know his name. We don't know how long they've had relationship.

We're going to make some assumptions here in a few moments that I think are logical and reasonable. But you can make up your own mind about these men. We're just not told any of the other details. This is what we know.

[6 : 55] They come bringing this man, probably a friend, on this cot to where Jesus is at this house in Capernaum. Look at verse 4, if you will.

Since they were not able to bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above where he was. And when they had broken through, they lowered the stretcher on which the paralytic was lying.

Now, that ought to take you back. If it doesn't, you, my friend, don't have much imagination. I'm telling you, that's one weird, weird scene.

These four guys have brought this guy, probably a friend, to Jesus. They want to have Jesus take a look at him, see if Jesus can help him. When they get there, the front door of the house, there are people standing in the doorway.

They no doubt approach those guys, hey, could you let us in? This is a guy we brought to see Jesus. Sorry, pal, you're out of luck, too late, can't get in the house. They walk around the house, the windows, they're jam-packed, the back door, you can't get entrance there.

[8 : 05] And they wonder, how can we get our friend to Jesus? Now, you'll recall months ago, three months ago, when I began as interim here at Pickens, we preached then from Mark in one of those opening sermons, and we told you that huge crowds often came to where Jesus was, and that Mark was the gospel writer who was not about theology so much or philosophy like John is.

He's the guy who's telling a narrative, and he goes from one story quickly to another, to another, to another. He doesn't give us neither the details any of the other three gospel writers give us. In fact, this is the word that you find more often in Mark than you know the word, the word immediately or straightway. He says, and immediately Jesus did this, and immediately Jesus did this, and immediately Jesus did this.

So when you're reading this story, here's what you get. Jesus comes home, word gets out, everybody shows up, these guys pick up this guy on the cot, bring him to Jesus, get there, can't get in, and in the very next verse he says, and they go up on the roof, and they tear the roof out, and they lower the man into the presence of Jesus.

Now, I hope you've got enough imagination to know that while he's accurate in telling that, he's left out some stuff, right? I mean, who of you in this room, if you're in the position of these four men, say immediately, when you can't get in the front door, oh, I know what I want to do, let's go up on the roof and tear out the thatch and lure him into the presence of Jesus, right?

[9 : 36] It just doesn't go down like that. There had to be a time where they stood back, and they looked at that, and they thought, well, man, this guy needs to see Jesus. How are we going to get him into Jesus? What are we going to do? And they mull that over, and ultimately come up with a solution that Mark tells us about very hurriedly.

They go up on the roof, they tear out the thatch, they lure him into the presence of Jesus. But I assure you, it didn't take place just that quickly as we read it.

Well, what happens? Look at verse 5. Seeing their faith, Jesus told the paralytic, Son, your sins are forgiven.

Interesting phrase, if you underscore in your Bible, underscore that second word, seeing their faith. The plural pronoun there.

Not seeing the paralytic's faith. That's how we normally think. That if I get a miracle in my life, it's because of my faith. But what Mark says is, seeing their faith.

[10 : 45] Can I give you a picture of what I think happened? Jesus come home. The crowd has gathered. Place is filled to the max. Jesus, in all likelihood, has taken a position in the center of the room.

Now think about it. Probably a low ceiling. It's a small house. A lot of folk. So how, if you're a speaker, are you going to talk to those folk unless they're kneeling, lying, and you're standing up, and you're somewhere in the center of the room.

I've had occasion where a real large crowd had gathered, and when I was speaking, I'd be speaking to people here and here and here, and I would just keep turning back and forth in order to try to make eye contact with everyone that was in the room.

I have a feeling, can't prove it, but it seems reasonable to me that's probably what Jesus did too. He's in the center of the room. People gather around him. He's talking, right? You ever been in a Baptist meeting where somebody's talking, they're up preaching, they're teaching, and somebody does something they didn't intend to do?

Or maybe they did intend to do it, but it just wasn't the smartest thing in the world to do, right?

Somebody's phone goes off. What happens? Ryan cuts your phone off, right? Everybody looks in that direction.

[12 : 03] Or somebody gets up and they go do something that you wonder why in the world didn't they wait until the church is over to do that, right? And yet, everybody turns and they look in that direction because they're distracted.

So Jesus is up teaching and all of a sudden they hear footsteps. This is not a solid roof, obviously, because they break through it pretty easily and lower this man into Jesus. So they hear footsteps on the roof.

