



# gracefellowship

Series: ~~un~~Worthy: Calling the Outcasts  
Date: August 27, 2023  
4:18-25

Title: Ordinary to Extraordinary  
Passage: Matthew

Scripture Reading: Acts 4:1-22

Last week we began a series looking at 8 snapshots within the gospel of Matthew that highlights one reality: Jesus came to earth to call outcasts- those the rest of the world sees as unworthy of belonging in the Kingdom of God, Jesus makes worthy.

This morning as we continue walking through these events in Matthew's gospel I want us to pay attention to two things primarily:

## Notice Two Things:

1. **Who Jesus calls as disciples**
2. **Who Jesus attracts as crowds**

We have a tendency to want things to be neat and clean in our lives. Jesus was just the opposite- he almost went out of His way to engage with messy people and messy situations. If you were going to start a ministry you expected to have a global impact what kind of people would you want around you?

- Stellar resume
- Incredible experience in the field
- Highly educated
- Clean background

Jesus doesn't do what most of us would do when beginning a global enterprise. Jesus calls the most unlikely people to follow Him so He can prepare them to lead His ministry. Look at Matthew 4:18-22.

## :: **Matthew 4:18-22**

**<sup>18</sup> As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.**

**19 “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.”**

**20 At once they left their nets and followed him.**

**21 Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them,**

**22 and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.**

In the call to these men Jesus tells them exactly what He wants from them as disciples:

1. I want you to follow me.
2. I will change you.
3. I will give you a new mission.

Jesus grew up in Nazareth, which is near the top of the map in the pinkish color section to the southwest of the Sea of Galilee. But when Jesus began His ministry he based everything out of Capernaum. Then he walked along the Sea of Galilee to Bethsaida to call his first disciples. Mark tells us that when Jesus walked on the shore of the Sea of Galilee he saw Simon (Peter) and his brother, Andrew, casting a net into the lake because they were fishermen. Then when he went a little farther he saw James and his brother, John, preparing their nets. They were fishermen as well. But here’s what we need to know and understand- there is a reason they are fishing.

In Jewish life most all children would go to school and learn the Torah- the writings of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. By the age of 12 many Jewish people could quote the first five books of the Jewish Scriptures! From there, the best students would go on to deeper studies and then after that, the best of the best would be chosen by a Rabbi to become his Talmid, or disciple. A group of followers/disciples were known as Talmidim. It was such an incredible honor to be chosen by a Rabbi that you left everything to follow them. Their life became your life. Their teachings became your teachings. You were meant, as a student, to stay on the hip of your Rabbi and absorb everything you could from them.

However, if you didn’t make the cut for the upper level education or were not chosen to follow a Rabbi you went back to your family and helped in your father’s trade of choice. So, here’s what we know of Peter, Andrew, James, John and Philip- they were not chosen! They had washed out of school. No one wanted them as a Talmid. So, they are fishing and taking on the family trade. They have settled into the idea they would fish for their rest of their lives.

Here’s another thing that doesn’t stand out to us in the text, but that we get from understanding Jewish culture: Peter and Andrew are fishing on their own, but James and John were in the boat with their Dad, so it is entirely possible that

these two brothers were still too young to have had their Bar Mitzvah. They may be 11-12 years old.

But then Jesus walks by and their whole story changes. Jesus does something no one expects- he calls fishermen to be His disciples! He calls average, ordinary guys and tells them He has big plans for their lives.

### **Jesus sees value in the things this world tosses to the side.**

The Rabbis had taken a hard pass on Peter, Andrew, James and John. But that's exactly who Jesus placed value in. But that's not where Jesus stops in calling disciples that don't fit the normal criteria! Jesus calls Matthew to be a disciple. Matthew was a tax collector who was hated by his countrymen. Then he calls Simon to follow Him; Simon was a zealot! The Zealots were hyper-religious group bent on getting Rome out of Israel. They would kill Roman soldiers, burn Roman garrisons and are generally thought to be responsible for the attacks against the Romans that ended with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD.

Jesus called these men and 6 others who the rest of the religious establishment saw as outsiders and unworthy and He made them part of His plan to change the world!

Here's what's amazing about that. By the time Jesus completes His mission of discipleship and sends the Holy Spirit to empower the church, these outcasts become world changers!

