

## Putting Down Roots: Three Pathways

08.29.2021

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This is the final week in what has been a very important series

We've called Putting Down Roots

Where we've invited people to "put down roots"

Into eternal things

To prioritize faith

In this new season

And to eliminate any excuse

That keeps us from growing closer to God

I'm expecting big things today

I've asked God to do big things

Here's why:

Three weeks ago

We invited several of you to consider leading a group through Rooted

This is a big ask

Several people have signed up to lead a new Rooted group this fall

Then last week

We invited you to consider joining our impact team

Finding a spot to make an impact in our community

And today

As we wrap up the series

I'm inviting you to join a Rooted group for 10 weeks this fall

I've been blown away by the responses:

So we really needed new groups

And new group leaders

To lead us through Rooted this fall

We have 17 new groups

People who weren't leading a group last year

Sign up to lead a Rooted group this fall

That's incredible

We really needed additional people to join our impact team

Before I give you the number

I understand that some people took on more than one role

So this doesn't exactly equal people

Some of you took 3 and 4 roles

Gluttons

But last week – at our impact team expo

88 people signed up to join the impact team last week

And those 88 people filled 123 positions!

88 people found 123 ways to make an impact!!

And today, I'm asking 100% of us to commit to a Rooted group

If you've not been with us

And if you weren't a math major

That's everybody – 100%

If today's your first Sunday

I'm asking you too

If you're watching online

I'm asking you too

We've got some great tools to help you find your right fit

And I want to give you a picture of what that's going to look like at the end  
of the service

Take a look at this



For the message today

I am going to focus in on an account from the life of Jesus

Out of Matthew 9

Now Mark & Luke also record this interaction

And I think it's fascinating why certain parts are excluded or included

I'll show you:

**Matthew 9:1 - Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to His own town.**

“His own town”

Help me, where’s Jesus at?

Nazareth

This an important detail

Keep that in the back of your mind

Does anybody know

How big was Nazareth in the first century?

We don’t know for sure

But because of Jesus

Lots of historical and archaeological effort has been given to answering those questions

**Dr. James F. Strange, Professor of Religious Studies – "Nazareth is not mentioned in ancient Jewish sources earlier than the third century AD. This likely reflects its lack of prominence both in Galilee and in Judaea."**

Dr. James F. Strange has spent years dedicated to studying ancient Nazareth

Which has to be... among the most boring careers known to man

What do you do? “I study ancient Nazareth”

But he’s spent decades studying ancient Nazareth

And he writes that Nazareth likely had a population less than 2000 people

But very likely was 500 or less

What does that tell us?

How many of you have ever lived in a really small town?

It tells us that:

Everybody in this account

Knows *everybody else* in this account

...And their business

...And their momma

OK – so Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to His own town.

**Matthew 9:2 - Some men brought to Him a paralyzed man, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the man, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven."**

It's a small town

So Jesus very likely knows this young man

And this young man very likely knows Jesus

He probably went to school with Jesus

Or maybe one of Jesus' kid brothers

Verse 3:

**Matthew 9:3 - At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, "This fellow is blaspheming!"**

Blaspheming

By definition, that means that Jesus is claiming to do what only God can do

Only God forgives sins

Now these guys may have been from Nazareth

Or they may be from Jerusalem or a neighboring town

Investigating this new upstart street preacher

Luke tells us that

Luke says:

**The report of His power spread even faster, and *vast crowds* came to hear Him ... One day while Jesus was teaching, some Pharisees and teachers of religious law were sitting nearby. (It seemed that these men showed up from every village in all Galilee and Judea, as well as from Jerusalem.) – Luke 5:15b, 17a (NLT)**

“Vast crowds” always grab people’s attention

But vast crowds in a 500-person village

Are undeniable

And it caused all of the religious folk to get nervous

What’s that church doin to grow so much?

Verse 3:

**Matthew 9:3-4 - At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, “This fellow is blaspheming!” Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, “Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts?”**

Think about this

Sometimes we just read through the Bible  
And accept everything at a surface level  
But this is creepy  
If you're listening to Jesus  
You've come to town to check Him out  
And when He says "your sins are forgiven"  
You think to yourself  
Who's this guy think He is?  
You think that to yourself  
And Jesus turns  
In front of the vast crowd  
And speaks to *your* thoughts  
  
That's creepy  
  
So now He's got their attention  
He's got everybody's attention

Verse 5:

**Matthew 9:5-7 - Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So He said to the paralyzed man, "Get up, take your mat and go home." Then the man got up and went home.**

Masterful!