They can hear voices, no doubt. Hey, then you're not going to drop him, are you? I mean, you okay? Are you all right? And they hear these voices outside. And now they hear walking on the roof.

And all of a sudden, somebody gets hit in the head with a piece of thatch. And they look up. And everybody in the room follows suit. They're all looking up. And now, if I'm Jesus, I don't know if he did or not, but if I'm Jesus, I quit talking because I know I've already lost a while anyway, right?

And I'm watching the same thing everybody else in the room is watching. I'm watching this little tiny hole through which daylight is coming get bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger until finally, you can lower a cot down through the opening and four faces suddenly appear.

[13:18] Hey, Jesus. Got a buddy here. He needs to see you. And they lure him into the presence of Jesus. Now, I'm going to tell you, that's a meeting I'd like to have been at.

Wouldn't you? That is one cool, cool story. That's what we get here in Mark chapter 2. Well, what do we make of this?

Uh-oh. I lost my microphone. That's one of those distractions we were talking about. Just cut it off. Now it's back on. Okay. Here's my question to you. Having looked at this story this morning. What in the world? What in the world possessed those four men to do what they did?

I mean, can you imagine? Can we just be honest? Is there anybody in this room that can envision you doing that? You going up on somebody's roof who probably you don't even know and tearing a hole big enough in the roof to put a cot through and to lure this paralytic into the presence of Jesus.

[14:34] When it's Jesus, it's the Son of God and He's teaching and you're interrupting Him. Is there anybody here that can imagine? Yeah, I think I could do that. I'm going to tell you, I'll do some wild, crazy things.

I don't think I'd have been in on that one. That's pretty out there, you know? Can I tell you something? If every one of us in this room could come to have the same traits I see these guys demonstrate in our life, Pickens, First Baptist Church, wouldn't have to talk about reaching the people of Pickens.

You would reach the people of Pickens. Can you imagine what it would be like if this church could really take seriously the mission that you stated to evangelize the world and you really began to see week in and week out lives change because you were reaching your neighbors and your friends and your relatives and people who've never heard about Jesus here in this community.

Can you imagine how exciting that would be? Can you imagine what that would be like? I want to show you six qualities these guys possessed that I think made that possible. First of all, these were men. I don't know a lot about them, but I know this.

They had to be men of great compassion. I mean, I don't know if they were related to this guy, if they just knew this guy, if they were close friends with this guy, but they saw that paralytic and they heard about the things that Jesus was doing and they believed, as we'll say in a moment, with all their heart that Jesus could help them.

[16:05] And so I want to tell you something. They had compassion for him. They looked at him and they saw a guy, you know what? He can't walk the way we can. He can't get to Jesus if he wants to.

I don't even know if he wanted to. But I know this. He can't get there on his own. If he's going to get to Jesus, if Jesus is going to impact his life, it's going to be because somebody cared enough about him to bring him to Jesus.

He's dependent on their compassion. Can you for one second separate yourself from the life that you now have and wonder what it would be like, just dare to imagine what it would be like if you could do nothing for yourself, if you were absolutely dependent on someone else to take care of you and sing about your welfare?

When I was pastor in Statesville, there was a lady in our church, Betty Sue Sharp. She's going to be with the Lord years ago. Betty Sue, at the time I knew her, was about 48. She had been injured in an automobile accident when she was 18 years old, just out of high school, severed her spinal cord. She was a paraplegic for the rest of her life. She would lie in bed. Her elderly mother, Mrs. Speece, would take care of her. And occasionally, because she wouldn't turn her enough, she would develop these bed sores.

[17:28] They would have to carry her to Baptist Hospital in Winston-Salem. When I would go over and see Betty Sue, can I tell you something? They had her on a striker frame.

Let me just describe what a striker frame is if you don't know what that is. It's just a little cot, probably very similar to what these guys carried this paralytic on. It has a bar on one side, a bar on the other.

The person lays in the middle. It's got canvas in the middle and a place cut out in the canvas for a person to put their face through that canvas. Then they take another identical cot and place it on their back.

And then they lace those two cots together. They put it on a swivel so that it can flip so that half the day, changing it every few hours, a person is lying there facing the ceiling and the rest of the time, they're lying there facing the floor.

Only two positions they can be in. They're either facing upward or facing downward. When I would go to see her, regardless of which position she was in, when I would get there, the nurse would come in and she would change her so she could talk with me so that she was facing up.