Earlier this morning we read from Acts 4 together. The disciples were boldly proclaiming that Jesus is the Messiah and it infuriated the Jewish religious leaders. The disciples get called to the principal's office and given a cease and desist order. But when they stand their ground and make their case about Jesus being the Messiah the members of the Sanhedrin were amazed. Luke writes this in his account of the event:

#### **:: Acts 4:13**

**13 When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.**

The Greek wording used there to describe the disciples is *agrammatos* (a GRAM a toss) *idiōtēs*. It literally means "illiterate ignoramus." But because they had been with Jesus it was clear these ordinary men were filled with extraordinary power! That's what Jesus does- He takes ordinary people and turns them into extraordinary witnesses of His Kingdom.

Later in the New Testament, Paul shared the view that Jesus knows how to take ordinary people and make them into something extraordinary. Listen to how he talked to the people in Corinth:

**:: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31**

**<sup>26</sup> Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.**

**<sup>27</sup> But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.**

**<sup>28</sup> God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are,**

**<sup>29</sup> so that no one may boast before him.**

**<sup>30</sup> It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.**

**<sup>31</sup> Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”**

We talked about this a little last week, but it's important to remember who we were before meeting Jesus. Jesus specializes in taking the things that the world looks at and says, “that's worthless,” and adding worth and value through His death on the cross. The problem comes when, after meeting Jesus and being given the transformative power of His grace, we still think of ourselves as worthless and less than. Your relationship with Jesus transforms you into a valued child of the Creator of the Universe! Let's stop thinking of ourselves as unworthy of the gospel that brought us life and hope and start leaning in to the power that we gain through the Holy Spirit when we live surrendered to Jesus. Jesus makes you extraordinary and gives you worth and value that can't be taken away from you, regardless of what anyone says about you or thinks about you.

John MacArthur wrote a book years ago called *Twelve Ordinary Men*. In it he wrote this:

**“Many Christians become discouraged and disheartened when their spiritual life and witness suffer because of sin or failure. We tend to think we're worthless nobodies- and left to ourselves, that would be true! But worthless nobodies are just the kind of people God uses, because that is all He has to work with!” - John MacArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men***

Satan will try to convince you that even with Christ in your life you are worthless.

- You can't overcome your past.
- What you've done disqualifies you.
- You'll never be good enough.
- Not even God can use you.

Remember, Satan is a liar and the father of lies. Don't listen to him!

**On my own, I'm nothing. With Christ I am everything!**

This is one of the reasons that the Church should be about helping people recover from sin rather than expelling them when they sin. None of us are perfect and any one of us is capable of having a major moral failure at any time. But

Jesus doesn't brush us aside when we sin. He asks us to pick up our brothers and sisters and nurture them back to health and then restore them gently.

Jesus takes us from where we've been and uses the foolishness and weakness for His glorious purposes!

Now let's move on to the second part of this passage we are looking at this morning. When Jesus calls His disciples He continues His ministry, but we start to see a greater level of traction as we move deeper into Matthew's gospel.

**:: Matthew 4:23-25**

**<sup>23</sup> Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.**

**<sup>24</sup> News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them.**

**<sup>25</sup> Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.**

Jesus is spending his time early on in his ministry around Galilee, but word about his teaching and miracles begins getting out to the surrounding areas. Here's a map showing Israel and the surrounding areas in the time of Jesus' ministry:

**(Show Map of Israel)**

At this time, Jesus is mostly hanging out around Galilee, but people are coming from Syria, from the Decapolis, and from the East side of the Jordan. Those are regions dominated by Gentiles. The religious leaders would never have gained an audience with these people- primarily because they didn't want an audience with these people! But Jesus welcomes them. And we see that not only are Gentiles coming to seek out an audience with Jesus, but they are bringing to Him people who are ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures and the paralyzed. This is a motley crew that's trying to get to Jesus!

Here's what I find interesting: According to Matthew all the sick people are being brought to Jesus from Syria. Syria was known for their medical advancements. In fact, much of modern medicine and our hospital structures can be traced back to the practices of the Syrians.

