

**THE CONFIDENCE TRAP 4 – A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF MARK**  
**MARK 2:12-17**  
**October 2, 2016**

November 8 and it will all be over. That's the good news. The bad news? One of the current candidates will be getting their moving vans ready for the White House. One of these two candidates will be getting ready to be President of the country we live in. That's the bad news.

As it turns out, these two candidates are the most disliked presidential candidates in recent history. Going back to 1980, there is polling data for presidential candidates in which they ask people, "How do you feel about these people, somewhat favorable, very favorable, somewhat unfavorable, very unfavorable?" By a landslide, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump have garnered the most "very unfavorable" replies of any presidential candidates in history.

Why is that? Could be years of polarization? Could be contempt for unethical liars? Could be their hair? I don't know, but it has led many people to stop and wonder, are these really our two options? Is this it? The great irony, of course, is that these two highly disliked people also don't like a lot of people. Donald Trump has called women pigs, dogs and slob. He has offended Mexicans, Muslims and blacks. Not to be outdone, Hillary Clinton called half of the Republican voting bloc a "basket of deplorables."

That is the strange secret here. Disliked people usually dislike people. They put themselves on a trajectory or they get put on a trajectory of being disliked. That leads them to distrust and like people less, which leads them to offend and marginalize more people. Before you know it, they are highly unfavorable. I bring that up today because Christians are receiving marks on a regular basis of being highly unfavorable. A Pew Research poll in 2014<sup>1</sup> measured how people feel towards particular religious groups. They asked them how

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/07/16/how-americans-feel-about-religious-groups/>

warmly they felt towards particular groups; very negative being 0 and 100 being very positive. Christians in general got around 61% favorability. Which sounds good until you look at the research because Christians make up a large part of American demographics, thus the survey. Now it becomes clear that Christians are saying they view Christians quite highly. When you remove how Christians feel about Christians, the number drops to about 50. When you begin to look at groups like atheists and agnostics, we drop to the very negative 20's.

Maybe that shouldn't be surprising. Atheists don't like Christians, but here is the ironic part, Christians were asked how they viewed other groups, and more than any other faith, we had the most contempt and the frostiest response to atheists and Muslims. That strange secret gets proven true - disliked people dislike people.

That can't be right for people who followed a carpenter from Nazareth. I want to show you a passage today that reminds us who Jesus came for. I want to remind you of the weird, wild uncomfortable truth of what he calls us to do.

### *Mark 2: 13-17*

I want to introduce you to a literary tool that Mark uses throughout his gospel. Juxtaposition is the literary technique of placing two events side by side and allowing them to comment on one another and expand the meaning of one another. The phrase they teach you in seminary calls this a *Markan Sandwich*, where ideas are sandwiched together to illuminate larger meaning. Essentially this is simple juxtaposition when two stories collide to point to something much bigger. Last week, we looked at Jesus healing a paralytic, then to this story of Levi and it ends with Jesus saying, "Those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick." That makes it clear that these two stories are interwoven. Last week was a man whose body was broken, this week a man whose soul is broken. Both needed to be healed.

This is the story of more sick people who need healing. Levi or Matthew, as he is sometimes called, is physically fine which makes it much more difficult to see the sickness chewing away at his soul. This man was a tax collector. How this worked was simple. The Romans would put different taxable regions up for auction. If the taxable amount they needed for an area was 50,000 denarius, then that is where the auction would start. Prospective tax collectors would then bid 50,000 denarius or more. Whatever the final number was, they would win that region and collect that amount of taxes. Anything beyond that they would keep for themselves as payment. This led to tax collectors who squeezed, manipulated and threatened every dollar they could so they could meet their quota and get rich off the excess. This made tax collectors abhorrent to observant Jews because they 1) represented the unlawful occupation of the pagan Romans and their taxation of God's people in God's promised land. 2) They were deceitful greedy manipulators. In fact, they find Matthew by the lake. He would literally track down these fishermen as they came in from fishing to make sure they paid taxes above and beyond on what they just caught. I'm sure Matthew would fit nicely in a basket of deplorables. Although not literal, this barrier was noted by everyone who knew Matthew because he was a greedy manipulative liar who had betrayed his own people. Last week, four men dug through a roof and brought a man to Jesus. This week Jesus decides to dig down. He lowers himself to this lowest of persons for the sake of healing.

