

## Vision Sunday: It's a New Day!

Matthew 9:9-17

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9 As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him. 10 And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. 11 And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 12 But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 13 Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

14 Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" 15 And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. 16 No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made. 17 Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved" (Matt 9:9-17).

One of my favorite subjects in the Bible is the concept of newness. Part of it is my personality – I'm a morning person, I dislike the night, and I love a new day. But the other factor is that I think there are few things more hopeful in the Bible than what it means to be new. Consider the following hopeful passages:

31 "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah (Jer 31:31)

22 The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; 23 they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness (Lam 3:22-23)

19 And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh (Ezek 11:19-20)

7 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come (2 Cor 5:17)

19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us... (Heb 10:19-20)

Newness in the Bible is so different than newness in our world. Our culture loves to repackage things to make them sound attractive (e.g, Pre-owned Cars, New Coke, Breaking News). But the Bible offers a newness that changes a person from the inside out, a newness that is transformational and total. In other words, **Jesus brings a new kind of new.**

Today is an important day in the church calendar at College Park. We call it Vision Sunday which basically means it is an opportunity for me to share my heart with you regarding where we are headed next year, and an opportunity for our members to vote on our annual budget. It is fitting for us to be in a text that talks about newness so clearly and powerfully. So let's take a look at Matthew 9:9-17, figure out what it says, and then make some applications for us as we move into 2010.

## **Jesus Brings a New Kind of New**

Our text today highlights the subject of newness in two ways. First, we see Jesus' ministry to a new kind of people. Secondly, we see that Jesus' ministry comes in a new way. And it is a beautiful picture to behold.

### **1. New People (vv 9-13)**

Jesus is still in the city of Capernaum when he meets Matthew (v 9) who is the author of this book. The text tells us that he was "at a tax booth," which give us some insight into Matthew and Jesus. To be a tax collector in Jesus' day meant that you were a hated person because you were collecting tax revenue for the occupying government of Rome. Taxable regions of the country were auctioned off, and people could purchase the taxing rights. To make it profitable, Rome allowed a tax collector to charge whatever the region would support (without killing you!), and the difference between what Rome required and what you collected was profit. So a Jewish tax collector was a wealthy pawn of the Roman government and was despised by the people.

Therefore, it is remarkable that Jesus recruits him. Matthew's chosen occupation was filled with corruption, extortion, greed, and disdain. It would be what we feel with names like Ponzi, Hoffa, Madoff, and Blagojevich. Yet Jesus calls him. But it is also remarkable what Matthew does. In verse 9 we see that Jesus says to him, "Follow me," and he did so. Luke 5:27 tells us, "And leaving everything, he rose and followed him."

But the story gets even better. Look what happens next! Matthew 9:10 tells us that Jesus went to a dinner where there were many tax collectors and sinners. Do you know how they got there? Matthew invited them! Luke 5:29 tells us that Matthew made a great feast in his house, and Jesus and his disciples were sharing a meal ("reclining at table") with the notoriously sinful people of the day. This is a big deal! They were more than sharing a meal; they were hanging out together.

And this made the Pharisees a bit indignant. They ask (v 11) why Jesus does this, and Jesus responds with a statement loaded with a rebuke of the spiritually isolated and mercy for the spiritually devastated:

"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 13 Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matt 9:12-13).

Jesus is saying that his ministry – the gospel – is specifically targeting people who need hope. Jesus is a Savior who has come to save people from something – their sins. And therefore it makes sense that the people who are going to be most interested in him are the people who see their need most clearly. Jesus comes to bring newness to people who know that they need something new. So mark it down somewhere: **It is more dangerous to think you don't need to be new when you do, than to need newness and know it.**

Now there two take-aways from this story in Matthew that I want to highlight:

- Real life change is contagious; it's meant to be a viral movement
- Jesus' kingdom is for messy people who need a miracle

Just think of that for a moment – **a viral movement for messy people who need a miracle.** I love that image of Jesus, and I love it when the church looks like that.

When I hear that statement, I cannot help but think about what God is doing here at College Park. Sarah and I felt called by God to come to College Park because we sensed that God was really at work here, and we sensed that there was so much potential to make a difference in the lives of people.

I remember hearing the story from years ago that someone came to College Park because they pointed to the sanctuary and said, "God is in there." And I'm asked frequently what is going on here, and my answer is "There is something in the water at College Park Church." I say this humbly and fearfully because it is a gift to sense the presence of the Lord. I can't explain it but I know that it has something to do with a culture committed to the Lordship of Christ, the authority of the Word, and redemptive community. It has everything to do with being a church whose goal is unity in diversity, being outward focused with extravagant grace, and constantly have an orientation toward unreached people groups. God's hand is just on this place, and we ought to be so grateful for that!

