

## PUTTING OUR TRUST IN GOD

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Texts: Genesis 12:1-9 & Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

### Genesis 12:1-9

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abram, and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the Lord and invoked the name of the Lord. And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb.

### Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him.

And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader of the synagogue came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples. Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, for she said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well." Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well.

When Jesus came to the leader's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, he said, "Go away; for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. And the report of this spread throughout that district.

There's a lot going on in the readings today. There's God calling Abram to leave his country and go to a new land. There's Jesus calling Matthew, the tax collector, to be one of his disciples. There's the leader of the synagogue asking Jesus to heal his daughter. And there's the woman with chronic bleeding reaching out and touching the fringe of Jesus' cloak.

So how do we get a handle on all this?

Well, the first two stories can be lumped together under the heading of call stories; and the last two stories can be lumped together under the heading of healing stories. But I think there's an even broader umbrella. All these stories, when you step back and look at them, are about people putting their trust in God even though they have a lot to lose.

In the first story, Abram's doing just fine right where he is. Haran is his ancestral home, and he has a pretty good life there. He's surrounded by family. He has lots of possessions. He's even wealthy enough to have servants. Then one day God comes along and tells him to pack everything up and head off into the desert in search of a new land. And God doesn't give him a whole lot to go on, just some vague promises. If he does what God wants, God will bless him and make him into a great nation. Most people in Abram's shoes would say, "Sorry, not interested." But Abram has an unwavering trust in God. He doesn't doubt, he doesn't question. He just goes.

Never mind the risks. Never mind the uncertainties. Never mind all the things that could go wrong.

In the second story, Matthew is working as a tax collector, which makes him an integral part of the Roman system. The Romans imposed heavy taxes on people in order to keep the wheels of the Empire turning. Then one day Jesus comes along and says, "Follow me." And he doesn't make any promises at all, not even vague ones. Which doesn't seem like much of an offer, but for some reason, Matthew puts his trust in Jesus. He doesn't turn him away. He doesn't tell him to get lost. He drops everything and off he goes. Never mind the fact that he's giving up a steady job, and never mind the fact that he's potentially getting himself into some hot water. By abandoning the tax booth and starting a new career as a follower of Jesus, he's announcing to the world that his loyalty is to the kingdom of God, not the kingdom of Caesar, which could be seen as an act of defiance, if not treason.

At this point in the reading, the scene changes. Jesus is having dinner at someone's house when a bunch of tax collectors show up, probably wanting to know why one of their own suddenly went AWOL. So they're all sitting around the table having their supper when some Pharisees come along and start questioning why Jesus is eating with sinners. Because they're the ones who need me, Jesus explains, and he uses the analogy of a doctor. "Those who are well

have no need of a physician," he says, "but those who are sick."

Then, right in the middle of all that, a leader from the synagogue walks in, kneels down in front of Jesus, and says, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." This is someone with a lot of power in the community. This is someone with a high position. This is someone people look up to and respect. And by coming to Jesus for help and publicly acknowledging his authority, he's putting all that in jeopardy. This is not going to sit well with the Pharisees, and they're not going to let it go. But the man doesn't care. His trust in Jesus is stronger than his fear of having his reputation ruined and losing status.

Last but not least, we have the woman with the chronic bleeding. Jesus is on his way to the synagogue leader's house when the woman makes her way through the crowd, sneaks up behind him, and touches the fringe of his cloak, believing that even that little bit of contact will be enough to heal her. But it's a risky move because she's actually breaking the law. According to Leviticus, women were unclean during their menstrual periods, and they had to separate themselves from other people. And if they did happen to physically touch someone, that person would be considered unclean, as well, and would have to wash their clothes and take a bath in order to be restored. So this woman, at the very least, is risking public scorn by reaching out and touching a rabbi, no less. But just like the synagogue leader, she doesn't care. Her trust in Jesus, is stronger than her fear of becoming even more of an outcast than she was to begin with.

I look at all these people and how they put their trust in God even though they have a lot to lose, and my immediate thought is: I don't know if I can be that trusting. I don't know if I have it in me. Because I'll tell you right now, if God came to me and said, "I want you to sell your house, pack up all your stuff, uproot your family, and go. Don't worry about where, just go," I don't know if I'd have the courage to make that leap of faith. And if Jesus walked up to me and said, "How'd you like to quit your job, give up all your financial security, and join my politically subversive movement?" I'm pretty sure I'd say, "No thanks." Even if I had a need, and I knew God could help me, but there was some kind of social cost involved, I can see myself saying it's not worth it.

Does that make me a bad Christian? Am I a spiritual failure? Should I throw in the towel and not even bother trying to live my faith? No, the point of these stories is not to set an impossible standard and make us feel hopeless. The point is to remind us that God is always there, and God is always opening up the future for us, even when we can't see it. And all we need to do is put a little trust in God—just enough to take the first step—and then God will do the rest. And little by little, as we go along, we'll learn to put our trust in God more and more—like Abram journeying across the desert, not in one straight shot, but by stages.

I hope this gives you some encouragement, so the next time a possibility presents itself in your life, and you feel God calling you in that direction, or the next time have a need, and you're hesitant to ask God for help, you can think about these stories, and take that first step, and trust God to be there. Amen.