The Chosen: Indescribable Compassion S1E6 Memory Verse: Psalm 147:3

October 15th, 2023 Scripture Reading: Mark 2:1-12

**SLIDE 1: T ITLE**

 Today we are taking a look at episode six of “The Chosen”. And this one focuses on two miracles of Jesus. We have already seen him bring about an impossible catch of fish and we have seen him elongate the party of a friend’s wedding by turning the water into wine, but today we come to two examples of healings. And healings, I think, are in a class all their own. Fish and wine are amazing and helped certain people, but healing seems to go deeper. It’s certainly more personal. Healings also come with their own set of questions, which we will try to tackle today.

**SLIDE 2: Pictures**

All miracles are noteworthy. Word spreads and people talk about the amazing thing they saw. If they are wise, they give credit to God and the miracle serve to strengthen one’s faith. It is surprisingly easy though for us to chalk up a miracle to something like coincidence or even good luck. When our Phineas was jumping on our bed the other day, he fell off, as all monkeys do and directly smacked his forehead on the weighted bottom of our exercise bike. He immediately formed a disturbingly huge goose egg right in the center of his forehead. We got him ice, we observed the wounded area, we determined he was okay. Whew, that was lucky. A few months ago Ezra fell 10 feet out of a treehouse landing on his head and shoulder. We brought him to ER fearing a broken rib and a punctured lung was the result. When doctors assessed him, they found nothing but scrapes and bruises. Could have been worse, am I right? Our oldest son Noah enrolled as a freshman in college at a Bible school, but his bill for the year, came at an amount way under what we were all thinking. What a wonderful turn of events. No! In all these happenings, we give glory to God. In all these instances, we thank God for his hand of protection and provision. There is no reason these examples should have turned out as they did…except that God is good and he still works miracles, he still does impossible things! I shudder at all the instances I do miss. How many times has God bailed me out or blessed be in an amazing way while I just stroll on by as if it’s just an ordinary day. Well, spoiler alert, the power and provision of God is the everyday reality in a place called the Kingdom of Heaven. In fact, the bible does not really use the word “miracle” to describe Jesus’ amazing acts. A miracle is something wonderful and impossible, but the word used in the New Testament to talk about Jesus’ amazing acts is *semion,* which means sign. The things Jesus did, the miracles he performed were not for some sort of entertainment, it was not an effort to shock or awe, it was not even primarily as a means to helping those in need. Jesus’ miracles served as a sign pointing to something. Jesus wanted the people he helped and the crowds who heard about it to look and see the kingdom of heaven.

**SLIDE 3: Picture**

 Episode six opens at the pawnbrokers where the line is going out the door and down the block. We are introduced to a man who is desperate for money. He has lost everything and is now willing to sell his rather expensive set of masonry tools. The clerk comes to find that the man is actually leprous. He covers his face, he shouts for him to get out, he mentions the possibility that his man could bring us “all down to hell.”

 Leprosy was a big deal in the ancient world. Scholars must admit, when we see the word used in scripture, we don’t have too many specifics on what it means. The general consensus is that leprosy refers any number of skin diseases. What we now call Hansen’s disease, which involves a slow growing bacteria, if untreated, can lead to paralysis or crippling of the limbs. But we know now this disease is not especially contagious. There are issues like psoriasis, which is flaky or scaly skin or vitiligo, which involves the loss of melanin in patches of the skin, but however we imagine what leprosy might have meant for the ancient world, for the Jewish people, it was not a medical problem, it was a spiritual one. Teaching about this issue goes all the way back to Leviticus chapters 13 and 14. And we know leprosy was a spiritual malady because it was the priests, not doctors, who oversaw the diagnosis and treatment of the issue. They were the God-ordained arbiters of who could and could not be a part of the community and who had to be cast out because of their leprosy/sin. A leper could not enter the temple or even the community because they would be considered unclean. This is how Leviticus 13:45 puts it: READ

**SLIDE: “Anyone with such a defiling disease must wear torn clothes, let their hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of their face and cry out, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’” Leviticus 13:45**

 Though the skin disease itself may not have been contagious, the impurity certainly was. God was concerned with purity. Jewish people were not allowed to touch bones or handle certain materials. They could not walk over graves and if they had to bury a body or engage in unclean activity, they would remain unclean until the next day. The law set up a very stark distinction between clean and unclean and this distinction makes us very uncomfortable today. The modern impulse is to accept people as they are with no judgement whatsoever. Separating into categories is not the way to treat people. But the Jewish people were to live into the Law of God and this law was very concerned with and conscience of sin! Sin makes you impure and the way to get clean at that time was to go through the system that God had set up. Follow the rules, offer the sacrifices and do what you must to remain clean before God. In the film we see a leper walking out in front of Jesus and his crew. Let’s read the account as Mark puts it in chapter 1 verse 40-45 READ (By the way, “incensed” here actually means “to have the bowels yearn”, in other words, a gut reaction, a feeling of pity…not sure why the CEB chose this rendering, but they do include it in a footnote.)