Then he says, "Follow me." He invites this highly unfavorable thief, this man who aligns himself with the Romans, this man who has gotten rich off of the hard work of others, he invites him to follow and goes to his house for a meal to be shared with a whole basket of deplorables, tax collectors and sinners. This is not just the modern equivalent of going to a dive bar. In this context, sharing a meal included social boundaries. Who you ate with spoke to who you were. If you hung out with deplorables, you could be contaminated. You could be unclean, literally and figuratively. You could catch what they had, and their spiritual uncleanness could seep over on to you.

So people stayed in their own circles. Observant God-fearing people only ate with observant God-fearing people. Sinners ate with sinners. You didn't go above your station or

below it, and you definitely didn't eat with people whose morals were different or view of God was different from yourself. Who you were willing to eat with defined who you were, so people were cautious about where they went and whom they ate with.

I don't know if you have noticed this, but it is almost impossible to get people to RSVP any more. I have read several articles about it and heard many people bemoaning this fact. It could be because people are over-scheduled. It could be because we live in an instant-gratification world with instant communication and people think they can wait until the last second to decide. It could be any number of things, but I blame Evites. You know why? Because you can see the entire invite list including who is going or not going, and whether people are willing to admit it or not, you may go or not go based on who will be or who *will not be* at a party, so people wait to see who is going. They put off RSVPing to make sure the group will be exactly to their liking.

Many subsets of modern Christians will do this. They are either afraid or unwilling to go certain places or to be around certain people. Unfortunately I think it is based on a similar fear. They might contaminate me. They might contaminate my kids. Maybe it's something as simple as their olfactory flavor or personal appearance or their predilection for being a close talker. Maybe it is something deeper; the way they vote, who they are in a relationship with. Perhaps how they worship or who they worship. We fear we may be contaminated or hear something that disagrees with our worldview or theology.

Jesus shows the complete opposite. There was a fear he would be contaminated by the leper, but he healed him anyway. There was a fear that hanging out with pariahs would make him one, but he did it anyway. You see Jesus went with the idea of contaminating them with grace and unapologetic love.

His disciples went there too. Verse 15 notes that Jesus' followers went where he went. You have to imagine they were skittish if not downright fearful, but they decided to be followers, which means you go where Jesus goes. You love who Jesus loves. We cannot forget that today Jesus went there so you can too. Jesus went there and so should you.

This could be the slum of a third world country or serving the poor in downtown San Jose. For some of us, it's something dangerous if not banal, that is mingling with people who are not Christian on a regular basis. Being unafraid and unapologetic to share meals and having dialogues with those whom you have absolutely nothing in common with. In fact, I'll take it one step further, with someone you vehemently disagree with.

Next Thursday we are having the Village Forum at the Foothill Club at 7:00 pm. We will have two speakers and then a moderated time of questions and answers. We will have Satyan Devadoss, a math professor at USD and Matt Dillahunty a Christian turned atheist who speaks and debates around the country. Satyan will argue there is proof for God. Matt will argue there is not. I think you should be there. You can invite someone who is interested in this topic. Even if this is settled in your own mind, I think you should come because you're going to want to hear the other side of the discussion. It will equip you and challenge you. You might have more empathy for the atheists in your workplace. You might learn to love them more.

It can be uncomfortable hanging out with people who don't act and believe like you. In fact, you can quote the Bible as to why you shouldn't, but Jesus did it here and his followers followed him there. Here is the great irony of this story, the Pharisees burst into the room and asked why Jesus was associating with sinners. Jesus replies that he came for the sick and sinners, not the righteous. The only problem with that is the Bible says there is no one righteous. No not one. It becomes clear through Jesus' interpretation of the law that we are all sinners. When he says he came for sinners, he is saying he came for everyone. His love is for everyone. He came for the Pharisees too.

