

The Unlikely Ensemble

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[0:00] It's amazing, though, who God chooses to use. The greatest Christian movements this country has ever experienced! It came from other people who are!

He could not spell well. He did not speak well. He was a teenage shoe salesman that stumbled over his words, but he had a Sunday school teacher that had a burden for him.

Edward Kimball paced back and forth in front of that Sunday school, I mean, in front of that shoe store one day, praying that God would give him the energy to speak to Dwight L. Moody about his salvation.

When Edward walked into that store, Dwight L. Moody was in the back in the stock room. Edward Kimball walked back there, shared Christ with him, and Dwight L. Moody came to know the Lord in the stock room of a shoe store in Boston, Massachusetts.

And God used Moody powerfully through the second half of the 19th century. He put a fire in that man's soul and a passion in his voice, and he preached simple sermons that burned with evangelistic fury.

[1:41] And his meetings filled music halls, filled arenas, filled theaters across America and throughout Great Britain with the simple gospel.

During one campaign in London of several nights, he preached to over 2 million people who heard the gospel. And he would say, if you want to find fault, come and find fault in me, but don't find it in Christ.

He had no microphone. He had no radio. His voice was carried by the Spirit of God. And it's been said that no man since the Apostle Paul has shaken two continents with the gospel like Dwight L. Moody did.

A simple man used of God. Last week, we looked at four ordinary men that God used in extraordinary ways.

And those men were accompanied by seven others that were just as faithful, but that we're not nearest familiar with. Just as unlikely and used just as mightily.

[2:55] And these most often are overlooked. But they shouldn't be, and they're not going to be today. Mark chapter 3, beginning in verse 13, it says, And he went up, speaking of Christ, went up on the mountain and called to them those whom he desired, and they came to him.

And he appointed 12 whom he also named apostles. So that they might be with him, and he might send them out. Notice this.

Three things is what he called them to. One was that they might be with him. Number two, and he might send them out to preach. And three, that he might give them authority to cast out demons. They had a supernatural authority that God gave them, those apostles that he called. He appointed the 12, Simon, to whom he gave the name Peter, James, the son of Zebedee, and John, the brother of James, to whom he gave the name Barnabus, that is, sons of thunder.

Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddeus, and Simon the zealot, and Judas as a carrot who betrayed him.

[4:18] Last week, we spent time talking about Peter, the outspoken, Andrew, the inviter, James, the thunderous, and John, the passionate.

Next on this list is Philip. I call him the practical. There's a powerful passage in Acts chapter 9 about an Ethiopian that's led to Christ by a man named Philip.

That's not this one. Don't get your Philips mixed up. This one was a fisherman. From Bethsaida in Galilee, just like Peter, just like Andrew, the same areas James and John.

He was a just-the-facts, by-the-book, practical kind of guy. Honestly, a pessimistic killjoy. When 5,000 men and their families need to be fed, Philip told Christ how expensive it was to feed them. Jesus got it done anyway. When Jesus was in the upper room, Jesus told the apostles, if you know me, you know the Father. And Philip said, show us the Father.

[5:38] In other words, he didn't get it. He didn't get what Christ was saying. But God can use a practical pessimist. Pessimist.

History tells us that God used Philip mightily in the church and that he died a martyr. They stoned him to death. And his preaching reached many for Christ before his death.

God can and will use the practical. And then there's also the skeptic. Philip's best buddy was Bartholomew.

John calls him Nathaniel. That's probably his given name. Anywhere you see Bar in front of a name in the Bible, Bar means son of.

And so in reality, Bartholomew was the son of Ptomei. And by the time you take an Aramaic name and translate it into Greek and then translate it into English, you get Bartholomew out of Bartholomei.

[6:43] But he came from Cana where Jesus did his wedding miracle. Philip is the one that brought him to Jesus.

And he was just as imperfect as the rest of us are. His problem was he had too much bias in his life. He had some prejudice in his life.

And I want you to watch what happens to him when he meets Christ. It's found in John chapter 1, beginning in verse 45. And it says this, Philip found Nathaniel, that's the same guy as Bartholomew, and said to him, we have found him of whom Moses and the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

And Nathaniel said to him, can anything good come out of Nazareth? And Philip said to him, come and see.

