

Unlikely Candidates: Humble Beginnings

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 November 2022

Preacher: Kent Dixon

[0 : 01] Good morning, and welcome here for this Sunday, November 20th. Time flies by, does it not? I got a Facebook notification the other day that let me know that Michelle and I have been friends for 15 years.

And I said, what about the other 11? I said, I guess we weren't that close, and I just didn't know. So thank you, Facebook, for setting me straight.

So my name is Kent Dixon, you all know that. It's my joy to be the lead pastor here. So over the past several weeks in our series, Unlikely Candidates, we've taken a closer look in this series at people from the Bible, specific people, and some who are more familiar to us, and others maybe not so much.

And so my hope has been that this has been an enlightening and encouraging journey for all of us, and I've had some good feedback. So I hope it has been that for you.

So do you remember the qualities of an unlikely candidate? We've considered these in the series.

Well, first, we've considered that unlikely candidates are people who are relatable to us.

[1 : 15] They are flawed, and they have struggles. They are people who are not unlike we may be. Second, we've considered that unlikely candidates are most often people who recognize their need for a savior.

Right? They recognize their need to be saved. Their need to be redeemed. And third, we've recognized that unlikely candidates are not proud or boastful.

Right? They are not people who seek attention. They don't seek the spotlight or crave attention.

And in fact, they have no cause generally to brag about what they've done personally.

But rather, I believe we've recognized many times that these folks, either through their actions or in a more direct way, point the attention back to God for what he has done through or for them in their lives.

And then fourth, we've recognized that unlikely candidates have no special qualifications. Right? God doesn't equip the called, as the saying goes.

[2 : 20] Or sorry, call the equipped. He equips the called. Right? God doesn't say, oh, I need to see your resume. Yeah, you're mostly a fit, and this is what I need you to do.

He says, I need you to step forward in faith, and I'll take it from there. So hopefully you recognize that happening in your own life at times. So we may not feel worthy of, we may not feel deserving of God's call on our lives, but he promises that he will make complete in us the good work that aligns with his will.

And that, as I said, he'll equip us. He'll take care of it. He'll show up to give us whatever we need to carry out his purpose in our lives.

So as I've confessed to you in the past, and maybe you're getting sick of this, I am a history buff.

Some people are sick of it, I'm sure.

So I like to know what happened in the past. I like to know how it shaped the present. And I like to know how all those things factor into the future.

[3 : 29] And that's not to say that I look at the news constantly and think, oh, what's happening, and I worry. No, I like to see how God's will is playing out in our lives, in my life, in the life of our church.

So, but even more than being a history buff, I'm a genealogy buff. I'm intrigued by the history of people, if that makes sense. I'm curious, and I find importance in who I am, not in relation to solely my skills or whatever, but I'm also interested in who came before me, how their lives may have shaped or spoken into my own.

So my dad was keenly interested in genealogy and family history. And he had traced our ancestors back to the 1700s.

And some people think, oh, that's just a drop in the bucket. That's not very far. Other people say, what? Oh, I think I know who my uncle was. And that's it. So, next picture.

Obviously, that's me right in the middle. Maybe you recognize me, maybe you don't, but that is me. As you can see there. So, to get a sense of the people who came before me, let's have a look at that.

[4 : 51] And there are a few people, Vern's mom Vera and Mark Johnson, know some of the people that are immediately around me in this little area, in the center.

So, I was hoping some of them would see that. But that's it, right? So, there I'm at the center, not because I'm the most important, but you see where it branches out, pun intended, from me.

And so, you know, as I said, my father was interested in genealogy. This is all on Ancestry.com, or .ca, I guess. So, we, this goes back generations.

And we're constantly seeking and looking to add on to that. So, you can see that I came from a long line of people. Generations of people, and many of them with very humble beginnings.

I have ties back to Ireland and Scotland and England. Yay! But I'm part of a larger family tree. You can see that. There's some very old photographs in there.

[5 : 54] But I'm part of a genealogical record. So, it's worth asking, I think, what do genealogies reveal? Well, for some folks, I believe genealogies may identify just how much they don't like genealogies.

Is that fair? Is that you? Or how boring they find them to be. And that's okay, too. You know, maybe you don't care that I came from all these people.

Like, for example, Andrew Dixon in 17-something. Same last name? Great. I don't need to know anything more than that. But I believe genealogies reveal where we come from, as I said, right?

Perhaps they reveal the traits or characteristics that we've inherited. If you look at some of these pictures up close, you'd say, wow, you look like so-and-so. Or Connor looks like so-and-so.