That's masterful!

**Matthew 9:8 - When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to man.**

I bet that's right

Because although the religious leaders didn't know this crippled guy

Many in the crowd did

They had seen him struggle

They had seen his family sacrifice

And now they see him get up and go home

Healed and whole!

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Scholars think this is the same event, by the way

That Mark records in Mark 2

And that Luke records in Luke 5

You can look at those later

But Mark & Luke both add a detail

That Matthew doesn't record

Mark and Luke both record

That the man was carried by his four buddies

Who climb up on the roof

With their paralyzed friend

And dig a hole in the roof to get to Jesus

I'm picturing them – after the miracle - hugging each other

High-fiving the crowd as they chased down their friend who was healed



And running off

He's all the sudden, fast

Mark & Luke focus on the excitement of the miracle

So the buddies add to that

But Matthew focuses more on the authority of Jesus

I need you to catch this

The New Living Translation pulls it out a little clearer:

**Matthew 9:7-8 (NLT) - And the man jumped up and went home! Fear swept through the crowd as they saw this happen. And they praised God for giving humans such authority.**

Mark & Luke focused on the excited crowd

But Matthew focuses on the authority of Jesus

And he doesn't want to take the attention off of Jesus by telling us about the four phenomenally dedicated friends

Verse 9:

**Matthew 9:9 - As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," He told him, and Matthew got up and followed Him.**

Just to be sure we're all on the same page:

We just read about a guy named Matthew who was a tax collector

He was becoming wealthy by betraying his people to extract money from them for the occupying Romans

This same Matthew became one of the 12 apostles

And later wrote one of the 4 Gospels  
The four biographies of Jesus  
The Gospel of Matthew that we're reading today

So that means this is Matthew telling his own story

Make sense?

Matthew focuses on the authority of Jesus

I think - because he *thought* he had authority

Until he met Jesus

Who said – “leave everything” – and he did

Matthew *thought* his sins were too many to be forgiven

His life was too broken to fix

Until he met Jesus who healed and forgave the crippled man's sins

So Jesus – full of authority

Called Matthew to leave everything

To follow Him

And he did

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This is one of the times

Where Jesus' ministry

And mine

Look different

I would have kindly asked Matthew

To hang out with Jesus

Or to listen to a message or two

Maybe learn a bit about Him

But Jesus has none of that

Jesus says leave everything

Follow Me

And Matthew does

I'm not sure Matthew had the option

To hang out with Jesus

Or to listen to a message or two

Maybe learn a bit about Him

Jesus called Him to full devotion

To go *with* Him

And Matthew follows

Remember when you were in school

Sometimes the teacher would give extra credit

It wasn't part of the main assignment

It was just an extra bonus?

I'm gonna offer extra credit here

I want to show you another way that Matthew's account

Is different than Mark & Luke's

And I know this is going to feel a little muddled to think through

That's why its extra credit

So if you're a nerd

Stick with me

I'll try to make this clear

I think its important

If you're not a nerd

No harm, no foul

Just check Facebook a second

Catch the NFL preseason scores

And I'll tell you when it's over

Like when you were a kid

And you hid your eyes during the scary scene

I'll tell you when it's over, k?

OK – for the nerds – for extra credit:

Matthew, Mark & Luke all record Jesus calling Matthew to leave the tax collector booth

We just read that

But Mark & Luke also record Jesus choosing Matthew

The tax collector we just read about

To be one of His 12 apostles

That happens in Mark 3 and Luke 6

You can look at that later

If you're taking notes – Mark 3 & Luke 6

And in each case

That story, occurs one chapter after

The story we just read

So in Mark 2, Jesus calls him from the tax collector booth

And in Mark 3, Jesus makes him an apostle

In Luke 5, Jesus calls him from the tax collector booth

And in Luke 6, Jesus makes him an apostle

You still with me?

Just a little longer – don't miss it

I told you it was extra credit

When Jesus makes him an apostle

In Mark 3 and Luke 6

Both times he's listed as Matthew

Just like the story we just read a moment ago

But here's the kicker

When Mark & Luke record the story we just read

Their versions both refer to the tax collector as "Levi"

Let me show you:

**Mark 2:14 - As He walked along, He saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed Him.**

That's the same event as Matthew 9

**Luke 5:27-28 - After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed Him.**

Same event as Matthew 9

And you'd think that Matthew would know his own name

Right?

So at some point between Mark chapters 2 & 3

And at some point between Luke chapters 5 & 6

Levi becomes Matthew

He follows Jesus

And then *becomes* Matthew

Do you follow that?