[18:36] On one occasion, I'm visiting Betty Sue and we're having a conversation. It's lasted about 30 minutes or so. And she turns to me. I'm praying with her, getting ready to leave. And before I leave, I say, is there anything I can do for you, Betty Sue?

And you know what she said? She said, Pastor, I hate to ask you this, but yeah, there is. Would you scratch my nose? My nose is itching.

Would you just scratch it? I'd be glad to. And I'm going to tell you, I had to fight back tears as I touched her nose and began to rub her nose.

Because I put myself in her place and I thought, my goodness. I complained about this and that and the other and I can't imagine what it would be like to be lying here on this striker frame.

And I can't even scratch my own nose. Can I tell you something? There are people all around Pickens who are just that helpless, just that disabled, emotionally and spiritually and mentally.

[19:37] And I'm telling you something, if they're ever going to come to Jesus, it's going to be because somebody who knew Jesus had the insight and the compassion to bring them to Christ.

They're never going to get there on their own. It's going to be because somebody cared enough to bring them to Christ. These were men of compassion. They were also men of deep, deep conviction.

Now, in a Baptist church, it's not hard to get people to raise their hand and say, I believe the Bible. I believe every word in the Bible. I have great confidence in God. God can do anything. And I want to tell you something.

If we're honest about it, there is a crisis of faith in the church today unlike we've ever witnessed in the history of Christendom. If we're honest about it, I don't think we any longer know even what we really do believe about Jesus.

Can I tell you what Paul believed about Jesus? Paul said in Romans 1.16, He is the power, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to the Jew first, to the Roman, and to the Greek.

[20:44] And that's the reason unashamedly, everywhere he went, he proclaimed the Lord Jesus Christ. You know why? Because Paul believed this. If a man can get to know Jesus, if Jesus can get into a man, the Holy Spirit can come into a man's life.

He can regenerate that man, and he can bring him to life again, and this man who was lost can be found, he can have a meaningful life if he just knew Christ.

And I want to ask you something. Do you have conviction about that? Is this just something we show up on Sundays and say that we believe Jesus can change the world, He can change lives, or do you really and truly believe that?

Because I want to ask you, if you really and truly believe that, how do you see people who are helpless like this man was and not speak to them about the Lord Jesus Christ? How cruel and insensitive and filled with hate must we be to really believe the things that we say about Jesus, but then tell no one about Jesus?

Do you understand that? These were men of conviction. I don't know what they believed theologically, I don't know if they believed He was Messiah or not, but I do believe this, they believed with all their heart, they'd heard enough, they'd seen enough of the miracles of Jesus.

[21:58] If we get our friend in the presence of Jesus, Jesus can heal it. Do you believe that spiritually about Jesus healing people in your life? Thirdly, they were people who were determined.

They were people who were determined. Now when I say determined, we recognize there are levels of determination, right? There are things even this last week you said, you know what, I'm determined to lose five pounds.

Are you really? The proof will be if you lose five pounds, right? If you really, really do mean that. We say, I'm determined to get more sales on my job. Really?

Is that just something you're saying to make the boss feel okay about your effort? Are you really determined? Last week, remember how I closed the service? I said, would you do me a favor? Would you go out and invite everybody you know who hadn't been here in a while and get them to come? Because I'm going to tell you something really important next week, and I don't dare say there were some of you who went out and you made some calls and you said, would you come?

[23 : 03] But I want to ask you, how determined were you about that? Some of you probably never thought about it again. Some of you probably never agreed to do it to begin with, and that's okay.

It's just me asking. I think you're not obligated to do what I ask you to do, but were you determined about it? Because I dare say there have been times in your life that you really have been determined about something.

In fact, it was such a matter of importance to you, you knew this, I've got to find a way to do that or it's going to be horrific. What if tomorrow morning you went into work and your boss looked at you and said, I want to tell you something, you will have this done by Wednesday or you're gone.

I'm going to let you go. You're going to lose your house. You're going to lose your job, your income. Boy, I guarantee you, you would give it your best area.

It wouldn't be something you say you'd really try to do. You'd be determined to do it. How determined are you to bring people to Christ? There's a fourth thing I want you to see about these men.

[24 : 04] It's one of my favorites. They were imaginative and creative. I mean, that just goes without saying, right? They came up with this novel idea after they'd stood back and looked at it a while.

