

Isaiah 45:1-6 : When God Uses the Unlikely

Introduction: When God Uses the Unlikely

- Most of us assume that God uses the obvious people: the spiritually mature, the highly gifted, the deeply committed, and those who seem to have it all together. Yet throughout Scripture, God consistently chooses unlikely people to accomplish extraordinary purposes.
- He chose Moses, a reluctant speaker. He chose David, a forgotten shepherd boy. He chose Gideon, a fearful farmer. And in Isaiah 45, God chooses perhaps one of the most surprising people in the entire Bible: a pagan Persian king named Cyrus.
- What makes this story remarkable is that Cyrus was not an Israelite. He did not worship Yahweh. He was not a prophet, priest, or king of God's covenant people. Yet God calls him "My anointed" and uses him to fulfil His divine purposes.
- This passage reminds us that God's plans are not limited by our expectations. He is not looking for the most obvious candidate; He is looking for people through whom He can display His power, sovereignty, and glory.

Historical Background and Context

- The book of Isaiah was written during a turbulent period in Israel's history. The nation had repeatedly turned away from God, and because of their rebellion, judgment was coming. Eventually, the people of Judah would be conquered by the Babylonian Empire and taken into exile.
- For God's people, exile felt like the end of the story. Jerusalem would be destroyed, the temple ruined, and many would wonder whether God had abandoned His promises.
- Yet long before these events took place, God gave Isaiah a remarkable prophecy.
- In Isaiah 45, God names a future ruler called Cyrus. This is astonishing because Cyrus would not be born for approximately 150 years after Isaiah's ministry. Cyrus eventually became the king of Persia and conquered Babylon in 539 BC.
- After defeating Babylon, Cyrus issued a decree allowing the Jewish exiles to return to their homeland and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. In other words, God used a foreign king, who did not know Him personally, to accomplish His covenant purposes for His people.
- For the original audience, this would have been shocking. They expected God to raise up another Jewish king like David. Instead, God chose a Gentile ruler from a pagan nation.

The message was clear:

God is sovereign over all nations, all rulers, and all history.

Kings may think they are writing history, but God is directing it. Empires rise and fall under His authority. Even people who do not know Him can become instruments in His hands.

That is why God repeatedly says in this passage:

"I am the Lord, and there is no other."

The focus is not ultimately on Cyrus. The hero of the story is God Himself.

Transition into the Sermon

As we look at Isaiah 45:1-6 today, we'll discover that God often works through the people we would least expect. He calls before there is clarity. He empowers beyond natural ability. He brings treasure from darkness. And He uses ordinary, unlikely people so that the world may know that He alone is God. **SO THE FOCUS IS NOT US, BUT IT'S ABOUT A**

AMAZING GOD

The question is not whether God can use unlikely people.

The question is: What if you are one of them?

'This is what the Lord says to Cyrus, his anointed one, whose right hand he will empower. Before him, mighty kings will be paralyzed with fear. Their fortress gates will be opened, never to shut again. This is what the Lord says: "I will go before you, Cyrus, and level the mountains. I will smash down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron. And I will give you treasures hidden in the darkness— secret riches. I will do this so you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, the one who calls you by name. "And why have I called you for this work? Why did I call you by name when you did not know me? It is for the sake of Jacob my servant, Israel my chosen one. I am the Lord; there is no other God. I have equipped you for battle, though you don't even know me, so all the world from east to west will know there is no other God. I am the Lord, and there is no other. '

Isaiah 45:1-6 NLT

Isaiah 45:1-6

1. God Calls and Uses People Before They Fully Know Him

"I call you by your name... though you do not know me." (Isaiah 45:4)

The first shocking truth in this passage is that God chose Cyrus before Cyrus knew God. Cyrus was not seeking God. He was not worshipping Yahweh. He was not praying for God's will.

Yet God says, "I called you by name."

This reveals something profound about God's sovereignty. God's plans are not dependent on our awareness of Him. Long before we recognize God's hand on our lives, He is already at work.

Many believers think God can only use them after they have reached a certain level of spiritual maturity. Isaiah 45 challenges that thinking. God's call begins with His initiative, not our readiness.

Supporting Scriptures

Jeremiah 1:5

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart."

God's calling began before Jeremiah took his first breath.

Romans 5:8

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

God moved toward us before we moved toward Him.

Acts 9:1-6

Saul was actively persecuting Christians when Jesus interrupted his life on the Damascus Road.

Nobody in the early church would have chosen Saul to become Paul the Apostle.

But God did.

Application

Some people are waiting until they feel qualified before responding to God's call.

God is not looking for qualified people. God qualifies the people He calls.

Your limitations do not surprise God. He knew them when He called you.

2. God Empowers People Beyond Their Natural Ability

"I will go before you and level the mountains; I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron." (Isaiah 45:2)

God never asks someone to accomplish His purposes through human strength alone.

The victories Cyrus would experience would not merely be military victories. God Himself

promised to go before him and remove obstacles.

Throughout Scripture, God's pattern is clear:

God often gives assignments that are too big for people so they must depend on Him.

Supporting Scriptures

Zechariah 4:6

"Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty."

Kingdom work is accomplished through divine empowerment, not human effort.

Philippians 4:13

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Give context)

The source of strength is Christ.

