The Chosen: “The Rock On Which It Is Built” S1E4 Memory Verse: Luke 5:10b

October 1st, 2023 Scripture Reading: Matthew 13:47-50

**SLIDE 1: TITLE**

 We are continuing our way through season one of “The Chosen” miniseries. Last week as almost an aside as we focused on children and how Jesus perceived children and how, in the end, we must become like children: helplessly dependent so that we might be in a position to receive the kingdom of heaven. The episode showed a side of Jesus that scripture hints at, and again, although these conversations and characters do not necessarily appear in the New Testament, we can see the filmmakers are trying to use their imagination responsibility as they flesh out some of the scenes we do have in scripture.

**SLIDE 2: Picture**

 This time around, in episode four, there is a lot of imagination going on. In a move of gratuitous foreshadowing, Simon has his ear cut by a Roman soldier because he is all caught up in a scheme to bust his fellow county men for fishing on the Sabbath, Matthew, the young and hated tax collector is enlisted as a spy by the Romans, and Zebedee, the father of James and John, is given a much bigger role than the gospels do. However, all of these things, these conversations, whether or not they actually happened, help to paint a backdrop for the things that did actually happen. So in order to ensure we keep informed imagination and historical fact straight, we need to be reading the gospels. We never rely on some screenwriters or movie directors to be our main source of spiritual food. As good as I think this series is, it cannot compare with the gospels themselves. Let this show serve as a supplement, a compliment, a side dish to the main course laid out for us in the New Testament.

 So with that in mind, let’s dive in…With so much going on and being set up in this episode, I really can only focus on a couple of things, so today we are going to talk about titles, three different titles, one implied and two different that are specifically mentioned.

The first implied title is not part of the episode but rather part of the title. Episode four is called “The Rock On Which It Is Built”. And this title is a reference to a conversation Jesus has with Simon and the other disciples. Matthew 16:13-18 READ

**SLIDE 3: Matthew 16:13-18 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter,[a] and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.**

Jesus changes Simon’s name to Peter, *petras* in Greek, and it simply means rock. The bible does this name change thing numerous times and it is because names means something…they are an identifier, they call out something that God has put into us. Even before we had our daughter Eden (which also happens to be Simons wife’s name in the show) I wanted to name her Mallory. I liked that name, and I thought it would go so well with our last name, Bonsell, as they both contain double l’s. My wife did not agree with me especially after looking up the meaning of the name Mallory, which means “an ill-fated woman.” I still liked the sound of it, but I am happy we decided on Eden instead. The middle names of our kids are family names thereby implying the importance of remembering from whom you come, and solidifying a newborn human into the web of a family long established. Women take on the last name of their husbands signaling a new phase, a combined life, a shift in identity. Probably most famously, in the bible, Jacob, meaning “heel grabber”, basically someone who trips others, had, after a wrestling match with an angel, his name changed to Israel, which means “one who struggles with God.” A new identity, a new calling. So here Jesus dons Simon as Peter, the rock on which the church will be built. What a terrifying honor that must have been.

**SLIDE 4: Lamb of God**

The next title we need to consider is “Lamb of God”. “Lamb of God” is applied to Jesus by John the Baptist. He does this twice in the Gospel of John right away in chapter one. Now the term lamb was obviously nothing new, But Lamb of God was not a phrase anyone had heard before. It does not appear in the Old Testament and we don’t hear the word lamb used as a title again until we get to the book of Revelation where it occurs 28 times! Lambs would have been significant to the Jews at the time because a lamb sat at the center of their Passover. Each year, God’s people would reenact that fateful night in Egypt when God sent the angel of death to claim the first born of every household. Thise who covered their door frames with lamb’s blood would be spared. But John the Baptist says too much. He says, “Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” This goes too far. The lamb’s blood spared the life of the first born, it did not have the power to take away sin. Later, the prophet Isaiah would speak of a suffering servant who would be like a lamb brought to be slaughtered. In this passage the lamb is connected to sin. Isaiah 53:5 says that this lamb, this suffering servant, “was pierced because of our rebellions and crushed because of our crimes. He bore the punishment that made us whole; by his wounds we are healed.” So John is taking these traditional understandings about lambs and sin and he is making a pivot move. He is introducing a new understanding of these things. He is saying, “Look! Lambs are not just historical metaphors anymore. Take what you know about the Passover, take what you know about the suffering servant and combine it all together because look! Here he comes now, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” Yet another example of Jesus fulfilling God’s word!

 In the show, we do not see this scene play out, but we do see a breathless and exciting Andrew running to tell his brother about this Lamb of God. I love how the writers keep that title in Andrew’s mouth. He says it a few times to Simon, but Simon is unaffected. He is not connecting any dots. He does not care about what “creepy John” has to say. Simon is interested in fish, not lambs.

**SLIDE 5: Picture**

 But as interested as he is in fish, as desperate as he is for a huge haul, he is unable to catch a thing. We see a scene in which Peter is out, at night, which was the prime time to bring in a good catch due to cooler waters, and he cannot come up with anything. We can feel his frustration in this scene. Coming up empty again and again, yelling and shouting to the heavens. I remember, years ago, trying to fix our washing machine. I did not know what was wrong with it, but I was determined to fulfill my duty as a husband. I took of the front panel, I carefully tracked every screw I removed, I paid attention to the hoses and wires. I unclipped things and removed pieces and partially flooded my laundry room numerous times. I remember being soaked, beyond frustrated, with the sun having set hours before, and at my wit’s end. Finally, I found the culprit; a single bobby pin trapped in a hose filter of some sort. I can’t even remember the specifics, but I do remember thinking, “I know *that* is not supposed to be there!” I had solved the problem! Hallelujah! Now I had to reassemble the whole thing….