Let's go up on the roof. That's the biggest reason I believe they didn't just walk up and try to get in the front door when that didn't work and go up on the roof because I'm going to tell you it's just too creative an idea.

Here's what had to happen. When they checked all around the house and they couldn't get in, they had to stand back. They probably put their friend down on the ground. You got any ideas, buddy? They looked at that house.

They thought about it. After a while, probably one of them said, hey, you know what? We could... No, that wouldn't work. Well, we could... No, that wouldn't work either.

And I can just see the light bulb come on in one of their minds, don't you? All four of them didn't think of it. The others agreed to it, but it was one person's idea, I guarantee you. Hey, you know what?

[25 : 07] Boy, this is crazy, but I saw a ladder in the back and I saw some rope over there on the side and we could get that ladder and we could go up on the roof and we could tie the rope to the ends of the cot. If you're willing, we can horse you up on the roof.

What are we going to do then? We're going to tear out the roof. We're going to what? We're going to tear out the roof. We're going to let our friend into the presence of Jesus. That's creative. That's magic. That's thinking, as we like to say today, out of the box, right?

Can I tell you something? We Baptists are not good at thinking out of the box. We Baptists are not imaginative. In fact, we people, not just Baptists, you see those first little kids up here?

Weren't they cute? You think they've got imagination? They sure do. I mean, those kids are low. I guarantee you, the one on this end didn't give a nickel what the one on that end was doing.

He's doing his thing, she's doing her thing, right? They don't care about anybody else. They're just pioneers. Everything's an adventure. My grandson, he's got a wild imagination.

[26 : 08] You Christians probably don't want to hear this, but he's as excited as he can be about Halloween. I mean, he wants to be a skeleton and all that jazz. He just loves that stuff, right? He's got a wild imagination. Wild, wild imagination.

By the time they get a little older, they lose some of that. Do you notice how those older kids, they did a great job singing? They all stood in their place because they learned, man, the routine. We got to do this.

Mom and Dad will get on to me if I get home and you know I cut up up here. So I can't pull my dress over my head, right? And I can't do those kind of things. And then you look at your choir.

Now, they have really learned the routine, right? They're not going to play with their dress. They're not going to, they're going to sing like adults, right? Isn't it amazing how when kids are in middle school, they begin to lose that creativity and imagination by the time they get out of high school, they're just parrots.

In fact, most of us in this room, we're parrots. I'm talking about myself. We're parrots. We do what others tell us to do. We don't like to think for ourselves. Most Baptists are parrots.

[27 : 14] You say, well, preacher, that's a little bit offensive. It may be offensive, but it's true. Can I just prove it to you? Those of you that are maids, think back, I'm 69 years old. Think back in the day

when we were young and we were going to church.

Remember what happened in the early 70s? I do. I was a young preacher. Early 70s, a guy in Dell City, Oklahoma by the name of Bailey Smith bought some buses and he began busing people to church and pretty soon they were running thousands.

Down in Houston, Texas, a guy by the name of John Massonio did the same. And a guy by the name of Jerry Falwell up in Lynchburg, Virginia did the same. And a guy over in Hammond, Indiana began to do the same. And pretty soon there were conferences being held about buses and people were learning about bus ministry and before that nobody knew anything about bus ministry.

And guess what? Every church in Easley by 1980 had a bus, right? And we're engaged in bus ministry and nobody ever said, were there any problems associated with that?

And we found out there were. There were a lot of headaches that came with that. And it worked in some places, didn't work in other places. And remember the gym phase where everybody said, we need a gym. Well, why do we need a gym?

[28 : 20] Well, because we need one, right? We need a gym. And it became a place where we played basketball, you know, a few times a year and we had a gym, right?

And through the years, I've seen that over and over and over. Some guy on the West Coast, Rick Warren, writes a book called Purpose Driven Life and it's a great, great, great book. And we began to have these conferences and everybody's duplicating that and saying, okay, we need to have a 101 and a 201 and a 301 and a 401 ministry and do things just like they do out on the West Coast. And so, people like you find here at Pickens and in other places like in Greer and all over the country, they say, you know what? We need to get a guru to come in here and tell us how to reach the people of our city.

And so they ran out to the West Coast, would you come and talk to us and be the expert for us? Or they call Columbia or they call Atlanta or they get Nashville and a guy comes in with a suitcase, a briefcase, and he's got the plan for you and he lays it out.