Every week we have amazing stories of what God is doing. Last week after one of our services I spent about 15 minutes talking with a person who had brought a friend about a counseling-related matter. After we worked through the issue, he said, "Oh – by the way – do you have

someone who my friend could talk with? He'd like to receive Christ today." I laughed with joy because it is such a gift from God to have that kind of thing happen.

I see it all the time – people who are excited about what God is doing, inviting others to come and experience the passion to follow Jesus. It's contagious and it's viral. We are a viral movement of messy people who need a miracle.

Let me just give you a few statistics that blow me away:

- From January-November, we had an average attendance increase of almost 700 people!
- Over the last 18 months there are 1,000 more people come to College Park.
- We've had 500 newcomers come to our Let's Eat and Fellowship Night this year
- Our "20 Somethings" Class has exploded from 45 in 2008 to over 100 in 2009
- We have 252 new members join the church in 2009

It is not just about numbers. There are stories behind every single person that comes. A good example of this would be Mitch and Sarah Dupoy. They came to a Seeker's Class the meets at David and Cindi Palmer's house. This class is for people who are looking to explore the message of the Bible. Mitch had known Christ for some time, but it was in the Palmer's home that Sarah fully understood the gospel. She received Christ. She is going to be baptized next month, they are in the process of joining, and right now they are signed up for our membership class on November 14. And not only that, but they've invited some friends to come. They've found newness in Jesus, and it is contagious!

Do you know what is great? Their story is not unique! I'm curious to know who many people are in this service today who received Christ this year? How many were baptized this year? How many joined the church this year?

Our mission of igniting a passion to follow Jesus is captivating, compelling, and contagious! We are seeing God at work in some incredible ways.

Let me give you another example:

"A few months ago, I filled out a prayer request card to be prayed over that night at the Fresh Encounter Prayer Service. The prayer request was for my wife's parents. They were separated and their reconciliation seemed highly unlikely at best. Her dad wanted them to get together but also pretty much gave up hope. Honestly so did we. Her mom seemed to be preparing herself for divorce, hired an attorney, and filed for legal separation. When we spoke to them about it there was no sign of any desire to do what she knew was right. Her mind just seemed to be so clouded and couldn't see the truth. So our prayer was that God would open eyes and help her see things through God's perspective.

Two weeks later we got a message from my wife's dad. He said that they were back together again and they were going to have a family celebration! We were really excited about it and immediately knew this had to be an answered prayer. As I said, we had pretty much given up hope. Our faith was weak. Then, as if we couldn't already tell that God was serious about answering prayers, he made it even clearer. My wife's sister, who had just spoken with her dad about their reconciliation informed us that her dad told her that it was 'as if she was seeing things through a whole new set of eyes!' Then, I remembered what I wrote on the prayer request card and that this is specifically what I had requested."

Now these are just a few of a number of stories that I could tell you. What is thrilling to me is the way that God is at work in our midst in people from all walks of life.

Numbers alone, however, do not always indicate spiritual health. And that is why our pastoral staff began discussing how we could get a better sense of how we are doing spiritually as an entire congregation. We have a strategy for spiritual growth that involves three key areas: Exalting Christ, Experiencing Community, and Embracing a Calling. We developed a brief survey that we would like you to fill out right now. We'd just like to get a sense as to where we are at from a depth perspective. Next year we plan to do the same survey, and we'd like to see what it says.

We're doing this because we really are passionate about following Jesus.

## **2. New Ministry (vv 14-17)**

The second section of our text reflects the way that Jesus brings about a new kind of ministry. Remember, Jesus brings a new kind of new. Verse 14 introduces us to question from John's disciples. Their motivation is unclear, but their question is straightforward: "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" Apparently, the disciples of John felt like the followers of Jesus were not on the same page when it comes to spiritual disciplines. It seems that the disciples did not choose to fast twice a week like most committed Jews (see Luke 18:12).

Jesus answers the questions with a challenging statement to fully understand. He uses a wedding analogy and an old-verses-new analogy related to cloth and wineskins.

His first answer is to point out that people celebrate while the bridegroom is with them; they certainly do not mourn or fast at a wedding. It just doesn't make sense. "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?" (v 15). The implication is fairly obvious: since Jesus is with them celebration is in order not fasting.

