

UNLIKELY CUSTODIANS

By Deon Lieberum
Christian Centre Abbotsford

12 February 2023

Key verses: John 1:19-51

INTRODUCTION

Definition:

- Unlikely: Means that this is **“not likely to happen, be done, or to be true”** it’s **“improbable”**.
- Custodians: A custodian is a person who has responsibility for taking care of or protecting something.

John 1:1-18

(1) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (2) He was in the beginning with God. (3) All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. (4) In him was life, and the life was the light of men. (5) The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (6) There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. (7) He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. (8) He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. (9) The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. (10) He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. (11) He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. (12) But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, (13) who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (14) And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (15) (John bore witness about him, and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.’”) (16) For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. (17) For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (18) No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.

From last week we saw that the writer of the Gospel according to John (John) does the following:

- He points us to Jesus, the Messiah (1-5)
 - o John explains that Jesus is the **“Light of the world”** – The promised, glorious, undisputed and eternal Son of God... God in flesh, Emmanuel, Messiah.
- Then he introduces us to John the Baptist, who was sent by God to point people to the Messiah. (6-13)
 - o John TB was a herald, witness and for-runner of the Messiah.
- Then he says that He lived with us! (14-18)
 - o And we witnessed his glory
 - o This is how he explains it in 1 John 1:1-4

- (1) *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— (2) the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— (3) that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. (4) And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.*

Then in John 1:19 he starts giving us an account of what happened.

John 1:19-51

(19) And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" (20) He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." (21) And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." (22) So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" (23) He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

- This was a quote from: Isaiah 40:3 and Mal 3:1 – John wasn't interested in giving himself a title, but these were scholars of the Scriptures and he knew that they knew exactly what he was saying.
- He was saying the time has come and Messiah is about to appear – in the words of Malachi – SUDDENLY!
- It was an alarm bell ringing for God's people to wake up and repent.

(24) (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) (25) They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" (26) John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, (27) even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." (28) These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing. (29) The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (30) This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' (31) I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." (32) And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. (33) I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' (34) And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God." (35) The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, (36) and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" (37) The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. (38) Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" (39) He said to them, "Come and you will see." So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. (40) One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. (41) He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). (42) He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of Jona. You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter). (43) The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." (44) Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. (45) Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." (46) Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." (47) Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" (48) Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." (49) Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (50) Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under

the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." (51) And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

We know that there are at least two other disciples (James & John the writer) called by Jesus here because we can read about it in the other Gospels.

- Matthew 4:18-22
- Mark 1:16-20
- Luke 5:4-11

While thinking about what I should prepare around, I couldn't help think about these disciples... and how Jesus called them to be custodians of the most important mission in human history.

You would think that when someone is about to launch the most important movement in the history of humanity and then leave the task of growing this movement in the hands of custodians to oversee, that these people would be the best of the best to ensure quality and longevity...

But, these disciples were NOT the best of the best. In fact they might have been the most UNLIKELY CUSTODIANS of this all important task.

PROPOSITION:

Jesus, when calling his disciples, who were not the best candidates,... so trusted the way He had trained them, that He was able to leave the future of the church in their hands and sit down at the right hand of God, knowing that what He had set out to do would be completed.

1. Why do you think I said that these disciples were unlikely custodians?
2. What gave Jesus the confidence to choose them and leave the church in their hands?

1. Why are these unlikely custodians?

They were not qualified enough and too young. To explain this we must look at the context of these events.

- We know they were unqualified and too young because of the following:

The Scriptures don't specifically tell us the age of the disciples, but we can make some fairly reliable assumptions based on biblical, historic and cultural details.

- For example:
 - o John was probably between 14 – 18 years old.
 - o As Jesus began His public ministry, He was about 30 years old...
 - In Jewish culture, disciples were generally younger than their teachers. Since the disciples had to be younger than Jesus in order for their relationship as teacher and disciple to make sense, it is likely that they were all under 30 years of age.
 - The term "little children" used by Jesus in reference to his disciples could mean they were several years his junior due to Him being older at around 33 or 34 when he died on the cross for our sins.