 We have all tackled something that should not pose too much of a challenge. Washing machines can be a hassle but they ought to be repairable. And catching fish is what Simon did day in and day out. Surely he could make something happen on this night. But no, nothing. I at least had the satisfaction of a job completed. I could go to my wife in triumph and say I fixed it. But Simon, his best plan is to hide out in Egypt and leave his wife in the care of his brother.

 Jesus however has other plans. Let me read this story from Luke 5:1-11 READ.

**SLIDE 6-8: Luke 5:1-11**

So we can see, the film takes some liberties…they depict the miraculous catch happening right on the shore, they have Zebedee, the father of James and John in the scene, which clearly was not the case, but I think they added him so that we do not simply see James and John ditching thier father and leaving the family business high and dry, which is kind of how the story comes across in Matthew’s gospel. Though outside the biblical text, it was nice to see Zebedee excited for his sons and encouraging them to follow Jesus.

**SLIDE 9: Picture**

 But despite some of the changes and additions made, I want to really look at what is accurate. First off, Jesus taught from a boat. It seems kind of strange, but since there were no microphones and amplifiers, speakers had to rely on natural solutions. We assume, as God, Jesus was familiar with the laws of physics that he himself established and, much like we noted last week, as Jesus struggled to make fire, here he did not perform some outlandish miracle in order to make himself heard or supernatural project more volume, rather, he employed the laws of physics. Look, I have a chart. So he gets on the boat and had the disciples row out a little way into the lake. Water actually allows sound waves to travel further as the sound can actually bounce off of the surface of the lake. Once the sound reaches shore, the temperature of the air now comes into play. Because cooler air is higher, the sound waves bend upward and can travel farther. So, if you ever find yourself needing to speak to a large crowd of people and you have no sound system, find a spot on the outskirts of town that has a lake surrounded by hills, get a boat, row out and start speaking. That’s how Jesus managed it.

 After Jesus is finished, he dismisses the crowds, and he has Simon row out even further so that he might cast out his net one more time. This is the last thing Simon wants to do after the night he had. But he takes a deep sigh, and he does so anyway. “Because you say so, I’ll drop the nets.” Is it an act of obedience? Yes, I suppose it is, but his words sort of indicate that Simon want to make it clear this was Jesus’ idea and not his. The film does an excellent job of capturing this unspoken exchange between the two. There is that “I told you so” look from Simon to Jesus, but Jesus just sort of shrugs, and then the water begins to foam and the net begins to break and the fisherman of overwhelmed with wonder. Once the catch is in the boat they cannot help but laugh at the absurdity of the situation. There is a quick shot of Jesus glancing toward heaven giving a nod of thanks to God the Father for his provision. Simon is over-joyed…for a moment, but he quickly remembers who is standing in the boat with him…The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Simon knows he is unworthy. He kneels before Jesus, presumably waist deep in fish at this point, and identifies himself as a sinner, as someone unworthy to be in Jesus’ presence. And Jesus replies, “Simon, don’t be afraid.” And he looks around at those dirty, sunburnt, sleep deprived men, those gnarled, oppressed, hard working men, men of no esteem, no social graces, no clout whatsoever. Jesus looks at these men and has a great idea…”I’m going to pick these ones. Yep, of all my options, these are the ones who will spread the Good news, these are the ones who will give their everything, these are the ones who will remain helplessly dependent on me. These are the ones I can use.” And with this bright idea, Jesus declares a new title for them: no longer Jewish scum, or good for nothing, or even fisherman; Jesus declares them to be fishers of men. The film adds a little commentary, when Jesus says, “You are to gather men – all kinds – I will sort them out later.”

**SLIDE 10: You are to gather men – all kinds – I will sort them out later.”**

 I hope it is not too far of a stretch for each of us to understand that these titles are for us. Even today Jesus wears many hats: great teacher, historical figure, miracle worker, maybe even figment of imagination. So the question comes before us all, who do you say Jesus is? What title does he bear in your life? Might Lamb of God fit the bill? Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, who takes away the sin of Simon, who takes away my sin and your sin…The Lamb of God who sees us in our weakness and says, “Yes, I’ll pick that one.” Thank God for this Lamb.

 And if we can accept Jesus as the Lamb of God, our next task is to accept the title that he has given us as those who follow this Lamb, and that is fisher of men, gatherer of people, one who goes out to bring in. And though there are countless ministries and organizations that try to sell their programs and books and strategies to help churches bring in new people, I believe we do not have the luxury of fish finders and fancy tackle or state of the art equipment…we are to be faithful to go out, and cast our nets. Sometimes we will come up empty…maybe most times. But we are called to go out and cast our nets again, and again, and again. That is what we are, you and I, fishers of men. We bring them in, Jesus sorts them out. We bring them in, we bring them in, we bring them in. So all I can say is, let’s hit this lake, Forest Lake, let’s cast our nets wide and let’s trust the Lord with the results. Amen.