The Chosen: I Am He S1E8 Memory Verse: John 4:39

Oct. 29th, 2023 Scripture Reading: Romans 8:5-11

SLIDE 1: Title

Today we take a look at the last episode of the first season of “The Chosen”. In the last episode Jesus issued a few invitations: one to Nicodemus who feels he must decline to follow Jesus and another to Matthew the despised tax collector. Despite hemming and hawing and expressions of disbelief from the rest of the disciples, Matthew left his tax booth, his hefty income, his favor with Rome and followed Jesus.

In this episode, Jesus and his motley crew of followers are gearing up for a six-day journey to Jerusalem. Which is opposite of John’s account. In the gospel, they head north to Galilee, not south, but the same principle applies as we will see. They have plenty to pack and prepare, but there are also some goodbyes that need to happen. We are shown a special scene between Jesus and Simon’s wife Eden. Simon has been thrilled to be a part of what Jesus is doing, but now, with the realization that the call to this ministry entails a lot of traveling and much time away, Simon is willing, but a bit more reserved. Jesus recognizes and actually names the fact that Simon and Eden are one flesh. They are married. They are supposed to be together. Jesus recognizes that any participation or contribution Simon makes to the ministry of Jesus, is also the participation and contribution of his wife.

SLIDE 2: Picture

His ability to be involved is steadfastly connected to her willingness. We will come back to this notion of the one flesh of marriage. Jesus then encourages Eden and blesses the household by healing her mother of her fever and relieving both Eden and Simon. Jesus comments, “Normal Simon is difficult enough…Do you think I want to travel with worried Simon?” Jesus puts the family at ease.

After all the preparations are made, the whole team finally meets at the city gate to depart. Jesus looks around and asks, “Is everyone here?” They all seem to be accounted for, except for the pharisee Nicodemus…he is hiding just out of sight behind a wall. He donated money to the cause, his heart wants to be counted among them, and yet he resists. He has too many other obligations, family commitments and a wife who is not so supportive. Jesus is holding out hope that he will show…”You were so close”, we whispers to himself. As they leave, Nicodemus breaks down weeping, knowing he is missing out on a life changing call.

SLIDE 3: Picture

Now, all of this is dramatized. It makes for a good movie, an emotional scene. We can’t say that any of this happened. But, I think a scene like this points it finger at us, the viewer, and asks, could this be you? Would this be you? Do you long to follow Jesus as much as this man? If you could not follow Jesus, would your heart break like this man? Do you feel depth of the tragedy of living without Christ? Do you value Christ as much as this man does? It is a fictitious moment but a very real question. The truth is, for some of us, our decision to follow Christ really was not a difficult one to make. For me, I was blessed to grow up in a Christian home. And because if that, my decision to follow Jesus was encouraged, applauded, even rewarded in some sense. It did not cost me my relationships with family or friends. It did not upend my life. And the truth is, for some people, the decision not to follow, may be the hardest one to make as we see in Nicodemus’s agony.

Meanwhile, Jesus and his band are making their way, following their map when Jesus announces a shortcut. “We’re going through Samaria.”

SLIDE 4: “We’re going through Samaria.”

Everyone stops short, shocked, perplexed and maybe even a little offended at such a suggestion. So let me explain what is going on here. If you recall the very first scene of this episode was a flashback showing Jacob setting up camp and digging a well, indeed the same well that Jesus visits in Samaria. We know Jacob had 12 sons, but it was not one big happy family. Four women were involved in making of this family and Jacob played favorites. Jospeh was the son of Rachel, the wife whom Jacob loved most and Joseph got all the special treatment. So there is a sense of enmity present already. Joseph went on to have two sons: Manasseh and Ephriam, who were eventually promoted as full tribes among the tribes of Israel. These two tribes of Joseph settled in the territory that would eventually become Samaria. Eventually the kingdom of Israel split into two: Judah in the south, whose capital become Jerusalem and Israel in the north whose capital became Samaria. In 722 BC Israel was destroyed and its people were scattered among other nations, while at the same time, others nations were brought into the former land of Isarel. This mixing resulted in the loss of tribal lands as bloodlines became confused. New worship practices and idols became the norm as well. Judah in the south eventually fell as well in 600BC but their exile only lasted 70 years. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah recount the efforts of faithful Jews who committed to rebuilding Jerusalem. The Samaritans’ help was not welcomed in this rebuilding effort and so, for their part, they opposed this reestablishment of a Jewish nation and the Jews moving in considered the Samaritans to be unclean half-breeds who were unfaithful to God. Biblical scholar Andreas Kostenberger, gives us a helpful summery of the three main gulfs to keep in mind: 1) An ethnic gulf. The ancestry has been damaged beyond repair. Samaritans can no longer be consider true Jews so they are therefore, no longer chosen by God. Their status has been revoked. 2) A religious gulf. Samaritans worshipped in their own temple, not in Jerusalem as they ought. And though they believed in the books of Moses, the first five books in the Bible, they rejected the words of later prophets and so their understanding was incomplete. The third gulf comes down to morality. Coming into contact with a Samaritan would render a Jewish person defiled. They did not live right, so stay away. So by the time of Jesus, there had been centuries of division. (SHOW MAP)

SLIDE 5: Map

One of the disciples mentions that he has never even spoken to a Samaritan. It was like two people giving each other the cold shoulder, both unwilling to extend a handshake. But Jesus is done with all of it. He knows that God’s love is to be extended to all and not only confined to those with a properly documented ancestry. So he insists on breaking with convention and traveling through the dirty, defiled, despicable land of Samaria.

