

Rooted and Living in Christ

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[0 : 00] Over the next few weeks, both in our Sunday morning services and in our city groups, we're going to be focusing on discipleship. This is a crucial topic for us to think about as Christians. Often in church we can spend a lot of time highlighting the importance of becoming a Christian, and there's good reason for that because there is nothing, absolutely nothing more important for anyone than that you become a Christian.

Everything else pales into insignificance when set against the question of how are you going to stand before God on the doorway to eternity?

So that is the most important thing for us to think about, and for that reason we spend a lot of time in church highlighting the fact that we need to come to Jesus and trust Him.

But alongside that it is also incredibly important to think about not just becoming a Christian, but then how we live our lives as Christians.

[1 : 06] And that's what we mean when we talk about discipleship. And often this can be an area that we neglect. So we want to spend a bit of time over this month and next month looking together in more detail at discipleship.

And to do that we're going to use the image of a tree. Derek introduced this topic last week and he focused on the wonderful words of Jeremiah 17, verses 7 and 8.

But as Derek showed us last week, this theme of a tree is an image that runs through the whole of Scripture and it's helpful for us as we think about discipleship.

On the basis of this image of a tree we are identifying five key areas of discipleship. And you can see these on the card that's sitting on all of your seats.

Now I want to say that it wasn't me and Derek who chose these five things. Here in St. Columbus we have a team, an adult discipleship team, who have spent the past year looking at this together.

[2 : 11] And so we have, this team has identified these five key areas that all arise out of the tree image.

As disciples we are rooted and living in Christ. And the tree image portrays that really powerfully. We have this beautiful image of a tree that Jenny Nicholson painted for us.

And in many ways that's something we can really connect with that a tree has roots. And from these roots it is alive. As disciples we want to be learning and growing together.

You think about tree, its journey is one of growth, starts off small and gets bigger and bigger. We want to be serving in unity as disciples.

When we're in a church together we all want to play our part. And if you think about a tree every branch is different, it's unique, but they're all connected together, they all work and serve as one.

[3 : 10] As disciples we want to be loving and protecting one another. One of the great images associated with a tree is the idea of shelter, whereby you can come under that tree and be protected.

And that's a really important part of being disciples of Jesus. That we love one another, that we look after one another, that we protect one another. And then finally we want to say that as disciples we seek to be bearing fruit for others.

That's the great goal of a tree, it grows up and then it bears fruit. And these fruit, they do two things, they can be seen by others, they're not hidden, they're outward and we want our fruit as disciples to be seen.

But also fruit is something that other people benefit from. And the fruit of discipleship is a great quality of life whereby other people benefit from our kindness and our joy and our faithfulness and our patience and all of these things.

So these are the five steps that we're going to go through together over the next five Sunday mornings and at the same time at our city groups each week.

[4 : 21] This week we're focusing on the first step that as disciples we are rooted and living in Christ. To do that please turn back to Colossians chapter 2 verses 6 and 7.

Therefore, as you received Christ the Lord so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith just as you were taught abounding in thanksgiving.

In many ways this phrase rooted and living in Christ is slightly different to the other four steps that we're going to be looking at and that's why when you look at the card it's the big one in the middle. It has a kind of an overarching role because it is the main truth from which all the others flow. So it's as those who are rooted and living in Christ then we learn, then we serve, we protect, we love and we bear fruit.

So really this concept of being rooted and living in Christ is of particular importance. So as we look at it I want to start with a question.

[5 : 27] When we talk about discipleship what's the first word that comes to mind when you think about your own discipleship? What would that one word be?

Well, I don't want to answer the question for you but I think that there's one word or one theme that would be the most common and it's certainly the word that comes to my mind.

What's the first word we think of? Failure or something like that, something negative.

I tend to look at myself and think I am so far from where I want to be. And as a result of our sense of failure or our sense of awareness that we've got such a long way to go we can tend to identify many things that we need to try and do.