The second answer relates to old verses new in the context of a garment and wine. Both have the same point. The first example that Jesus gives is what happens one would take a new piece of cloth and use it as a patch for an old garment. Using a new unshrunk piece of cloth on

and old garment creates a problem – “...for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made” (v 14).

Wine is the other example. Jesus indicates that you don't take new wine and put it into old wineskins (v 17). In Jesus' day wine was stored in the skins of animals. New wine still needs time to ferment, and it would stretch the skins of the animals as it fermented. However, if an old wineskin was used, the new wine would press the old beyond its ability, and it would likely burst. Therefore, Jesus says that new wine requires new wineskin.

Again, Jesus brings a new kind of new. So what is he talking about here? The analogy of the wineskins and the wedding are essentially the same. Here's the point: Jesus was not content with worn-out Judaism; his new ministry could not fit into the old forms. Jesus was bringing a new day with new ministry. One person summarized it this way: “Jesus did not mean to condemn the old forms; he merely said that they had had their time.”<sup>1</sup> He was ushering in a new season of ministry, one that was rooted in the past but unique.

Last year we laid out for you some new ministry objectives. And we had some big things our hearts for 2009:

**Exalting Christ:** Determine our growth strategy

**Experiencing Community:** Increase body life connections for first-time visitors and members

**Embracing a Calling:** Expand our influence in the Brookside neighborhood

And we have seen God bless those three objectives in marvelous ways.

At a staff planning retreat in August, our Staff Elders identified the following objectives for 2010:

**Exalting Christ:** Implement our growth strategy, addressing our facility needs

- Our growth strategy involves 1) improving and expanding Worship, 2) a facility expansion, and 3) multi-sites around the city
- Our challenges are not just sanctuary space; we have comprehensive facility needs
- We are in a feasibility study regarding a new facility that would provide a new sanctuary, connecting space and renovated adult and children's space
- Three teams are working – facilities, finance, and funding
- We will complete our work by the end of the year, and we'll have something specific for our church family to consider in February
- We have to do something to meet the needs of people who are coming

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<sup>1</sup>Citing Ridderbos - Leon Morris, The Gospel According to Matthew, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1992), 227

**Experiencing Community:** Expand our corporate commitment to “doing life together,” and see small groups mobilized for ministry together

- Community has to happen here or we will only be a big church with no depth
- We need existing small groups to grow even deeper, Big Groups to discover how they can do life together in new ways, and we need to launch about 10-15 new small groups next year
- Right now we have about 700 people who have no connecting point
- We need to provide opportunities for people to serve together like what happened this weekend at Kids Church

**Embracing a Calling:** Create a culture of leadership development

- College Park has been known for great content and that is not going to change
- We need to think not only about what we teach but how do we develop teachers
- Every area of ministry needs to think not only about what they are doing but also who they are developing
- We aim to be more intentional about every leader having a “Paul” – someone you can look up to, and a “Timothy” – someone you can help grow
- I am particularly burdened that we help young men and women learn how to use their gifts

In 2010 we dream of seeing three words realized at College Park: Broader, Deeper, Together. Our mission is vital, our opportunities are endless, the blessing of God is so evident, and the stewardship of what have been given is significant. We have important work to do. We need to be a part of Jesus’ new kind of new.

Let me give you a finale example of what I’m talking about:

“Last January I began working with a 22 year old single mother with three young pre-school children that could not read. Our first meeting was tense. She would not give me eye contact and would barely talk with me. I asked her to trust me and to work with me so I could help her....she replied "I can't, I don't know how to trust you."

We met twice a week for 1 1/2 hours at Heart Change Ministries. Weeks later she said to me "You act like you like me." Several more weeks later she asked me "Why do you keep coming back?" As time went by, out of nowhere she said "Can I trust you?" After responding "Yes," she told me she could not tell time or count money and could I help her? Every time I met with her I would call her cutie, sweetie pie or something silly and one day she said "I love it when you call me those names." When the semester ended I told her I was so very proud of her.....she teared and said "No one has ever told me that." As I was leaving she asked "How long will you keep coming to see me?" I replied, "As long as you come I will come." She said "I hoped you would say that."

It has been 10 months since we began this journey together and we are both still coming.....I am not sure between the two of us who has learned the most. The friend who asked me to help with this girl thought I was the most unlikely person to bond with her, but since reading was my specialty she asked me anyway.....and I am so grateful to have had this amazing opportunity. One person at a time we can make a difference.”

Jesus brings a new kind of new. And there is nothing more exciting than being a part of his work.

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