But I want to tell you something. Because it works in Atlanta, because it works in Columbia, because it works in Bakersville, California, it doesn't mean it's going to work in Pickens. Do you know that? You know who the expert on Pickens is?

[29 : 30] It's not Ralph Carter. I'm from Greer. The expert on Pickens are you folk because this is where you make your home. You know the people in this county.

You know the people in this city. You know the people in this community. You know your neighbors. But what happens is we get lazy and we just want to do what somebody else has told us to do instead of taking the time to stand back and say, we need to pray and we need to, God forbid, think. Right? We need to come up with a solution that's right for our community and a plan for what would reach the people of the Pickens community. I'm going to tell you a story out of my past and I hesitate to tell it because I'm so fearful somebody will come up and say, that's what we need to do. No, it's not what you need to do. It's what we did. I'm in states from North Carolina. Went there in 77. Left in 92. Long about the late 80s. We had relocated the church.

Run out of room. Built buildings and we had people meeting in every Sunday school classroom. In the auditorium. Had a meeting in a closet.

[30 : 37] Believe it or not, a room closet. A small class. Had every staff person forfeit their office on Sunday morning, including my own. We all gave up our office and said, you can have Sunday school class in the year. Move chairs in there.

We don't have any more space. But I'm thinking to myself, God puts an idea on my mind. If I had another space, I think I could reach people who've never been to Sunday school. They might come to a class that I'd teach if we had one for just people who've never attended Sunday school.

I asked the director of our Sunday school and our education director, if you've got a room for me or we don't have any room, Pastor. I don't mind the idea, they said, but you've got to find your own room.

Well, one day I'm leaving work. I look to my left. Our building's out on the fringe of town. Nothing but a lot of acres behind us, open woods, except for this one man that lives there and this moose lodge. It's about 250 yards from our building and it's about a third the size of this room. And so, I think to myself, hmm, I don't know any moose, but I could find out who runs that thing and so I made a few calls and pretty soon I get connected with the head moose, right?

[31 : 53] And it happens he's a member of a Sister Baptist Church. So I told him who I was and I said, listen, you know, you're building, your moose lodge is only about 250 yards from my back parking lot and I'm looking for a place to teach Sunday school on Sunday morning.

Do you all use that place on Sunday morning? No, we don't use it on Sunday morning. When do you use it? Use it Friday night and Saturday night. Well, would you be willing for me to rent it from you? Well, I wouldn't charge you.

I'd just let you have it. Well, that'd be great. Do you mind me using it? No, but you can tell there's hesitancy in his voice. I said, well, what's the problem? He said, well, you know, I don't know how to put it, but we kind of gather and have social gatherings.

What he meant is we party hardy on Saturday night and said, we have to stop the party at midnight. I later learned that was because you can't drink in states at that time after midnight.

You know, it's Sunday. You can't have an open bar. So, he says, we close up about midnight, but when we close up, we just leave things just like they are. So, if you went on Sunday morning, there'd be beer cans and beer bottles and whiskey bottles everywhere.

[32 : 57] I said, I'm sorry to tell you that, but that's just how it'd be. So, I don't guess it would work. I said, yeah, it'd work. I said, would you let me and a couple people go in there and clean that up beforehand? Do you mind if we clean that?

No, it'd save us having to come back on Monday. I said, well, great, I'll just clean it up for you. So, I go to the deacon and I say, guys, here's what we're going to do. We're going to open a class for anybody who's never been in sun school.

You can't come if you're already in sun school class, but if you're not in sun school class, we're going to open it up to anybody who wants to come. They said, okay, you can try it and see. I could tell the way they said it.

They didn't really think that's going to work and I wasn't sure about it. I mean, it's just an idea, but we tried it. Me and a couple guys went down there and that Sunday morning, we cleared out all the bottles, had two big garbage can bags of beer bottles and cans that we took and put in the dumpster and then we opened that building for Sunday school.

You know what we called it? The Happy Hour. We sandwiched it between one worship service and another worship service and some of those guys that said, I bet you won't have over five or ten were right.

[34 : 02] We had 42 the first time we met in that room. Can I tell you something? The secret to reaching Pickens is not out there in some book.

It sits right here in this room. when you care enough to come out for something other than a worship service and sit down with your friends and family members and say, let's develop a strategy for reaching our community for Christ.

