

# God in Unexpected Places

Matthew 1:18-25, Luke 1:26-38

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Peter Hiatt (as Joe Davidson)

*Video and audio versions available online:*

<https://relentless-love.org/sermons/god-in-unexpected-places/>

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*This document was prepared by Brett Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Brett know. Thank you!*

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## Message

Oy vey, I loaded up at the start of that song; I thought it was never gonna' end! Mazel tov! I'm your speaker for the evening, sorry about that. I may not be what you expected. I'm a builder (a carpenter to be more exact). I ran a family business in Nazareth. Nobody expected anything good to come out of Nazareth.

My name is Joe Bar David, or how you goyim would say it, "Davidson." "Bar," in Hebrew, means "son of." So, for instance, "Bar Rabbi" is like "son of the Rabbi." In fact, the Barabbas kids lived nearby (very religious, very patriotic). I was "Bar David," "Joseph of the house and lineage of David," (King David). Actually, it didn't mean much: There were a lot of us "Davidsons" in my day, and even though I was a "Davidson," I didn't feel like no "Son of David."

I felt forsaken. We all did. It'd been 1000 years since David was king. Then Syrians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks and, for the last 60 years we've been overrun by the worst of all—Romans. I didn't see God anywhere: I figured his name should be, "God NOT with us." Or maybe "God is NOT Salvation;" God the Father was missing.

I know it's different in your day. But in my day, if you didn't know who your daddy was, you didn't know who you was. They had an ugly name for it. And if you felt like one, you lived like one—like you had to prove yourself, justify yourself, even create yourself. See? I felt like a bastard. We all did.

Like a good Jew, I'd pray to God every day, but in my heart, I was screaming, "Why have you forsaken me?" More than once, Roman soldiers burst into my shop screaming, "Jew, make a cross for a Jew!" They could've done it. It's just two timbers. But they made me do it, just to humiliate me. [Joe prepares a cross by combining the timbers he carried in.]

Preparing the timbers, I'd tremble with rage, wondering if it would be someone I knew that got nailed to this tree? Just to get through it, I'd picture a Roman centurion on the tree. And I'd picture... the Messiah, the Christ, THE Son of David, pounding the nails. He would teach the Romans what crosses were really for! [Joe pounds nails into the cross.]

The Torah is clear, "Cursed is the man that hangs on a tree." And so, the Messiah, would hang the damn Romans on their own damn tree. That's what I expected. I brought this one to show ya. Those were dark times, and Israel was a dark place, in a very dark world.

But I had a light. I'm talking about Mary. "There was just something about Mary." We were already betrothed. In my culture, that's basically married, but no sex! And believe me on that; Mary was a saint.

I loved Mary, but her in-laws were a bag of mixed nuts...Meshuggeneh! One day, Mary came to see me at work. She seemed troubled—like she was pondering something in her heart. She told me that she was leaving for Judea to visit her crazy aunt Elizabeth. Then she mumbled something about her barren old Aunt Elizabeth being pregnant. I laughed out loud! Mary left and I felt forsaken.

Three months later, when Mary returned to Nazareth, I was just so glad to see her, and yet, something was different. I'm a carpenter, not a gynecologist. I said, "Mary, why the trip? And, uh, why the unexpected weight gain?" It was then that I heard the two words that would change my life forever: "I'm pregnant." She fell apart, weeping.

I mumbled, "Who?"

And she mumbled, "God."

And I said, "No way!" And she said, "Yah-weh."

And I said, "No way." And she said, "Yah-weh." "No way!" "Yah way."

The name "Yahweh" is so holy that we didn't even say it. And now, I'm asked to believe that a 14-year-old farm girl from hick town Galilee has been impregnated by Yahweh -the Consuming Fire?? That's not just adultery, that's not just blasphemy; that's insanity! I was so hurt and angry.

The law prescribes stoning for adultery, but I couldn't hurt Mary. She was so sincere; She said, "Joe, the Angel said nothing shall be impossible for God." But in my mind, the two words "Bastard" and "Messiah" just did not go together: impossible! I decided to divorce her quietly, but my heart wasn't quiet; it was screaming, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me—your bastard boy—Joseph?"