Jesus saw Nathaniel coming toward him and said to him, behold, an Israelite indeed in whom there is no deceit. And Nathaniel said to him, how do you know me?

[7:55] Jesus answered him, before Philip called you when you were under the fig tree, I saw you. And Nathaniel answered him, Rabbi, you're the son of God.

You're the king of Israel. And Jesus answered him, because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree. Do you believe? You'll see greater things than these.

In this passage, what you find out about Bartholomew is both his weaknesses and his strengths. His weaknesses was that he wrote people off because of where they were from. Or for what they look like.

He was prejudiced. He came from Cana. Cana is a small, nothing little town. You wouldn't know anything about Cana if Jesus hadn't done that wedding miracle there.

But he scorned someone who come from a rough, unrefined little town named Nazareth. And Nazareth was rough. You get your tail whooped in Nazareth, you ain't careful.

[8:57] I mean, it's that kind of place. And he knew that. He didn't expect much to come out of that, but man, he got a whole lot. Jesus told him something only God could know.

First, he tells him that he's honest. If you're an honest person, God can use that powerfully. It's not common today.

Second, Jesus speaks of what he knows about Philip. And we're not sure of what Jesus was speaking of, but it really don't matter if we know what he's speaking of.

Philip knew what he was speaking of. I mean, excuse me. Yeah. Bartholomew knew who he was speaking of. He knew. And that is God's unique way, and that's the way he does it, to speak to each one of us right where we are.

Through the Holy Spirit of God, God can whisper something in your ear today that nobody else in the world would ever understand what that means. But you know what that means. That's because he's personal.

[10:06] Customizes. And he did that for Nathaniel. And the reality is, we don't know what he's speaking of, but what it appears to be, houses were small in that day.

And when we were studying Capernaum a couple of weeks ago, I told you that an exterior wall was no more than 18 feet on a house, and that was it. So they were small, and when they were cooking going on, it got hot, and they lived in the desert.

And so there was often a shade tree nearby, and they'd go hang out on the shade tree, either for rest or possibly for study. Theologians believe that what he saw, and we don't know for sure, what he was talking about was Bartholomew studying the Word of God under that tree.

Jesus had seen him studying God's Word. And Jesus was saying to him, what you've read is now being fulfilled before you.

And in response to that, he knew what he was talking about, and he said, you're the Son of God.

[11:18] We don't know much else about him, except that he was brutally killed for his faith, and his body was thrown into the sea. God can and will change and use the skeptic.

And then there's Matthew. And I call Matthew the meticulous, because Matthew was probably the most educated among them. He was the tax collector, which was a shameful occupation.

He had sold his soul to the Romans for money. That's what the Jews would think. And that is until Christ called him and he walked away from his lifestyle and he invited all his friends to his house and invited Jesus to his house and introduced his friends to Jesus.

We basically know two things about Matthew. One is that he was a publican or a tax collector. And we also know that he wrote the Gospel of Matthew.

And this is what is interesting. In the Gospel of Matthew, he quotes the Old Testament 99 times. It is in an effort for the Jews to see Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecy.

[12:36] But I want you to remember something. As a Roman commissioned tax collector, his job was seen as so sinful that he was not allowed in the synagogue.

So this man's not been sitting under the teaching of the Word of God. He's not been able to because of what he did for a living. So how in the world did he know Scripture so much?

Well, apparently he studied on his own. And by him studying God's Word on his own, God began to draw him. God began to work in him.

And then one day when he was sitting in that tax booth, Jesus walked by. And Jesus looked at him and said, come and follow me. And the man dropped everything he did and followed Christ.

No wonder he left immediately. God had already been doing a work in his life. He seems to have stayed humbly in the background of the ministry of the Lord.

[13:41] It seems obvious that he was journaling to me. Obviously, he was journaling the words and the actions of Jesus everywhere they went. We have the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapter 5 through 7, because of Matthew and because of his scribing while Jesus was speaking.