2 Corinthians 12:9

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

God intentionally works through weakness so His power becomes visible.

Moses (Exodus 3-4)

- • Moses argued that he wasn't eloquent enough.
- • God's response wasn't: "You're better than you think."
- • God's response was:
- • "I will be with you."
- • The answer to inadequacy is God's presence.

Application

- • The question is not: "Am I strong enough?"
- • The real question is: "Is God with me?"
- • Every calling from God requires God's power to fulfil it.

3. God Works Through Brokenness and Darkness

"I will give you treasures hidden in darkness." (Isaiah 45:3)

- • This may be one of the most beautiful promises in the passage.
- • God does not merely work despite darkness.
- • God often produces treasure from darkness.
- • The places we wish we could erase often become the places where God displays His grace most powerfully.
- • The wounds we hide can become ministries that heal others.
- • The hardships we resent can become testimonies that encourage others.

Supporting Scriptures

Genesis 50:20

Joseph tells his brothers:

"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good."

The betrayal became the pathway to God's purpose.

Romans 8:28

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him."

Not all things are good.

But God can redeem all things.

Psalms 30:5

"Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning."

God has a history of bringing life out of darkness.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Paul says God comforts us so that we can comfort others with the comfort we have received.

Often our greatest ministry emerges from our deepest pain.

Application

- Some people see their past as a disqualification.
- God may see it as preparation.
- Your scars may become evidence of God's faithfulness.
- What you survived may become someone else's source of hope.

4. God's Calling Is Bigger Than the Individual

"For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen..." (Isaiah 45:4)

- God explains why He called Cyrus.
- It wasn't primarily for Cyrus.
- It was for Israel.
- This reveals a critical biblical principle:
- God's calling is never merely about personal fulfillment.
- It is about serving God's larger purposes.
- Modern culture often asks:
- "What makes me happy?"

Scripture asks:

- "How can my life advance God's kingdom?"
- Cyrus became part of a much bigger story than himself.

Supporting Scriptures

Ephesians 2:10

"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works."

We are created for God's purposes.

1 Peter 4:10

"Use whatever gift you have received to serve others."

Gifts are intended for ministry, not self-promotion.

Genesis 12:2-3

God blessed Abraham so that all nations would be blessed through him.

Blessing was never meant to stop with Abraham.

Matthew 28:19-20

Jesus commissions His followers to make disciples of all nations.

The mission is always bigger than ourselves.

Application

- God hasn't called you simply to build your life.
- He has called you to build His Kingdom.
- Your career, gifts, resources, influence, and experiences are all tools for His purposes.

5. The Ultimate Goal Is That God Is Revealed

"So that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting people may know there is none besides me." (Isaiah 45:6)

- This is the heartbeat of the passage.
- The story is not ultimately about Cyrus.
- It is about God.
- The victories. The calling. The provision. The breakthroughs.
- Everything points to God's glory.
- Throughout Scripture, God's desire is that people would know Him.
- Not simply know about Him. Know Him.
- God used Cyrus so the nations would recognize His sovereignty.
- God uses us for the same purpose.

Supporting Scriptures

Isaiah 43:7

"Everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory."

We were created for God's glory.

Matthew 5:16

"Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

The spotlight belongs on God.

1 Corinthians 10:31

"Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."

Every area of life can glorify God.

John 17:4

Jesus said:

"I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do."

Jesus is the perfect example of a life fully lived for God's glory.

Application

- God's primary goal is not your comfort.
- God's primary goal is His glory.
- And when God receives glory through your life, you discover the purpose for which you were created.

Conclusion

- The story of Cyrus teaches us that:
- God calls people before they fully know Him.
- God empowers people beyond their natural abilities.
- God brings treasure out of darkness.
- God's calling is bigger than the individual.
- God's ultimate purpose is His glory throughout the earth.
- The amazing truth of Isaiah 45 is that if God can use a pagan Persian king who didn't even know Him, then none of us are beyond His reach, beyond His grace, or beyond His purpose.
- The unlikely candidate is often God's chosen instrument because when God uses the unlikely, everyone knows the glory belongs to Him alone.

Before I close, I'd like to share something personal.

When I was 16 years old, God gave me this very passage from Isaiah 45. At that stage of my life, I couldn't fully understand what He was saying or where He would lead me. Like Cyrus, I felt unlikely. I felt inadequate. I certainly didn't have everything figured out.

Yet God used these words to impress on my heart that He was calling me into ministry.

Looking back now, I can see that God's calling wasn't based on my ability, experience, or qualifications. It was based on His grace and His purpose.

There were seasons when I doubted, seasons when I struggled, and seasons when I wondered if I was capable of what God had called me to do. But again and again, God reminded me of the same truth He taught Cyrus: "I have called you by name. I will go before you. I will equip you."

This passage is not only about a Persian king thousands of years ago. It is a reminder that God still calls ordinary, unlikely people today.

And if God could use Cyrus, and if God could take a 16-year-old young man and begin to shape him for ministry, then perhaps God is speaking to someone here today.

Maybe you feel unqualified.

Maybe you feel overlooked.

Maybe you feel like the least likely person God could ever use.

But the message of Isaiah 45 is this: **God's call is not limited by your weaknesses. When**

God chooses someone, He equips them, goes before them, and uses them for His glory.