But then, I got an angel too, in a dream. It said, "Joe Davidson, do not fear to take Mary as your wife for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son and you shall call him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." Wow! "Save his people from their sins." Even as he said it, I think I thought: "You must mean 'save us from Romans.'"

Five hundred years before, King Ahaz needed to be saved from Syria, and Isaiah prophesied, "A virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel (That means God with us) and of his government, there will be no end."

At the time, Ahaz must've been thinking "I need an army, not a baby." But in our time, we figured it to be a prophecy of, you know, a baby that would grow up to become like a real kick-ass Messiah. So, I put it all together, forgot the sin part, and thought—"Hey, that's my boy!"

Well anyway, I woke up, jumped out of bed, and ran to where Mary was staying. I begged her forgiveness, and despite all the gossip and kibitzing in Nazareth, I took her home to live with me.

The Angel thing had said that we should name him "Jesus". "Yeshua" is how you'd say it in my language, from Yehoshua, meaning "Yahweh is salvation." It was a common name. Some of your ancient manuscripts still attest to the fact that one of the Barabbas kids was named "Jesus." So, there was a Jesus Barabbas (Jesus, son of the Rabbi), and now Jesus Bar David (Jesus, son of David) or maybe Bar Yahweh...Son of God!

Anyway, I pictured Roman Centurions dropping to their knees before my boy confessing in terror: "You are the Son of God, King Jesus Bar David." We didn't know what it all meant, but we were sure of this: God was in it. And since God was in it, it would be smooth sailing from here on out—health, wealth, and no more crosses for Jews (Romans yes, but not Jews). That's what we expected.

Well, it was about then, that the Romans announced the census. They didn't mail the form to you. If only we had it so good! The Romans made you go to them... in the town of your origin. That was Bethlehem, the "City of David." Bethlehem means "House of Bread." And I always wondered, "What bread??"

It was a four-day journey, and Mary was "heavy with child." "Oh, Little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie. . ." not so much. It was the census, just insanity. And Mary's pains had started. And, I'm a carpenter, not a gynecologist! We went to an inn and the inn was full. I said to the innkeeper: "Look, she's pregnant!" The innkeeper says, "Well, that's not my fault!" And I screamed, "Well, it's not my fault neither!"

A stable was the best we could do—Mary was in anguish; I was in anguish: "Did I screw up Christmas?" What a putz. I had thought God was with us, but all I could see was pain and flies. All I could smell was schmutz... and poop... and fluid... lady fluid! And I'm a carpenter, not a gynecologist! Mary screamed! There was no time to think! The baby was coming. No! Let me rephrase: The Messiah was coming; Jesus was coming! I was about to meet God. But what a way to meet him! And what a place to meet him: Oy vey!

Keep in mind that I was not only being introduced to Yahweh; I was being introduced to the nether regions of the female anatomy. And in our religion, all that blood and lady schmutz is unclean. And this place was the place that God appeared to me? Church people often ask, "When and where did you find Jesus?" Well, that was when and where—kind of funny I know and also kind of profound! The very place that we all cover in shame—that's where I met Him. And what did he look like, you ask? A booger covered in schmutz. You ever seen a newborn baby?

He didn't look like this:



And he didn't look like this:



And he sure didn't look like this:



That's just creepy.

"Radiant beams from thy Holy face, with the dawn of redeeming grace." Who writes this stuff? It wasn't like that. It was 1000 years of failure, confusion, pain, shame, and darkness. And then an eight-pound, naked baby, covered in schmutz, crying. That's "God with us." Not what I expected! You know every baby is the Breath of God in a little bag of dust, blood, and schmutz—every baby, and that's every person in this room.