I will tell you this is the other end of the spectrum and not to be missed. Some of you in this room are on the other end of the spectrum. You have no qualms at all about hanging out with the lowly or the poor. You are theologically liberal and progressive in all that you do. You are willing to hang out with anyone, except those you deem to be Pharisees. You are willing to hang out with anyone as long as they don't live in the South and vote for Donald

Trump.

I'm sure you know this but fundamentalism is not a word to be used only for the far right. It can be someone on the far left too. I mean fundamental in theology, politics and disposition in all ways. A fundamentalist is someone who lacks nuance and has little room for ambiguity. Fundamentalists are people who stand on propositions with no flexibility or ability to see something from another's perspective. You can be a far left fundamentalist or a far right fundamentalist on politics, theology or worldview. Fundamentalism is a big part of the confidence trap we often fall into. We are so certain about what we know regarding people, God and politics that it makes us inflexible and narrow. The world gets narrowed down to winning or losing.

The paradigm shift here is that Jesus came for all of us. He tells us to follow suit, to go where he goes and love who he loves, and that is everyone. This means the scorecard is no longer winning or losing. The scorecard is how well you loved. Period. End of discussion. Jesus said as much, "People will know you are my disciples by how you love one another." That is how we win, by showing love, by speaking love.

I want to let you in on a little secret. The state of someone else's soul is not up to you. I don't even like the phrase winning souls for Jesus because it implies *you* can lose them. It's not up to you. Only God changes hearts. If that is true, why do we still obsess over arguing people into a new way of thinking? There is a freedom and a joy there. The moment you realize you are put on this earth to love people wildly instead of inspecting their lifestyle and demeaning their habits you will find freedom. It's tiresome fretting over everyone else's decisions and worldview. It's stressful to stay up wondering how you can change someone. Once you realize that you are called to act like Jesus and not simply talk about him, you will find joy.

That's one of the many reasons we do Serve Sundays. We have one coming up in three weeks. Its purpose is two fold, 1) to shape your soul by giving you the opportunity to serve.

2) To allow our neighbors to see us acting like Jesus, not talking about him. We go out and serve them in all different ways, because service is love. Putting our time, money and sweat into this world we live in is love.

The Bay Area is 61% de-churched which means people who grew up in church and then left it. This is undoubtedly for many reasons, but I think chief among them is a dissonance between who Jesus was and how his followers live. People view the church as judgmental, hypocritical and cloistered away. Much of that is rooted in the need to win or lose, in the need to police the world and speak truth and show little love.

In his book, *The Kingdom of God is a Party*, Tony Campolo tells the story of a trip to Hawaii. After arriving, he was unable to sleep so he went into an all night diner. At 2:30 am, as he consumed pancakes he heard a table of prostitutes talking about their work and the kind of day they had. One of the women mentioned that it was her birthday and one of her friends sneered, "What do you want a party?" The woman replied, "I never had one my whole life, why should I expect one now." Tony saw an opening. He chatted with the owner and the other ladies. He had them come back the next night. He had a cake baked and everyone ready to scream "Happy Birthday" for this woman of the night when she came in the door. They did and she loved it. She was stunned. At 39, this was her first birthday party and first birthday cake. Tony prayed with this woman and helped change her life. He didn't try to argue about the immorality of prostitution. He didn't shame her for her life choices. He threw her a party.

After seeing this party and the prayer, the owner was shocked. I didn't know you were a preacher. What kind of a church would you be a part of? Tony Campolo proudly said, "I belong to a church that throws parties for prostitutes at 3:30 in the morning." That kind of love changes people. I don't know if that woman stopped being a prostitute, but that isn't the point. I also don't know if people exhorted Tony because people might get the wrong idea about him hanging out with prostitutes, but that isn't the point. The scorecard has changed. He wasn't trying to win or lose just show unapologetic love and extravagant grace.

Disliked people often dislike people. The opposite is also true, loved people love people. When you begin to embrace the idea that Jesus loves you, it will lead you to love others. When you know you're not your performance or how right you are or if you believe correctly, you will love others. Christians in America have a highly unfavorable rating from many people. It's time to change that. It's not about being right or wrong. It's not about winning or losing. It's about going to the places Jesus went. It's about loving the people Jesus loved. The rest will take care of itself.