

## The Kingdom of the Unqualified

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He had a melt-down in the parking lot. Fellowship hour was between the 8:30 service and Sunday School: coffee, juice, pastries, fruit... The minister had words with the woman in charge, and began shouting. She burst into tears and ran from the room. He chased her into the parking lot, screaming at her. There had been other episodes.

The elders met with him; but, he wouldn't admit he had a problem. The Regional Minister was called in, and recommended anger management. When he refused, he was dismissed.

Turns out he'd been dismissed from three previous churches because of anger issues; but, the search committee hadn't checked his references. The Regional Office revoked his standing. He was considered not qualified to be a minister.

The strangest part of the story is that, when I arrived as Interim Minister, there were people still angry that he'd been terminated. They loved him; thought he should've been given another chance.

Samuel had anointed Saul King of Israel; but, it became evident that Saul was not qualified to be king. The Scriptures describe behavior some psychiatrists have called "paranoid" and "bi-polar". Samuel had difficulty accepting Saul as a mistake. He'd seemed so qualified: tall and strong; warrior; charismatic...

Samuel had been so sure God had called him to anoint Saul King. Had God made a mistake? OR—had Samuel been so mesmerized by Saul's physical qualities and charisma that his own perception was distorted, and he misunderstood God? Saul was a mess; the kingdom was in chaos, and Samuel struggled to understand.

I SAMUEL 16:1, 10-13 (NRSV) *The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons."*

And so, Jesse's sons were paraded by Samuel. And each one seemed better than the last; but, each time, God said, "This is not the one."

<sup>11</sup>*Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes."* <sup>12</sup>*He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The LORD said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one."* <sup>13</sup>*Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward.*

She was petrified, but followed her group to the granite cliff. Despite her fear, she put on the gear, grabbed the Saul rope, and started up the rock.

She stopped at a ledge for a breather, and the safety rope brushed against

her eye and knocked out her contact lens. There she was: halfway up a 100-foot rock wall. She searched the ledge, and her clothing, but it wasn't there. Her vision now blurry, she was desperate and when she got to the top, a friend examined her eye and her clothing, but the lens was not to be found.

Resting at the top, she looked across the mountains and recalled (PROV. 15:3) *"The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth"*. She prayed, "Lord, You know every stone and leaf. You know exactly where my lens is. Please help me."

They took a trail to the bottom, where another group of climbers was just starting up. One of them shouted, "Hey, anybody lose a contact lens?"

Now, that alone is awesome; but listen to how he saw it: an ant was crawling across the face of the rock, carrying it, and the sun's reflection caught his eye.

The girl's father's a artist. When he heard this amazing story, he drew this cartoon: "Lord, I don't know why You want me to carry this thing. I can't eat it, and it's awfully heavy. But if this is what You want me to do, I'll carry it for You."

**GOD DOESN'T CALL THOSE WHO ARE QUALIFIED. GOD QUALIFIES THOSE WHO ARE CALLED.**

In the text, David is anointed King of Israel. Saul no longer was qualified. And so David is chosen. David: just a kid—a ruddy boy with beautiful eyes—a shepherd—a musician. Is God nuts?

**BUT GOD DOESN'T CALL THE QUALIFIED. GOD QUALIFIES THE CALLED.**

Some of the most unlikely people are called. Imagine Simon the Zealot and Matthew the Tax Collector on the same team: the one a part of a radical military underground—sworn enemy of the Roman Empire; the other an employee of the Empire—collecting taxes from his own people? On the same team?

Or, how about Simon Peter and Thomas: one of them compulsive to the point of blind faith ("Though they slay me, Lord, I will never deny you!"); the other a skeptic through and through ("Unless I see the scar in his side and touch the nail prints in his hand...") Can you imagine those two serving effectively together?

And Paul. Paul knew about the unqualified being called. In his first letter to Corinth he wrote, *"For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect."* (1 CORINTHIANS 15:9-10 NIV)

They all were unqualified. But, when God called them, God qualified them. Some of the most unlikely people are called. And God sometimes qualifies in the most unlikely ways.

Remember Gideon? Called to lead Israel against the Midianites. Talk about unqualified! When God called him he said, *"But Lord, how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."* (JUDGES 6:15 NIV)

But God said, "I will be with you;" so, Gideon recruited a huge army; but still wasn't sure. He said, "Lord, if you really want me to do this, I'm gonna' lay out a piece of lamb's wool on the ground tonight. If it's full of dew in the morning, but the ground around it's dry, I'll know." And God made it so.

Still, Gideon wasn't convinced. He asked God to reverse the procedure; and God made it so.

But, God said, "You've got too many men. You need to trust me, not your military strength. Tell the men anybody who's afraid can go home." 22,000 went home.

God said, "You've still got too many men. Take them to the river to drink. Keep only those who kneel to drink, and scoop the water up with their hands. Send home those who put their faces in the water and lap it like a dog."

300 men were left. 300! Against thousands of Midianites! But Gideon prevailed without a drop of Israelite blood being shed. God called him and God qualified him; but in the most unlikely of ways.

**GOD DOESN'T CALL THE QUALIFIED. GOD QUALIFIES THE CALLED; AND SOMETIMES GOD CALLS THE MOST UNLIKELY PEOPLE, AND QUALIFIES THEM IN THE MOST UNLIKELY WAYS.**

Samuel and Jesse's household—unqualified. David, the most unlikely candidate—called. Truth is: nobody qualifies. **BUT ALL WHOM GOD CALLS, GOD QUALIFIES.**

The trick is to understand who is called, and for what. David was called in a culture of unprecedented brutality. Israel had invaded their promised land, and was conquering the people who had inhabited it for generations—rooting them out of their homes, slaughtering them—men, women, children and livestock—because they understood that's what God was calling them to do.

And David was chosen as king. It's true, he was a great military leader and was able to bring the twelve bickering tribes together and unite them into a cohesive nation. When David was on the throne every nation tipped its hat to Israel.

But nations come and go. Wealth, power, charismatic leadership are fleeting. David had all that. What he built lasted scarcely 400 years. But, ever since the city he built was destroyed by the Babylonians—for 2,600 years—Israel has longed to restore their kingdom to the glory it enjoyed under David—the shepherd boy—the ruddy boy with beautiful eyes—the musician—who was called to be king.

God does not call the qualified; God qualifies the called. And sometimes God calls the most unlikely people; qualifies them in the most unlikely ways, and for the most unexpected purposes. All his military, political and personal skills lasted only a lifetime. But the matchless gift of David—the gift that has lasted, and therefore, perhaps, the gift that defines the purpose for which God called him—maybe—is not a military victory or charismatic military leadership; but a message: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."