Mary screamed and pushed. And suddenly I was holding Him. He cried and cried. And then, I said, "Yeshua," and immediately, He stopped—shabbat, He knew my voice! He knew his Father's voice. All those months, whenever I spoke, everything in his womb world vibrated to the sound of my voice—he knew me and then, I knew Him. I cut his cord with a rusty knife. Mary washed him as best she could. She swaddled him in rags, and then held him to her breast. He suckled, and Mary acted as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

I said, "Mary, oh my God, Mary, Mary, Mary, do you really think it's HIM?" And she said, "Quiet, Joe. Let him drink and go to sleep." So, I wondered. Actually, I wondered as I wondered: What if this was God somehow? Had God ever been held like this? Was this what God had always wanted: To be loved when he was good for nothing—just a breath, in a bag of dust and schmutz. You know, "good for nothing," just good? Such incredible thoughts I think: Maybe the Creator is so much more than the Unquenchable Fire... or maybe the Unquenchable Fire is Unquenchable Love? I had always feared God, but for the first time I thought, "Hey I kind of like God."

That night, I bent my knees before the baby held to my bride's breast. I'm saying, my knees bowed, and my tongue confessed, "I love you" The baby was asleep now. I whispered, "Mary, Mary, could Yeshua be HIM? Could this be the incarnate essence of Yahweh, the ground of all being, seeking some sort of existential communion with all humanity through this kenotic manifestation of his essential beingness?" Mary gazed into my eyes and whispered, "Shut up, Joe. The baby is sleeping."

We placed Him in a manger, made of wood—*awrone* in Hebrew. A wooden box, like this [Joe taps on the wooden manger on stage], or you could translate it "ark." And all at once it hit me—this is the Ark of the Covenant: A Manger, covered in schmutz—not what I expected! People passed by and snickered at the pitiful sight. I would've too—maybe you still do—because nobody expects the King of glory in a place like that. Nobody! Well, except shepherds—red neck shepherds. And that's only because an entire legion of angels appeared to them and told them! But why them? I guess God likes to party with shepherds and carpenters more than Kings and Pharisees—Think about it and it does make some sense. We had a party: They held Yeshua, sang to Yeshua, danced with Yeshua, and then, they were gone, and I thought maybe I'm insane—meshugenah! Know what I mean? It's like God gives you just enough to keep going, but you're still poor, confused, sitting in a stable in the dark, covered in schmutz.

Well, you know the stories:

- Simeon prophesied: Yeshua was "set for the rise and fall of many."
- You heard how the pagan wizards showed up with gifts.
- You heard how I had another dream and we fled to Egypt.

- You heard how Herod massacred all the little boys in Bethlehem.
- You heard how we moved back to Nazareth, and Yeshua “grew in wisdom and stature.”
- And let me tell you, I fell in love with my boy Yeshua.

At first, it really stressed me out—being His dad. I went to The Great Dad's Seminar at our synagogue, but they really had nothing on raising the Messiah. You should've seen me trying to explain the facts of life to him. When He was 12, we accidentally left him at the Passover feast in Jerusalem. We were already a day away when I realized, "Oy vey! I lost the Messiah. That's bad. I ran back and found him in the temple, and He said, "Didn't you know I'd be in my Father's House?" Sounds kind of smart-alecky as I tell it now.

But he never disrespected me, as if I wasn't his dad. In fact, it was like he expected to see God the Father in me—His dad. So, his words didn't take anything from me, but actually gave everything to me. I taught him stuff or, God the Father taught Him stuff, through me. One day, we were building a bench, and I got a splinter in my eye. Yeshua tried to help me and gouged my eye. I yelled, “Jesus Christ!” Then, I looked at him with my one good eye and I saw like a bag of saw dust in his eyes. I said, "Yeshua! Never go taking specks out of other folks' eyes when you've got a log in your own eye."

I taught him how to make yoke for oxen. He became famous for yokes so easy on the oxen that almost any burden would seem light. When he got blisters or cut his finger, it was me that said, “Yeshua, don't worry, to make anything good you gotta put your flesh and blood into it.” “That's what it is to be a builder, a creator of beauty.”

See? God, the Father, fathered the Messiah through me - I didn't expect that! The rumors persisted and I did expect that. The other kids would tease him (especially the Barabbas kids). They called him, "Jesus Bar-a-Who?" Son of who? They called him "Bastard." Now, I use that word, because if you've ever been called that word, I want you to know: You're in great company. They called him "Bastard"—But no one has ever acted less like a bastard than Yeshua—no one ever acted less forsaken than Jesus. The kids would tease, and “Jesus wept;” but he wept for them, for they obviously didn't know who their Abba was, who their Daddy was. They had “Daddy issues.” We all do.