So what's going on?

I'll tell you – in just a second

One more thing...

Let's talk about the name Levi a second

Levi was one of the 12 tribes of Israel

Levites were set apart from birth to be priests

So many scholars think that Matthew the tax collector

Was supposed to be Levi the priest

But his life got off track

One wrong choice lead to another

The choice may have been sinful

It may not have been

But now Levi the supposed-to-be-priest has become Levi the failure

Levi the turncoat

Levi the disappointment

Levi the tax-collector

And then Levi the sinner meets Jesus the Savior

And one chapter later

It only takes one chapter

One chapter later

We read about Matthew the leader

Matthew the Apostle

Matthew one of four biographers of Jesus' life

Don't ever let a bad label stick on you

Don't ever let a bad label stick on you

Because Levi the disappointment

Became Matthew the disciple

Saul the murderer

Became Paul the missionary

Simon the unreliable

Became Peter the Rock

John the rebuked son of thunder

Became John the beloved apostle

So don't you ever let a bad label stick on you

Listen to me:

No matter what you've done

No matter whom you've disappointed

No matter how badly you've fallen

When you meet Jesus the Savior

He'll give you a new identity

He'll give you a new purpose

A new direction

He might even give you a new name

Because He'll give you a new life

But notice *when* that happens

That happens *after* he follows

*After* he goes from just being a fan of Jesus

To being with Jesus

He gets up



He makes a change

He follows

And then he gets a new identity

I titled this message “Three pathways”

Because you see those options in this story

You can be “against” Jesus – like the Pharisees were

Actively opposed to the ways of God

And the things that Jesus stands for

You can be “for” Jesus – like the vast crowd of people

Like He’s interesting to you

You’d vote for Him

You think He’s a good guy

Or you can be “with” Him

Leave everything behind

Follow Him

And like Matthew

Be “with” Him

Lifecchange happens

When you’re with Him

New identities come

When you’re with Him

He calls us

Just like He called Matthew  
To come be *with* Him

I saw an interview with Tim Keller a while back  
That describes this so well

He says he talks with his Christian friends

And they see the world around them changing:

The secularization of our schools

The abandonment of Christian values in government

The shedding of Christian traditions and customs in culture

And they wring their hands and say

“They’re taking over”

“The other side is taking over”

At the very same time

He says he talks with his non-Christian friends

And they see the world around *them* changing:

The pushing of a Christian worldview in public life

The shifting of the Supreme Court towards a Christian perspective

The increase of Christian topics in art and culture

And they wring their hands and say

“They’re taking over”

“The other side is taking over”

And Keller – who is a student of culture

Says they're both correct

The number of atheists, agnostics, and non-Christian people is increasing dramatically

And at the very same time

The number of people who are devoted to God and serious about their faith is increasing dramatically

What's going away – Keller says

Is the group in the middle

The vast crowds of people

Who are kind of... meh... about faith

More people are against Jesus than a generation ago in our country

More people are serious about their faith

Living *with* Jesus than a generation ago in our country

What's going away is the group in the middle

The group who are mildly in favor of Him

Which, honestly, is good news to me

Because Jesus wasn't fixated on the middle group

Not that He didn't care about them

Not that He didn't have a vision for their life

But honestly

He just doesn't believe they exist

In Matthew 12:30 – a few chapters later

He declares emphatically

**Whoever is not with me is against me – Matthew 12:30a**

I called this message

Three pathways

But really, there's only been just two

And a time is coming

When only these two options will make sense

We can be with Jesus

Or we can be against Him

But the "Jesus-is-a-nice-guy-I'd-vote-for-Him-for-school-board" time in our country

That time is coming to an end

That's bad for our nation

But it's good our faith

Because "mildly in favor of" Jesus

Never really was an option

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I'm inviting you to join us

In getting serious about your faith

Whether you came today

Opposed to Jesus

Or mildly in favor of him

I'm asking you to put down roots

Into something eternal

Some*One* Eternal

If you want to go deeper with your faith {**Show Jeremiah 17:7-8**}

If you want to be unafraid when heat comes

If you want to have no worries in times of doubt

I want you to go on this journey with us

To put down roots into something deeper

To take on a new identity

As a *follower* of Jesus

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I'm going to pray

And then I'm going to dismiss you

Some of you need to come down here to me to talk about giving your life to Christ

And I want to invite all of us to *prayerfully* consider a group to join

We showed you the video at the top of the message

We'll show it again in 2 minutes

So if you hit a snag, that'll help