So we can think, well we need to pray more, we need to read more, we need to focus more on our faith, we need to stop sinning, we need to strive to bear fruit. There's a lot that we need to do and often you will be told that there's a lot that you need to do.

[6 : 44] So in seeking to understand discipleship we could come to a passage like Colossians chapter 2 and say you need to be rooted and living in Christ.

As a Christian you need to connect your roots to Him, you need to live in Him more and more and out of our failure we want to do what we need to do in order to get back on the path of discipleship.

So I can stand here today and say you need to be rooted and living in Christ. And you could leave here today thinking as a Christian I need to be rooted and living in Christ.

And we would all be wrong because that's not what Paul is saying.

And we need to look very closely at these verses to see exactly what we've been taught. So let's do it, let's look at it together. Verse 6 we are given a command which is the commandment and I shouldn't ask you these questions but, you head answered which is the command, therefore as you receive Christ Jesus the Lord so walk in Him, that's the commandment.

[8 : 01] We are to walk in Him and that's the command to live out our lives as Christians in other words, it's an imperative to discipleship. But then in verse 7 we are given some supplementary information related to that walking.

We walk as those who are rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith.

Now the grammar here is really important, now I don't want to bore you with grammar but it's actually really quite exciting, well I think it is anyway. So rooted, built up and established, these words are all verbs as you all will know a verb is a doing word.

But they are also all passive verbs. So with verbs you can get active verbs and you can get passive verbs. Active verbs is something you do, passive verb is something that's done to you.

So active verb I kick, passive verb I get kicked. Very good, you could have kicked harder if you wanted it.

[9 : 10] So these are all passive verbs, in the original New Testament it was written in Greek and an active verb and a passive verb are spelled differently so you can tell very easily what's what.

And so that means that all those three things they are not things you do, they are things that are done to you.

And then on top of that those three words the tense is different. So the first two are both present tense. So sorry, the second two are both present tense.

So we are being built up, we are being established, it's something that's ongoing in the present. The word rooted is read because it's different.

It's not in the present tense, it's in what's called the perfect tense. And the perfect tense basically means that it's something that happened in the past and has an ongoing permanent effect into the present and beyond.

[10:16] And that's not brought out quite so clearly in the ESV that we use but the New American Standard version captures it really well. It says walk in him having been firmly rooted and now being built up in him and established in your faith.

Do you see the difference? And it's really important to see that difference because it's crucial. It all means that rooted is not something that needs to happen to you as a Christian.

It's something that has happened. And rooted, built up and established are not things that you do, they are things that are done to you.

These are all verbs but the doer of the doing verbs is not you, it's God. And the same applies to the word living.

We look at verse 13, you who are dead in your trespasses and sins and the uncircumstition of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.

[11:30] This he set aside nailing it to the cross. The made alive part of your Christian faith is something that God has done to you by uniting you to Jesus Christ.

So the key point is that Paul is not saying as a Christian you need to be rooted and living in Christ. He is saying as a Christian you are rooted and living in Christ.

And it's crucial that we recognize this because I think that step one of discipleship is not to focus on what you need to be. Step one is to recognize what you already are.

When it comes to discipleship, it's incredibly easy to be demanding and to be elitist. We can go up to people and say you need to do this, you need to do that and then you'll be more and more rooted in Christ.

You'll be more and more a proper disciple and often there's a kind of implied like me behind all of that. It's just not true.

[12:38] If you are a Christian you do not need to become rooted and living in Christ. You are rooted and living in him because that's precisely what a Christian is.

You cannot be a Christian without being rooted and living in Christ. It's impossible. A Christian is someone who has new life, they've been born again, they are no longer spiritually dead, they have eternal life.

Where does that life come from? It doesn't come from you and from your efforts it comes from Jesus. And we get it only because we are united to him by faith.

Just as a tree gets life because it's rooted to the ground, so too we are living because we are rooted to Jesus.