- **Some of Jesus' disciples were fishermen. James and John specifically left their father in the boat to follow him (Matthew 4:21-22).**
 - This means they had enough experience that by this time they could work full-time fishing with no further support from their parents. They must have been old enough to work on their own by then – possibly around 16 or 17 years old.
- Peter was either in his late teens or early twenties when he first met Jesus. He already had a wife and sick mother-in-law that we know about, so it is possible he married at the age of 14 to 18 years old, as this would be considered an acceptable marrying age back in those days.
- The later lives of many disciples also help us to guess their ages. John lived the longest of all, and according to church history passed away at the end of the 1st century.
 - This was around sixty years after personally walking with Jesus during his life on earth.
 - John lived until at least AD96 when Revelation was written, which is 66 years after Jesus died. That suggests that John was almost certainly a teenager when he joined Jesus.
- In Jewish culture, it was customary for most children to begin religious training at the early age of 5 and continue until the age of 14.
 - If a committed child continued with his growth and studies, they would then find him a rabbi who could teach them more about life in general as well as religion and apply for him to follow that Rabbi.
 - They would pattern themselves after that teacher from their teens until about 30 when they were old enough to lead disciples of their own.
 - If this pattern was consistent with the followers of Jesus, some of them may have become disciples as early as thirteen and may even still have technically been teenagers at the time he died on the cross.
- **Although scripture does not share with us all of the specific ages, it's quite likely that the twelve disciples ranged in ages between 13 – 30 years old when Jesus first met them.**
 - John was most probably one of the youngest disciples at this time, but Peter can be considered to be among the oldest of the twelve disciples as he had already been married.
- Coincidentally if you were not considered good enough or were not too bright, and unable to pursue religious studies, you would most likely join your family **business...**
 - In the case of Andrew, Peter, James and John they joined the **families'** traditional business and became fishermen.
 - Matthew was probably a bit of an outcast as a tax collector.

Most of these disciples were NOT qualified to follow the Messiah and probably too young to handle the responsibility of the Church.

ILLUSTRATION (Call up young people): **First Thando (As someone that is Jesus' age) the the 12 disciples examples (youth).**

2. What gave Jesus the confidence to choose them and leave the church in their hands?

Based on Scripture and the teaching of Jesus we can understand what it was that gave Jesus the confidence to entrust His mission to these disciples.

- He modelled a lifestyle of communion, fellowship and loving one another.

When Jesus called His **disciples, saying "FOLLOW ME"** – He was saying this:

- I believe you can be like me
- I want you to follow me, to model your life on mine and what I teach and show you.

This must have blown their minds because they knew they weren't good enough. They might even have been rejected by other rabbis or encouraged to settle for business by others.

Jesus affirmed them by calling them, and in essence was entrusting them with the greatest honour one could be given in being a disciple of Jesus the Christ!

- Then he loved them and showed them how to
 - o (1) love, worship, commune and walk with God, and
 - o (2) love, fellowship with and care for people.

He planted the seed of the Gospel the message of the Kingdom in this environment.

ILLUSTRATION (TWO POTS, one with soil and one with stones): If you knew that you could plant a seed that would grow better than anything in a certain environment, **but wouldn't be** unfruitful anywhere else, where would you plant it?

He kept reminding them of:

- the way of life He was calling them to
- and that He would die for their sins
- and bring them into a living relationship with the Father
- and rise again to complete the deal and justify their faith in Him

CONCLUSION

Jesus came with the most important task in the history of humanity and entrusted it to young under qualified disciples... **because** He understood that the seed He was about to plant would take root in a very specific environment! Then He modelled and created that environment for these disciples to see and experience. After three years, He unleashed them on the world.

DISCUSSION/REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. How does the image of Jesus and His disciples being young people change the way you think about the Scriptures, especially the New Testament?
2. How do you think we can create the ideal environment for intentional discipleship in our small communities?
3. Jesus lived a life that was compelling in His walk with God and His love for people. How can we reflect this life in our relationships, with one another, family, friends, colleges and even enemies (those we are not fond of)?