I read this in an article this week about ancient Syrian medical practice:

The Vendidad, one of the surviving texts of ancient Persian literature, distinguishes three kinds of medicine: medicine by the knife (surgery), medicine

by herbs, and medicine by divine words; and the best medicine was, according to the Vendidad, healing by divine words:

*“Of all the healers, namely those who heal with the knife, with herbs, and with sacred incantations, the last one is the most potent as he heals from the very source of diseases.”*

— Ardibesht Yasht

How did Jesus often heal people? Simply by speaking! He would say to the paralyzed man, “Get up and walk.” He would tell a person with a withered hand, “Stretch out your hand.” He commanded demons to leave the body of a person and the demons would obey. Jesus simply spoke and bodies were healed physically. He even called to Lazarus in his tomb and Lazarus woke up and walked out of the grave!

Most of the people coming to Jesus with these kinds of illnesses and deformities were considered the result of sin in either their life or their parent’s lives. The Rabbi’s would never have touched any of these people for fear of becoming ceremonially unclean! But Jesus had no fear of being around these who were considered outcasts in society. These people had been labeled and then everyone was afraid to be around them. What if the label rubbed off on them?

Do we have people in our world who are like that? Do we have people we have put labels on and said if we get too close to those people we may get labeled too?

- Would you be embarrassed to have dinner with your gay neighbors?
  - o Jesus came for them.
- Would you be unwilling to invite an undocumented immigrant into your home?
  - o Jesus came for them.
- Would it make you uncomfortable to go into a prison and share about Jesus with murderers and thieves and rapists and sex traffickers?
  - o Jesus came for them.
- You fill in the blank with the people you might have put a label on that prevents you from going to them with the gospel and remind yourself that is exactly the person Jesus came for.

This week one of my Pastor friends posted on his social media account that people are shocked to find out that sinners can come to his church! The American opinion about church is that sinful people are not welcome. How did we ever get to that point?

The world won’t always come to us like they came to Jesus. When Jesus called His disciples He told them they were going to learn to fish for people. In order to fish for people who are not in the Kingdom of God you have to go where the fish are! I have friends who moved from a great church and stable financial situation in Arkansas to plant a church in Bangkok, Thailand. Their primary target

audience for sharing the gospel is women who work in the Red Light District selling their bodies for sex. They want those precious young women to know that there is a God who loves them and can take people from the most ordinary broken situations and turn their lives into something extraordinary!

I have a friend in India who our church currently supports with money from Generosity Sunday to provide hope for 10 orphans. He recently opened the orphanage just to house 10 kids. But his dream is to expand that next year to 25 kids. And then he is working to disciple 100 people to plant 100 churches in 100 Indian villages. Here's the cool thing- because of your generosity to support his work this year, he named the orphanage "The Grace Children's Home." **(Picture of Grace Kids)**

**God wants you to take the gospel where you live, work and play. He can use ordinary you in extraordinary ways!**

We have to overcome two trains of thought and two lies as we learn to live like Jesus and go into all the world to make disciples.

The first is: "I'm not unworthy."

The second is "Others are unworthy."

Let's end today by asking God to help us see people like He sees them and then asking Him to empower us to share His love with everyone we meet. We are going to put a prayer on the screens that I would like for us all to pray together as we close our time together today.

**Father, help me to live this day to the full, being true to You, in every way. Jesus, help me to give myself away to others, being kind to everyone I meet.**

**Spirit, help me to love the lost, proclaiming Christ in all I do and say. Amen.**

Life Group Discussion Guide:

1. Who do you know that is being used by God in powerful ways but has little, or no, religious schooling/training?

*Read Matthew 4:18-25 and Acts 4:1-13*

2. In Matthew 4 what do we know about these 4 at the time Jesus is calling them?
3. What stands out to you from Matthew 4 about the ministry of Jesus and who He ministered to?

4. From Matthew 4 to Acts 4 things changed dramatically in the lives of the disciples. What kinds of things did Jesus do that impacted them so much that it was apparent to the religious leaders these men had been with Jesus?
  - a. How can we follow the model of Jesus to disciple others?
5. In this week's message we talked about people we may have labeled as being unworthy of the gospel. How do we overcome our labels and learn to see people like Jesus?
6. What is Jesus asking you to do this week to share His love where you live, work and play? Can you think of a person specifically you need to reach out to and invite to church, or have a meal with, or serve in some way?

*Next week's passage: Matthew 8:5-13*

Pray as a group for any immediate needs that exist in the group. Look for ways to connect people this week beyond your group time to disciple, care for or serve in some way.

Begin a discussion about ideas to engage with a #20for20 service project in our community this fall. What is an area in our community that needs the light and love of Jesus brought to it?