And I want to emphasize this because it's an important thing for us to recognize. Sometimes in fact I think almost all the time we base our theology of discipleship on how we feel.

[13:42] So in order to do this I've got a wee picture. Please, please don't judge me for the terribleness of these drawings. But here's a picture, okay? So this is how we tend to feel, okay?

We tend to feel we're here on our walk and Jesus is way up there in heaven. And somewhere in the middle the Holy Spirit is kind of floating about and occasionally it maybe just comes down, He just comes down and reaches us.

But for us to be what we should be as disciples we face a huge uphill task. And we think of all these people who are so much better and godlier and wiser and stronger than we are.

They're way up there at the top of that purple line where we should be. We're just down here, Jesus is miles away, Holy Spirit is nearly as far away. And it just seems like it's a massive task for us to get anywhere as disciples.

And that's a picture of how I feel more or less every day, and maybe you're the same.

[14:51] It is absolute theological rubbish. Because the biblical truth is not that. The biblical truth is that a Christian is not that.

The biblical truth is a Christian is this, standing absolutely rooted into Jesus. And the Holy Spirit is not wafting above you in the middle of nowhere.

The Holy Spirit is a powerhouse of life right in your heart. And on that basis and in that power we go on living our Christian lives as disciples of Jesus.

And the absolute vital truth that I want you to remember is that if you are a Christian or if you become one, you are never that ever.

From the moment you are saved, forevermore you are that. You are rooted and living in Christ.

[15:51] That's why the command you must be rooted and living in Christ is not a command to the disciple, it's a command to the unbeliever.

It's what you need to become if you're not yet a disciple. So Paul is making this great point that as a Christian or if you become one, you are rooted and living in Christ.

And that has very important implications for us. And I want us to look at that together for the last few minutes because it can help us correct misunderstandings in our faith.

And I think that often one of the biggest hindrances, often many of the biggest struggles we face as disciples come from misunderstanding things. And it's important that we are ready to listen to the corrections that God's Word can give us in regard to this.

I think there's four things that we can misunderstand in terms of our discipleship. The first thing that we can misunderstand is grace. At the heart of the Christian faith is grace.

[17:02] God's favor and kindness and love towards us, which we do not deserve. The Christian salvation offered in Jesus is not something that we ever earn.

It's a gift. Sometimes though, we can think of grace as a free plane ticket.

So we can think of it as getting given a ticket for free. And so we have this free ticket for heaven.

And we think, okay, I need to then, okay, I've got this ticket.

Brilliant. Now I need to travel on life's journey. I need to press on with this ticket. And good disciples will travel really well. Rubbish ones will struggle along.

But we have this free ticket now. Now we need to get in the queue. Now we need to get on board.

Now we need to get to the gate of heaven for departure. And that's how we can think of grace.

[18:00] And that's perhaps a tiny bit true. But I don't think it's a really accurate illustration of grace because grace is not really getting given a free plane ticket that you have to then get on board in order to depart.

Grace is more like a Chinook helicopter landing beside you and picking you up and carrying you out of enemy territory and bringing you home.

Grace picks you up out of a broken world and it plunks you down in a whole new realm as a permanent citizen of the kingdom of God.

It's not simply a ticket to a better life. It's a wholesale, colossal, complete rescue mission on the part of God.

That's why all the verbs are passive. That's why rooted is in the perfect tense. It's a completed, permanent, unchangeable act that God does to you and for you.

[19:05] And nothing can stop him. And nothing, not even your own failings, weaknesses, failures and insecurities.

Nothing can undo it. Grace is just massive and brilliant.

We can also misunderstand how we compare to other people. One of the biggest difficulties we face as Christian disciples and thinking about this whole issue of discipleship is kind of struggling with the trap of elitism.

And it's incredibly easy to think that discipleship is for the good Christians, the ones that are getting on really well. And it's easy to think, well, everybody else is way more rooted in living in Christ than I am.