But in Jesus there was no fear, no shame, no need to hide himself, or justify himself. It was like everything in his world—the light/the dark; the pleasant /the painful; the good/and even, what we call "bad"—it all reverberated to the sound of God the Father's voice. And this is what God the Father was constantly saying: "Behold, this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased." It didn't make Yeshua proud, but just the opposite: constantly grateful. Many, many times I found Him dancing and laughing all by Himself. I'd say, "Yeshua, what are you doing?" And He'd say, "God likes me, Daddy, and he really likes you. My abba is your abba, abba—call Abba, ‘Abba,’ Abba. Then he'd giggle.”

He was a walking party. No matter who you was, or what you done, in Yeshua's eyes, your mere existence was reason to throw a party. It made me nervous 'cause that's how you get hurt. Love makes you vulnerable to pain. And Yeshua felt pain. It wasn't that He didn't feel pain; it was how He bore it: "Love bears all things." Yeshua's yoke was “easy”—but not because there was no

burden, but because of how he bore it. Each moment was like a cup handed to him by his Father and so, he drank it with abandon, constantly losing his life and finding it; he had faith!

And that's what all of humanity—all of Adam—is missing. We each believe that we have been forsaken. We have no faith in Love. But not Jesus; He is who we all are meant to be. And so, people either surrendered to Him and his walking party or they wanted to kill him as the ultimate insult to their ego. Yeshua never judged a soul, yet his very presence—like light shining in the darkness—is the judgment of this world. Just like old Simeon said, "He is set for the rise and fall of many - a sign- that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." Jesus Bar David is the judgment of God. Jesus Barabbas is our judgment. That is: Save yourself with yourself.

On Good Friday, Pilate gave us a choice: "Would you have Jesus Barabbas or Jesus Bar David; What kind of savior do you want?" One that crucifies his enemies, or one that would be crucified for his enemies? One that saves you from Romans, or one that saves you from yourself? We chanted for Barabbas—That's our judgment.

And so, our Father handed Yeshua a cup and he drank it to the last drop. It was a yoke (a cross beam) fit for Him from the foundation of the world. For Yahweh had said, "I will make a helper fit for you, Adam." I was no longer present in your space and time, this age. And yet I did see, and I do see. Like the prophet said, "Every eye will see him - everyone who pierced Him." They nailed Yeshua to a cross—my cross! I don't know if it was a cross that I made, but it belonged to me.

I'd like to set it up to show everyone. [Joe sets up a cross from the timbers he carried up.] They nailed my Yeshua to a cross, and it belonged to me. I knew it belonged to me, for as Yeshua hung there and the sky grew black, he lifted his head and cried, "My God my God, why have you forsaken me?" That was my line! And that is the first line of Psalm 22. David's psalm starts like that, but it ends with the conquest of hell.

Yeshua cried, "My God my God, why have you forsaken me?" That was faith—spoken from a place of faithlessness—my place of faithlessness, my fear, anger, and shame. That was Yeshua praying to God the Father on my behalf, confessing out loud what I had only grumbled to myself alone in the dark. That was Yeshua (the Word of God) having descended into all our fear, anger, shame, and forsakenness—the hell in which we all trap ourselves. That was God calling to God from the dungeon of our own Godlessness.

When you find beautiful things in UNEXPECTED places—like a light shining in darkness, or logos in chaos, or faith, hope and love in hell—you love those things all that much more, right? Why else would you wrap all your presents for Christmas morning? So, someone would rip off the paper and say, "WOW, I didn't expect that! Wow, wow, wow." See? Maybe all creation is like wrapping paper containing the burning heart of God.

- I never expected God in Mary.
- I never expected God in a manger.
- I never expected God on a cross.
- And I, sure as hell, never expected God in hell, my own personal hell!

See? Maybe all the sin, suffering, sorrow, and shame is wrapping paper. Maybe this world is like a dark theater prepared for the revelation of Grace—The Glory of God. It's in the darkness that we fall in love with The Light. And Yeshua is the Light.