Not only did he write, but the history tells us that he shared the gospel with the Jew and the Gentile alike until he was most likely burned at the stake for his strong Christian message.

God uses the meticulous. Then there's also Thomas. Thomas is the pessimist. You probably know him as Doubting Thomas, but he's more than that.

Thomas was a worrier. He was anxious and he was cautious and he was a bit like Eeyore from Winnie the Pooh. He's, oh, it'll never work. He's that kind of guy.

When Lazarus died and Jesus was going into Bethany to raise him from the dead, the disciples didn't want him to go. It was a dangerous place and they didn't want him to go.

[14:53] They were afraid of what would happen to him. They tried to get him not to go. Jesus would not hear of it and Thomas said, let us also go that we may die with him. And Philip said, do what?

And in the Greek, that's, huh? But he don't stop there. When Jesus told him in John 14, he would prepare a place for them and where he goes, he will go also.

It was Philip that said, excuse me, it was Thomas that said, Lord, we don't know where you're going. How can we know the way? And Jesus said to him, I'm the way, the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father through me. What he is most known for is not being with the disciples in the locked room when the resurrected Lord appeared to them.

And later, they told Thomas that they had seen Christ resurrected and he didn't believe it. Notice what he says in John 20. It says, so the other disciples told him, we've seen the Lord.

[16:01] But he said, unless I see in his hands the marks of the nails and place my finger in the marks of the nails and place my hand in his side, I'll never believe.

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again and Thomas was with them. Although the doors was locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, peace be with you. And then he said to Thomas, put your finger here and see my hands and put your hand and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe. And Thomas answered him, my Lord and my God. It does not say in scripture that he touched his hands.

It does not say that he touched his side. And I personally believe he didn't have to because when he saw the Lord, he knew and he said, my Lord and my God. It was a life-changing experience for Thomas.

Many historians concur that he shared Christ effectively in India and that's where he's buried. And if you go to India today, there are still churches that were established during the first century during his ministry.

[17:14] He's believed to have died a martyr by being ran through with a spear. with a spear. God can change and use even a pessimist.

Give your kink to God because he can. Then there's the obscure. The obscure is a man named James the Less.

He's called the Less probably due to his stature. That's about all we know about him. It is interesting that his dad's name was Alphaeus. And we learn in Mark chapter 2 that Matthew's dad's name was Alphaeus.

Now, there's a lot of close connection among the disciples. As I've studied the disciples, I realize they were all, many of them were already friends before they ever met Jesus and followed him. Many of them were from the same area. Seven of them are fishermen, for instance. So there's a possibility that they could be brothers, but there's nowhere that it says that except that Mark points out both of their dad's names.

[18:25] And he don't do that for everybody. History tells us that James took the gospel to Syria and to Persia where he was killed for his faith.

Even when little see it and it seems obscure, God uses those. And then there's also the zealous. He was another man named Simon.

Don't get your Simons mixed up. This Simon is a former zealot. That means that he's a militant, politically motivated outlaw that hated Rome and wanted to bring down Rome one man at a time. The zealots were disruptors. They were assassins. They wanted to take down Rome and they had men that were called dagger men who kept a small, concealed, curved, bladed knife in their robes, underneath their robes.

They're bad dudes. But you know what? God changes bad dudes. God doesn't work in bad dudes. I got to reading this and I got to thinking about something. Can you imagine you got Matthew or Levi who was the publican.

[19:45] Now that means that he bought himself out to take up taxes for the Romans. He aligned himself and worked for the Romans. And then on the same team you've got Simon the zealot who hates the Romans.

How in the world could two people be on the same team and be so different? How can that happen? God.

God does that. It is believed that Simon died for his faith. God can use a zealot and he can turn that zeal into something that changes people's life for the gospel.

One more today I want to talk about and that's the humble. There's another man among the apostles named Judas and if you're that guy no wonder you're humble.

You got the wrong name. But he was also called Thaddeus and I'm going to call him Thaddeus so we don't get the Judas guys mixed up. Thaddeus is a nickname.

[20:55] It means breast child. The modern translation of that is he's a mama's boy just to be honest with you. He is. And I don't mean that as a

criticism but he was soft hearted.