Everyone else is at a level that I'm not at. And it's so easy to think that, well, I'm just not going to be at that level. I'm not going to be able to do that. And I'm just different from everybody else.

[20:18] I'm not what I should be. And so when we think of this topic of being rooted and living in Christ, we can think in terms of a hierarchy. So we think there's those who are really rooted and living in Christ.

Then there's those who are fairly rooted and living in Christ. And then thirdly, there's those who are barely rooted and living in Christ.

As a Christian, and in all of this, for those of you who are Christians, as a Christian, which one are you? Well, I can tell you which one you are.

You're the top one because the other two do not exist. This whole idea of elitism is unbiblical in terms of your preciousness in the eyes of Jesus, in terms of your rootedness to Him as your Savior, in terms of your status as a beloved child of God made alive through union with Christ, we are all

the same.

That's why in these ways, the Christian church is a realm of absolute, beautiful, glorious equality. And I think one of the places where you see that so powerfully emphasized is in the parable of the prodigal son.

[21 : 43] It's so easy to feel in terms of our failures that we're not like others, we're not properly rooted, we're not completely part of God's family. That was how the prodigal son felt. He felt he was in a total mess and he was like, well, I'm not really properly part of my family anymore.

So I will go back and I'll maybe ask if I can be a slave because I am no longer at the level of a son. And the astounding thing is that when he comes back and meets his father, yes, he's broken, yes, he's dirty, he probably smelled bad, his life was in a complete mess, but his father says, get a robe, get a ring because one thing's for sure, this boy is 100% part of my family.

And for every Christian, no matter how smut we struggle or stumble, that is true of us all.

Thirdly we can misunderstand our own brokenness. Our equality in terms of our status in Christ doesn't mean that we're identical, we're all different.

We've got different gifts, we've got different weaknesses and we're all at different stages of maturity as well. And there is a growing process that comes after the rootedness and we're at different stages in that.

[23 : 07] But in terms of our brokenness, we're all broken in different ways as disciples. It's really important to remember that when we talk about discipleship, we're not talking about perfectionism.

We're not saying this is what you need to do to become perfect Christians like we are. That's not true. We are all so broken, every one of us. And we all make mistakes and we'll go on making mistakes.

And I remember before I became a minister, I was an engineer and you start off and you make lots of mistakes and you break lots of things. But you then realize that even as you go on, you carry on making mistakes.

You carry on breaking things. It's so easy to break a drill bit. It's so easy to break a tap if you're cutting a thread. And it's only once you've broken it, you realize that you've broken it. I know that's obvious, but it's only then it's too late.

And I realize that a good engineer is not an engineer who never makes mistakes. A good engineer is one who reacts well to his mistakes. And I think that principle applies to us as Christians.

[24 : 11] We will all make mistakes, but we have to be careful that we don't misunderstand our own brokenness. So the path of discipleship is a path full of failings and mistakes.

We all say silly things. We all do daft things. And these things can pile up on us and they can wear us down.

And the result is that we can look at ourselves and think, I am fundamentally broken. As a Christian, I'm just fundamentally broken and I'm a failure.

And that kind of feeling can be overwhelming. And it can lead us to stop trying. And so we think, well, I don't think I can carry on.

It can lead us to feel we want to give up. It can make us lose any confidence that we maybe once had in terms of following Jesus. But what I want to emphasize is that this concept of being rooted and living in Christ and the truth set before us in Colossians chapter 2 is that if you are a Christian, you are not fundamentally broken.

[25 : 26] You are fundamentally fixed. That's what Paul means when he says you're a new creation, something radical and fundamental has changed in you forever.

You are now rooted and living in Christ. And it's important that we recognize that and we remember that. As disciples, we are going to face a lot of challenges.

That's true. So we're going to face weeds around us, things in our lives that shouldn't be there, things that we have to try and root out and remove because they're damaging to us.