The fifth thing I want you to see about these guys is they were daring risk takers. That's one thing to get an idea. It's another thing to see it through, isn't it? I'm confident there wasn't a Baptist among those four because if there had been a Baptist, especially a Baptist deacon or a pastor or staff member among those four, you know what they'd have said?

We can't do that. That's never been done before. Somebody would have said, do you know whose granddaddy built that roof? I mean, wouldn't he?

And certainly somebody would have said this, who's going to pay for that? Right? We can't do that because there'd be cost involved and somebody would have to pay for that roof.

[35 : 21] And I'm going to tell you something, those four guys through caution to the wind, they said, you know what, this is the only way our buddy is going to get into the presence of Jesus if we go up on that roof and tear out that roof and lower him into the presence of Jesus.

And if we do that, you know what, I think Jesus will heal him. And boy, they were right. And so they demonstrate what it is to be a risk taker.

Can I ask you something this morning personal? When's the last time any of us in this room took any kind of risk at all in sharing the gospel?

Where you said, I'm throwing caution to the wind and I don't care what's ever been done before, so long as it's legal and it's not immoral and it has integrity and character, it's a viable way, it's just not something we've ever done before.

When have you ever cared enough to risk yourself, to risk this? You know what we fear risking more than anything else? It's not our money. It's risking embarrassment. When's the last time you

risk embarrassing yourself to see someone come to know Christ?

[36 : 28] And finally, and I close with this, they worked as a team. They probably weren't completely in agreement about going up on that roof.

I can't imagine any three friends that I've got where I would be the fourth and any one of us suggest, let's go up on that roof and tear it out and lower our friend in the presence of Jesus where at least one or two of them wouldn't have been saying, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, wait just a minute.

There were some serious objections I'm sure that somebody in that group of four raised. But in the end, here's what impresses me. when it came down to crunch time, they all grabbed one end of that rope and they all worked together to make it happen.

I want to tell you something. I've been so impressed. I'm not saying this to make you feel good. I've told everybody I've come in contact with since I became your interim pastor. Those people at First Pickens are some of the nicest people I have ever met.

I believe you have that quality of caring about people. I think you have the conviction that Jesus can change lives. I hope you have the imagination to do the daring and are willing to take the risk.

[37 : 46] But I hope you also have the ability to work as a team. I hope you're willing to say, you know what? I may not get this. I may not understand this, but I know this.

I'm going to be one of those guys holding that rope and going up on that roof and hosting that man into the presence of the Word Jesus. Now let me close by telling you this. What is the payoff? You say, what's the payoff if we did that?

What if we began to change how we do ministry? What if we really said, let's be serious. Let's not just say this in name only. Let's be serious about reaching our community for Christ.

And let's get together as a church and let's map out a plan. What would work here in Pickens? And then when we have our plan, let's begin to work that plan and let's be determined and let's do everything we can.

And if we fail a few times, that's okay. We'll back up and we'll come at it from another angle. But our goal is to reach the people of Pickens with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[38 : 46] Well, I'm going to tell you something. It'd be a sacrifice. It'd be daring. It'd require you to take some risks. But if you do that, what would be the payoff? Here would be the payoff. Jesus saw their fate, the team's fate, not the man's, the team's fate.

And he said, Son, your sins are forgiven. And a little later, if you go home and read the rest of the story, you know what he says? Take up your mat and walk. And here's the payoff.

Those four guys on that roof looking down got to see their buddy for the first time they'd ever seen this get up off that floor, stand there, and walk out that front door.

Would that have been cool or what? I mean, can you imagine how cool that was? There he goes.

He's walking down the road. He's heading home. What a cool thing. I'm going to tell you something. You'll never have a joy as great as the joy of seeing someone whose life was just going down the tubes and you, through the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, help rescue them and bring them to Christ.

[39 : 56] I'm telling you, that's a hoot. I believe some of you this morning would like to have that experience. It doesn't take everybody. It takes four.

We're going to have Brian sing a verse of a hymn. If the Holy Spirit of God has spoken to your heart while He sings this, would you be brave enough? Would you take a big enough risk this morning you'd step out and come and just kneel here at this altar for a moment and just say, by your coming, I want to be one of those four.

I want to be somebody like that. I want to be somebody who dares to reach this community with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's stand. Let's stand.