He was unassuming. He was humble and he was tender. And he's mentioned one other time in scripture. It's in the upper room when Jesus is telling them that he'll ask he will make himself known to them.

and humbly Judas asked him Thaddeus asked him Lord how is it that you will manifest yourself to us and not to the world?

What a what a humble statement. He couldn't believe that Christ would let himself be known to them. It was as if he was saying who are we?

There's a great account in history of Thaddeus. Thaddeus took the gospel to Mesopotamia the modern day Turkey today.

[22:04] And he went to a king named Kim Abgar. This is told to us by Eusebius which is a reliable historian and we find out a lot about what happened to the apostles after the days that scripture writes about from his accounts.

And in this account he goes to King Abgar of Edessa and he lays hands on that king and he heals him of a debilitating disease and that king came to Christ and he encouraged others to come to Christ as well.

Thaddeus did a powerful work for the Lord before he was beaten to death by clubs because of his faith. So what are we?

Think about your traits. Are you so practical that you make everybody else around you sick? Always shutting them down when they want to do something special? No, that's not practical.

Well, God will cultivate that. He'll use that. Are you a skeptic questioning everything that comes down the way? God can nurture that.

[23:24] He can work with that. Are you one with a meticulous nature? A bean counter? One focused on the details?

We need folks like that. God has a way of refining that, smoothing that. Or are you a pessimist? Ask your neighbor.

They'll tell you. God can make a believer out of you as well. He did Thomas. Are you one that's behind the scenes? Good.

We need folks behind the scenes. We need folks who are willing to serve the Lord even if they're not recognized for it. God uses such as that.

Are you one that's full of zeal? If you are throw your knife blade down please and let the Lord sanctify that zeal and God will use you powerfully.

[24:24] Powerful things can happen for the Lord. Are you so humble that you're shocked that God can ever use you? He can and he will.

But hear me. Don't let the devil humiliate you into thinking that you can't be used by God. None of us have excuses. The apostles teach us that God does extraordinary things through ordinary people.

God gathers the most unlikely people together to do the most unbelievable ministry. I started this morning by talking about D.L.

Moody. Let me quote him one more time. He said this, I am only one but I am one. I can't do everything but I can do something.

What I can do I ought to do and by God's grace I'll do it. May we all be the same and then do it.

[25:32] With every head bowed and every eye closed. I want to ask you this morning if you've ever given your heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ you may find yourself with some of the traits of these guys that just came natural for them and it comes natural for you.

And I'm thankful that their stories give us hope that God takes us as we are and makes us to be what he'd have us to be but we must surrender who we are to him. And if you've never surrendered your life to Christ you've never admitted that you're a sinner and you're separated from God that you need him to forgive you of your sins and to come into your life and empower you and change you that's never happened to you I encourage you today to come follow the Lord in obedience.

Maybe you're here this morning and you have done that but you've never acknowledged that through baptism. We're baptizing next week and if you've never been baptized as a believer I encourage you to come we'd love to line that up.

Set that up with you. Maybe God's drawing you to Pickens First Baptist Church. God's doing a wonderful work here and I just want people to be obedient.

I just want you to follow what the Lord's telling you to do. If you feel led to commit your life to follow him here I encourage you to come. God's doing a good life to do it.

[26:55] And for all of us I hope today through the scope of the Holy Spirit of God you've seen those traits within yourself. Those traits that may not be that good and may be pretty good but I am thankful through the Holy Spirit of God through the sanctification that only he can give.

that our lives can change and we can become productive for Christ. God can use us in mighty ways if we're open enough to allow him to use us. Will you surrender who you are today to the Lord? Whether it be in the place you stand or whether it be at this altar or whether you have a pastor praying for you. Lord I'm ready to serve you and I ask that you'll refine me to be everything you'd have me to be.

I don't know what God's telling you but I encourage you just do exactly what he tells you. Trust him. Heavenly Father I love you and I thank you Lord for your love for us and I ask right now Father that you'll have your will and your way in our midst.

Help us to be obedient and follow you as you lead. In Jesus name. Amen.