Once there, the disciples go into town to get some food, a huge step in their development, a first-time experience, a deep breath kind of moment for them. “Okay, here we go…” But, very quickly, the story shifts from food to water instead, as a lone woman treks to the famous well to fill her containers. John 4:4-9 READ.

SLIDE 6: John 4:4-9

So John includes a little editorial note here for his Greek audience to ensure we understand the tension that exists between these people groups. It is also somehow apparent to this woman that Jesus is a Jewish man. Maybe it was his appearance, or maybe his accent, we don’t know. But we should know, speaking to Samaritan woman is a double whammy. In fact, if Jesus were to drink from her jar, he would be considered unclean.

John 4:10-16 READ

SLIDE 7 & 8: John 4:10-6

The woman is caught off guard here if she wasn’t already. She is there at the well, in the heat of the day, by herself for a reason. She is an adulteress. A third strike against her…Samaritan, woman, adulteress. She is unfaithful in her many marriages, and unaccepted by decent folk. Her life is in stark contrast to Simon and his wife Eden who live to honor their oneness. But Jesus knows all about this woman. Somehow, there are no secrets with him. There is no use in lying…

SLIDE 9&10: John 4:17-26

I am he…This woman has a decent grasp on the role of the Messiah. She believes this prophet of God will teach everything to us. Jesus stands before her announcing his identity as the Messiah! What do you make of that? Surely he is out of his mind, but then again, hoe does he know all the things he knows?

SLIDE 11: John 4:27-30

She drops everything and runs into town ignoring the fact that she is shamed and isolated and has no voice worth listening to. She has three strikes against her, a nobody running and shouting about somebody. Who would listen to a raving loner? Who would pay attention to this woman of disrepute? Those who have ears to hear. She had a testimony to share, news to tell and she was not going to let her bad reputation stand in the way. The message she had to share was for any and all who would listen. Prepared speeches and polished words did not matter. She had seen the Messiah, she had heard him speak. She knew something about Spirit and truth.

Spirit and truth…Do we know about spirit and truth? Read the words of Jesus again, “God is spirit, and it is necessary to worship God in spirit and in truth.” What does that mean? How do we do that?

SLIDE 12: God is spirit

Well, let’s break it down: God is spirit. That means God is not physically located in a particular place. It means that God is not restricted by space. He cannot be represented by things. This is why idols are such a sorry excuse. We can’t see God, Jesus says the same to Nicodemus. The Spirit is like the wind, invisible, uncontrollable, unpredictable. If God is Spirit, what good is it to give him physical things? Animal sacrifices, money, beautiful temples and churches? The gifts we must ultimately render to God are spiritual in nature.

And what are the spiritual aspects of us? Of Humans? We are more than just physical beings. We have a thought life, we have desires, most people would agree we have a soul, a part of us that transcends the confines of our bodies. The bible speaks of the heart, not the muscle that pumps blood, but the innermost part of us. The place God’s spirit can come and make his dwelling. This is the spiritual temple, the unlocated, unconfined temple in which God lives; the temple of the human heart that Paul talked about in today’s scripture reading. This is why Jesus does not advertise Jerusalem as the only proper location for worship. He says, “Soon enough, in fact now, you will not worship here in Samaria or in Jerusalem.” It is not about a location.

William Barclay puts it this way: “The true worship is when man, through his spirit, attains to friendship and intimacy with God. Genuine worship does not consist in coming to a certain place not in going through a certain ritual or liturgy nor even in bringing certain gifts. True worship is when the spirit, the immortal and invisible part of man, speaks to and meets with God, himself immortal and invisible.” When out soul, in invisible, immortal part of us, meets with God in friendship – we are worshipping in Spirit and in truth.

SLIDE 13: “What is the purpose of man?”

The Westminster Catechism asks, “What is the purpose of man?” It’s a question that so many are struggling to answer. So many people are looking every which way for a clue. So many have grand plans and ways of finding themselves. But even if I were to be able to find myself, I would be just as lost as ever. The answer to the question, according to the catechism is this: “The purpose of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” So many are trying to glorify and enjoy themselves. That sort of life does not take long to fall flat, to grow stale. We need God in that equation. We need spirit and truth. We need the one who says, “I Am”.

And when we have the answer to this question of purpose, when we have this crazy spiritual answer, this answer that doesn’t make much sense at first, this answer that seems to bring up more questions, when we have this answer, we tell others about it. People might think we are raving. They might think we have lost all our marbles, but how else can they come to know the answer that we know unless we are willing to dare to appear stupid and speak up? In the film the woman is filled with excitement at having found the Messiah. She says to Jesus, “I’m going to tell everyone!” And Jesus replies, “I was counting on it.” And she runs into town, as despised and discounted as ever, yet she is unashamed to share the spirit and truth that she has found. She is unashamed to speak of her new friendship with God. She is unashamed to share the answer.

Is it true for us? Do we have a friendship with God? Can we speak to the purpose of human life? How concerned are we about how we might appear to others? Is Jesus really counting on us?

SLIDE 14: Verse 39

Verse 39, “Many Samaritans in that city believed in Jesus because of the woman’s word when she testified, “He told me everything I’ve ever done.”

We must go and do the same. Amen.