Yeshua cried, "Father forgive them; It is finished" and delivered up his Spirit. And it was at that moment that the Roman Centurion, dropped to his knees before Yeshua and confessed - "Surely this was the son of God." And I knew exactly what he meant; He meant what I had meant thirty years before. He meant: "I love you."

Yeshua was hanging there naked as the day he was born, covered in nothing but bruises, blood, and schmutz. And Mary was there with him, but now there were several Marys—Mary of Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph and "the other Mary"—I mean by that, the men, John and my namesake, Joseph of Arimathea. They took him down from the tree. They knelt before Yeshua's body broken and his blood shed. They kissed his wounds, and I knew exactly what they meant. They meant what I had meant, what the Centurion meant. They meant: "I love you." They placed him in Joseph's tomb, just as he had found his way into my heart—Joseph's heart—thirty years before. And of course, he rose from the dead, for he is the Life—THE LIFE.

And tonight, you will bend the knee, kiss his wounds, place him in the tomb that is your heart, and sing to him like the shepherds. And I know what you mean, you mean: "I love you," (even if only a little bit). "He who loves is born of God and knows God. God is Love." And that means that all of us are "highly favored;" We're Mary.

You know Jesus didn't often use the name "Davidson," or "Son of David," and he didn't normally refer to himself as "The Son of God," even though God is most definitely his Father. Do you know what he liked to call himself? "The Son of Man." So, figure it out: God is his Father and Man (Adam, humanity, all of us) is?

Tonight, you may feel quite a bit of sorrow, shame, fear, and anguish. But in the midst of that empty pain, you may also sense a little faith—maybe it's only the size of a seed—or a bit of hope, or maybe a little love? Well, Good News: You're pregnant and it's not your fault, which also means it's not your responsibility, it's a miracle; it's the gift of God in you. I'm saying that which is conceived in you is of the Holy Spirit. You're like a virgin, who conceives and gives birth to faith, hope and love—gives birth to an entire new creation—including yourself, your true self. So Merry Christmas.

## Communion

Merry Christmas, for on the night that Yeshua was betrayed, He took bread (undoubtedly from Bethlehem, just a few miles to the south of Jerusalem) and broke it saying, "This is my body, given for you. Take and eat." And he took the cup saying, "This is the covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you. And do it in remembrance of me."

I know that this is shocking—maybe we need to be shocked—but we all take his life (it’s not your life) we take his life—it’s called sin. But he gave it, before we could even take it, He fore-gave it—that’s Grace. If you reject this [holds up communion wine and bread], you’re choosing nowhere and nothingness because he’s the builder, and this is how he builds all things—with his own flesh and blood. But when you surrender to him, it’s Christmas to you, Christmas in you, and Christmas through you—through you he is filling all things.

And one day, like me, I think you will say:

- I never expected God in an unwed teenage farm girl!
- I never expected God in a manger covered in schmutz.
- I never expected God on a tree in a garden on a mountain named “Calvary.”
- I never expected God to show up in hell.
- I never expected God to fill ALL things with Himself.
- But most of all, I never expected God in me.

Or let me say it this way, I never ever expected to find the Son of God in Me.

I don’t mean to make your head pop, but I think Jesus called himself Son of Man, so that his old Dad, Joseph, would finally call himself son of God, and hear our father say, “This is my beloved son, Joe, in whom I am well pleased.” I am so not a bastard, and neither are you. So where do you least expect to find him? In a painful memory, a failure in the past, a place of shame or resentment right now? Close your eyes, think of that place, and say what Mary said that night long ago “May it be done unto me according to your word.”

Take a piece of bread, dip it in the cup, and put it in that very place and I think you’ll find that he’s been there all along, waiting for you. And this is what he has to say to you: Merry Christmas my beloved son, my beloved daughter, in whom I am well pleased.

Merry Christmas.

## Silent Night (Candlelight Singing)

### Benediction

So, Lord God, we thank you for who you are— Yeshua. It’s in his name that we pray thank you and Merry Christmas. Amen. And so, by way of benediction, Merry Christmas to you and thank you for joining us. I was a little weird tonight, I know. I try not to be so weird most of the time. We’d love to have you join us every Sunday. So Merry Christmas and believe the Gospel, in Jesus’ name, amen.