As disciples, as a kind of young tea kind to grow, we'll face harsh conditions. You can think of a tea that gets battered by the wind and the rain and we can be exactly the same. We get, we go out into work or home or school or society and even maybe in our own hearts and thoughts, we can be pounded by harsh conditions.

As a result, we get knocked, we can get bruised, we can get scarred. As disciples, we can also face the challenge of being pruned, which is the sometimes painful process whereby growth and maturity comes through a cutting back and having to experience the pain of that.

[26 : 49] It's a means that in the long term, that in the short term is hard, but in the long term is fruitful. At the beginning, Jesus said, I need to prune my people to help them to bear fruit. All of these things are hard and they challenge us.

We face these challenges every day. And yes, as disciples, there is plenty that's wrong with us. But as a Christian, there is nothing wrong with your roots and there never will be.

With all the weeds and struggles and storms of life, there are absolutely solid, vibrant, strong, secure living roots.

Now you may be sitting there thinking, Thomas, it doesn't feel like that. I actually don't care what it feels like because this is theological truth. And feelings have got nothing to do with that.

And maybe our biggest problem is just that we forget that these roots are there. So tomorrow morning, when you go to work with a million and one things to do and pressure put on you, you go there totally rooted in Jesus Christ.

[28 : 02] When you drop off your kids at school tomorrow, you do so totally rooted in Jesus Christ. When you go to the doctor, not really sure what he's going to say to you, you go there totally rooted in Christ.

But even if life is battering you right now, nothing can touch your roots.

So we can misunderstand grace. We can misunderstand how we relate to others. We can misunderstand our own brokenness. Lastly we can also misunderstand our needs.

When it comes to discipleship, we all quickly realize that there's a lot of, we have a lot of needs. We want to change, we want to grow, we want to be more like Jesus this week than we were last week. And so although we're equally rooted and living in Christ and that's unchanging, above the soil there's still a lot of growing that needs to take place.

[29 : 07] And in thinking about all those needs, it's easy to misunderstand how those needs are going to be met. Because often we can think that in order to grow we need to deposit into ourselves spiritually.

So we can think in terms of investment and in terms of depositing. And we can think, okay, if I read my Bible, if I pray, if I serve, then I am depositing into my relationship with Jesus and that is going to help me grow.

Now that sounds very good and in some ways it is, but I don't think it's 100% true.

Should you be trying to deposit into your rootedness in Jesus in order to meet your needs? The answer is no.

In order to meet your needs, you do not need to deposit. You need to withdraw.

[30 : 15] Because if you look at a tree, life and growth doesn't come from depositing into the roots. Life and growth comes by withdrawing from those roots.

Life goes that way, if you like, from the roots, through the branches, through the fruit, and outward. And so when you read and pray and come to church, which you must do, but when you're doing these things, you're not banking a deposit of good Christian stuff that's going to make you more favorable in the eyes of Jesus.

You're not depositing. You are withdrawing. When you come to church and read and sing and pray, when you do that with friends or on your own, when you spend time together in fellowship as Christians, you are not depositing.

You are withdrawing. You are withdrawing from Jesus, from His resources, His strength, His nourishment, His presence, His goodness. That is how our needs are going to be met.

Every day in everything that you do, you need to keep coming back to your rootedness in Christ to withdraw the strength and help that you need.

[31 : 32] And the amazing thing is that you can do that anytime. So you go to work tomorrow morning and you're confronted by an email or a colleague or a circumstance and you think, oh my goodness, what am I going to do?

You can withdraw from your rootedness to Jesus. You battle on through school this week or through your uni work and by Friday night, you're exhausted.

In all that tiredness, you can withdraw from the resources that you have in Jesus. When you face temptation to sin, which every single one of us is going to face this week, we can withdraw from the resources we have in Jesus to help us to turn away from that temptation.

In all of these things, we need to withdraw. And all of this should guard us against the two great dangers that we face as disciples.