But I believe they also reveal where we fit. They reveal where we belong within a larger family.

Does that make sense? So, genealogies may also show us something about where our family came from.

[7 : 06] And as I said, there are national origins there as well. But our sermon this morning is titled Humble Beginnings. And this morning, you get a bit of a two-for-one because we're going to be considering two unlikely candidates together.

As much as we may find genealogies to be boring or irrelevant at times, they are clearly important to God. Because there are many genealogies, most of you would recognize this, in Scripture.

And they're not there by chance. They're there for a purpose. And we're going to focus in on one particular one that's this morning. And I'm going to blast through it because it's a begat and so forth and so on and many names that you will instantly forget.

But it's found in the Gospel of Matthew. So, turn with me in your Bibles. You can grab a Bible from the pew in front of you or if you have one with you. Turn, if you would, with me to Matthew chapter 1.

Easy, right at the beginning. Verses 1 to 17. And I'm going to read through it. And I'm going to read it fairly quickly. And forgive me for mispronouncing some of the names.

[8 : 18] I know most of them, but not all. So, it begins. Matthew 1, verse 1 to 17. It begins, This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Abraham was the father of Isaac. Isaac the father of Jacob. Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar.

Perez the father of Hezron. Hezron the father of Ram. Ram the father of Abinadab. Now, remember these names because there will be a quiz after. Abinadab the father of Nashon.

Nashon the father of Salmon. Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab. And some of these names should jump out to you as people you know. Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth.

Obed the father of Jesse. And Jesse the father of, guess who, King David. David was the father of Solomon. Hmm, there's a familiar name. Whose mother had been Uriah's wife.

[9 : 22] Solomon the father of Rehoboam. Rehoboam the father of Abijah. Abijah the father of Asa. Asa the father of Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram.

Jehoram the father of Uzziah. Uzziah the father of Jotham. Jotham the father of Ahaz. Ahaz the father of Hezekiah. Another familiar name. Hezekiah the father of Manasseh.

Manasseh the father of Amon. Amon the father of Josiah. Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon. Everybody breathe. After the exile to Babylon, it continues.

Jeconiah was the father of Shealtel. Shealtel the father of Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel the father of Abihu. Abihu the father of Eliakim. Eliakim the father of Azor.

Azor the father of Zadok. Zadok the father of Acham. Acham the father of Elihud. Elihud the father of Eleazar. Eleazar the father of Mathan. Mathan the father of Jacob.

[10:20] Jacob the father of Joseph. The husband of Mary. And Mary was the mother of Jesus who's called the Messiah. Thus were the 14 generations in all.

See mine is just a drop in the bucket compared to this. 14 generations in all from Abraham to David. 14 from David to the exile to Babylon. And 14 from the exile to the Messiah.

Everyone ready for the quiz? So the genealogy of Jesus. That's what we just read. Emmanuel. The son of God who became a man.

The one who died to make the way for all of humanity to be in relationship with God. Jesus was the one who brought God's plan to make all things new to humanity.

Freeing us from the slavery of sin and death. There's your gospel lesson for this morning. So this is a pretty important genealogy, right?

[11:27] I think we can agree on that. And we definitely, as I said, see some notable names in there. King David being an obvious one. So we may look at Jesus' family tree more closely one day.

Dig into it more deeply in different branches and so on. But in the meantime, here's a rhetorical question you don't have to answer. Can you recognize something else about it?

Well, the list of names that I just read could easily include many people who are unlikely candidates. People who God used in this process, in this genealogy, who may have been relatively unremarkable.

And that list ends with Jesus' parents, Mary and Joseph. So you may be thinking, as I say this, Pastor Kent, of course we know about Mary and Joseph.

It's going to be Christmas in a month. Duh. They are central figures of Jesus' birth, without any question. How could they be unlikely? How do they represent humble beginnings at all?

[12:40] Well, first, we recognize that Mary and Joseph came from humble circumstances. Within Jesus' family tree, there are rulers and leaders.

There are wise people and prophets. But also many folks who didn't particularly stand out. And if you're familiar with Jesus' family tree, there is a prostitute in that list.

Joseph was a carpenter, right? Yes, he may have had his own business. He was a, you know, self-made man in some ways.

But he had no significant social status. He may have had a reputation of making good tables, but he wasn't a noticeable, notable leader by the world's standards within his community.

He worked with his hands. He made an honest living. But he wasn't notable by the world's standards. Not that we can tell in Scripture. What about Mary?