What are they? Well, the two great dangers are legalism and antinomianism. And I'd love to look at this in more detail, but time has gone. Antinomianism is basically the idea that we have to do stuff in order to establish our relationship with God or to earn his favor and earn his blessings.

[32 : 41] Antinomianism is the opposite that says, oh, well, I'm saved. I can do whatever I like and you just go and you live like the rest of the culture around you. These are the two dangers that we face as disciples.

And Paul addresses both of them in Colossians. The background to this letter was a false teaching that was telling people, you have to do this, do that, do the next thing.

Stop eating this. Observe this day. Go here, go there, do this, do that. And Paul, as we read, is saying none of these things are beneficial. You do not need to do them.

Christ has done everything that you need. But then in the very next chapter, you can read it when you go home in chapter 3, Paul also says, but don't, in abandoning legalism, don't go to the other extreme of becoming an antinomian and thinking you can do whatever you like.

And he says, you know, watch what you do. Put away anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk from your mouth. We have to avoid both of these things. We must never think I'm rooted in Christ, but I have to add to that.

[33 : 43] Because that's effectively saying that Jesus didn't do enough. But nor must we ever think I'm rooted in Christ, I can do what I like, because that's effectively saying Jesus didn't do very much because sin's not that serious.

Instead, I hope that you will go away thinking I am rooted and living in Christ. And as a result, I want to learn and grow.

I want to serve alongside others. I want to love and protect everyone around me. And I want to bear fruit for the benefit of others.

We've got one minute left because I've run out of time. All of this is just an amazing reminder that Jesus works with broken people and he fixes them.

So often we look at ourselves and we think I don't know enough. I'm not strong enough. I failed so many times. I'm not confident. And what do you think Jesus says in response to all of that?

[34 : 49] When you stand and say, I'm just no use. I can't do this. I can't do that. What do you think Jesus says in response to that? Well, I honestly think that Jesus' instinctive reply to all of that would be no problem.

Because it's not a problem to him. Jesus fixes people and he does that by rooting it to himself. I remember hearing a great story which I've never forgotten.

Some of you might remember in the news about four or five years ago an oil rig washed ashore on the Western Isles. It was being towed down the Atlantic and there was a freak storm in August and the line broke and the oil rig washed ashore.

It actually washed ashore in Carlyway, which is where I used to be the minister. So we woke up this morning and there was this massive oil rig down at the beach. It was very cool, I have to say. So this enormous oil rig was perched on the cliffs and they brought in a salvage team to deal with it. They had a public meeting and there was a woman there who was the leader of the salvage team and she gave a presentation as to what they were going to do in order to get this oil rig off the rocks.

[35 : 59] And they had a plan. It basically involved sealing up the holes, pumping the thing full of air and lifting it afloat when the tide came in. And somebody, there was a question time, somebody put up their hand afterwards and said, what's your plan B if that doesn't work?

And she said, there's no plan B, this is what we're going to do. And the questioner said, but what if it doesn't work? What's your plan B? And the woman said, this will work.

This is what we do. There is no plan B. And I think in exactly the same way Jesus says, you are rooted in me.

You are my disciple. This is what I do. This is the kind of people I work with. You are mine. You are rooted, firm, stable, secure and precious.

And I have begun a good work in you and I will bring it to completion. There is no plan B because that is what I do.

[37 : 05] And I find it such an incredible encouragement in my own weak and stumbling journey of discipleship to realize that that's how Jesus works. I and you, we are utterly rooted in Him.

That's amazing. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we just thank you so much for what you do for all who come to you.

Come to you those who are weak and broken and yet you do far more than we could ever ask or think. We thank you for the incredible blessing of being rooted and being living in you.

Forgive us for all the times we've forgotten that. We pray that this truth would be written on our hearts today and for the rest of our lives. And for any of us here who are maybe not sure where we stand before you or who are maybe quite clear in their minds that they're not yet a Christian, please just draw them to you and help them to see how simple, beautiful and amazing the gospel is.

Amen.