[13:46] Well, Mary was a young and unmarried woman. She would have been on the lower end of the social scale. She would have been vulnerable and challenged to even provide for her own basic needs.

And, you know, we hear that today and we think, well, that's pretty, that seems sexist or whatever. But if we recognize the culture that she grew up in, the culture in which she lived, that was reality. She would have been reliant on her family members to support her. She would have been reliant on them until ultimately, hopefully, eventually, she had a husband.

Jesus' earthly parents came from humble circumstances, and yet God chose them. God used them. Second, Jesus' earthly parents demonstrated humble hearts.

Let's reflect on Joseph's situation for a moment. And you know some of his circumstances, some of his story. When Joseph learned that Mary was pregnant, he would have known he was not the father, right?

[15:00] We've talked about this in the past, around Christmas time. Joseph may not have been a scholar, but he knew basic biology, we can probably understand. He knew he wasn't the father.

He would have been well within his rights, in his circumstances, to expose Mary to disgrace. Well within his rights. Even judgment or stoning by her community, which is what would have happened for adultery.

But that apparent adultery she had committed, that apparent crime, let's put that aside for a moment. The Bible says in Matthew 1, verse 19.

You can turn in your Bibles with me, or I'll read it for us. Matthew 1, 19. Just a few verses from where we were. Because Joseph, her husband, was a righteous man, and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, it says he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

We recognize here that Joseph made, in a difficult set of circumstances, an honorable choice, a humble choice.

[16:13] The choice of a humble heart. He chose to protect Mary's reputation, despite how things looked. What about Mary?

Well, we learn from Scripture that Mary was definitely afraid when God revealed his plan for her. The angel Gabriel came and laid it out for her, explained the plan.

So let's turn to Luke, chapter 1, verse 26. A couple chapters, and roughly the same spot. The Bible says in Luke 1, verse 26, In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph.

Hear this? A descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, Greetings, you who are highly favored. The Lord is with you.

So we learn in Mary's story that she had obvious questions about, same for Mary, biological impossibility, right? She understood how it worked, but Gabriel's pronouncement was clear.

[17:32] And after he explained how it would happen, we recognize Mary's humble heart. Because Scripture says Mary's response ultimately was, May it be to me as you have said.

She essentially responds to Gabriel's proclamation, the scary one in many ways, by saying, Okay, clarified now, I get it.

I'm your girl. That's essentially what Mary says. Her attitude and submission are outward reflections of a humble heart.

Third, we recognize in Mary and Joseph that they also had humble perspectives. While they were concerned about their circumstances, as they should be, to some extent, even what others would think about them and their circumstances, or how their lives would be changed by God's call in their lives, we can recognize in their stories that both Mary and Joseph ultimately adopted humble perspectives.

They recognized that this was God's will for their lives, God's call on their lives, and they submitted to that.

[18:53] As we reflect on these unlikely candidates, this unlikely pair, what can we learn from them? Well, do we harshly judge our own background, our own skills, our own experience, maybe even our own sense of worthiness?

Or can we recognize that just as God worked in and through the humble circumstances of Mary and Joseph as he revealed his plan for salvation, that he can and will work through our humble circumstances if we ask him, if we're watching for the ways in which he may be calling us to do that?

Friends, do you seek to have a humble heart in the face of challenging circumstances? Are you open and looking for the ways in which God may be calling you to step up or step out of your comfort zone so that he can use you?

Good to think about. Finally, do you have a humble perspective on your own life, your own circumstances? Well, that can obviously be a huge conversation, right?

It has potential to affect and impact many areas of our lives. How much are we willing to be humble? people. But what I'm really challenging us to do here is to keep our eyes up.

[20:29] Lift our perspective beyond simply the here and now of our circumstances. Lay everything at the feet of the God who created us, the God who knows us better than anyone ever could or ever will.

can you recognize that God loves you? He wants to partner with you to accomplish his plan, partner with you.

I'm not saying all of us as a group, that's true too, but he wants to partner with you individually to accomplish his plan to make all things new.

Can you recognize that Mary and Joseph were blood relations of Jesus? Joseph was. But that each of us have also been adopted into that same family?

It's not a figurative way of looking at it. We have been adopted into that family. we share those same humble beginnings, that same humble calling.

[21 : 34] So my brothers and sisters, we have been lovingly adopted into a relationship where those who come before us have passed on an amazing legacy of faith and service that God can and will use to change the world.

Amen? Amen.