 First of all, this leprous man is not strictly following the rules. He is supposed to stay away, out of the community. And when others are around, he is supposed to warn people by shouting out loud, “Unclean! Unclean!” But this man was driving by a faith in Jesus’ ability to heal. Mark does not tell us how the leper knew of Jesus. The film makes a line about his sister being at the wedding in Cana, but the man is convinced help can be found in Jesus. As he approaches, everyone starts to panic and freak out. They do not want to touch him or even breathe the same air. The disciples are all reacting to this man’s presence, but not Jesus. He approaches the man, and the man says, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.” Not at all a demand, not even really a request…just a vote of confidence, a declaration of faith. Very importantly now, Jesus reaches out his hand and touches this man. If anyone else were to touch this man, they too would be made unclean. The contagion would spread. But Jesus, fully knowing all the rules that apply, touches the untouchable. And the longstanding formula was reversed. The overwhelming purity of Jesus is what spread to the man. Jesus touched him, he says he is willing, and he declares, “Be clean!” The man’s skin returns to normal and then Jesus tells him to do two things: 1) Live into the rest of the law and get yourself checked out and cleared by a priest as Moses commanded. Jesus upholds the law. He endorses the dichotomy of clean and unclean, of sinful and righteous. 2) Don’t tell anyone about this. Mark is quick to let us know that the man did not follow this portion of Jesus’ orders. He went out and blabbed to everyone of the great news of what had happened to him.

 Similarly, later in the episode, Jesus is visiting Zebedee’s house. Some people began asking him questions and a conversation began. Soon all the folks in town are standing outside the house straining to hear what is being said. I love the way the movie depicts this sort of grassroots kind of teaching. Jesus was a rabbi, he had followers, but if you read the gospels, you get the impression that his parables and lessons are born from his immediate surroundings, or as this scene depicts, what is in the local headlines. Jesus is truly teaching people, he is not merely presenting information. He knows how to pivot, how to engage his listeners, and as the pharisees quickly observe, he somehow knows how to teach with some sort of superior authority. The crowd continues to grow. We even see Matthew joining the kids on the rooftop. Simon sort of mockingly says he should take notes in his tablet. In another scene, we also hear the Roman Preator Quintus call Matthew a “fine reporter”. Just some excellent foreshadowing to Matthew’s eventual role as a gospel writer. Som, the crowd grows and soon enough, a woman who knows Jesus’ powerful abilities, has brough her paralyzed friend for a miracle. But the cot is obtuse, and the crowd is unwilling to make room. With no other options available, they opt to try the roof. They cause a commotion, they interrupt, they make dust fly…again, Jesus remains completely calm. He looks squarely at the woman responsible for all the ruckus. He would be justified in being annoyed or offended at the interruption, but instead he says to her, “Your faith is beautiful.”

**SLIDE : Picture**

The lame man is lowered, and Jesus adds a little twist. We need to pick up on the twist. Instead of reaching out and healing this man, Jesus instead declares to him, “Your sins are forgiven.” The film does a great job of capturing the response of the pharisees. They know that such things cannot be legitimately declared. They know blasphemy when they hear it. Only God can forgive sins! But Jesus takes this opportunity to drive home a very crucial point. He puts up his dukes so to speak. He says, “Which is easier to say to this paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up, take your stretcher and walk?’” Rhetorical question here right? Everyone knows that talk is cheap. I could say whatever I wanted to say. I could claim anything that came into my mind. I could speak any old words, but what good are they? What do they mean if they are not true? Obviously Jesus, it would be easier to forgive sins with words than it would be to heal a lame man’s ailments. Jesus follows up this obvious question with a bold statement, “But so that you might know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins – I tell you, stand up.” The man stood, he walked out of the house and through the crowd. People were amazed and glorified God. The film has this great shot of the man, walking for the first time, but he is not necessarily smiling. He looks thoughtful, unsure of what just happened. Because remember, this man was more than simply healed. His ability to stand and walk was more than just restored. This man’s sins were forgiven. His greatest need was not for new legs, it was for a new heart. It was to be made clean, just like the leper was. His greatest need, a need he was maybe not even aware of, was met in Jesus.

 Now to the question about healings. We might easily ask, what about the others? What about all the other people with diseases and ailments? What about Shua, the blind woman? Why didn’t Jesus bring healing to all of them? Why doesn’t he bring healing to all of us now? The long answer and the short answer are the same…I don’t know. Nobody can say definitively. Are those who are healed more faithful and those who are not more sinful? That would at least be a formula we could work with, but God’s ways are not our ways. Sometimes that is the answer we must settle on. Remember, these miracles and healings, they are not to shock and amaze. They are not even primarily to help people! If Jesus came primarily to help people, then he would have gotten rid of the Romans, we would have filled every net with fish, he would have healed all the ailments. But the miracles do not serve the here and now. They are signs and they point to a coming kingdom. In that kingdom there will be no need for healing, because all sickness and suffering will have ceased. There will be no need for miracles because God’s abundance will be all in all. The miracle is not the main thing.

**SLIDE 6: The miracle is not the main thing.**

So many churches these days want to focus on the here and now. Feed the hungry, house the homeless, prioritize social justice concerns and put you time and energy into this present world. For these churches and leaders, our job as Christinas is to fix this broken world. The problem is, this world is passing. It is not the main thing! Now, of course, we live to be helpful , we look to relieve suffering, we want to be of service and advocate for those who have no voice, but we know our purpose serves much more than the pains of this world. We attend to an eternal reality, a kingdom that is coming. As Nicodemus states in this episode, we can “Keep to the ancient roads and still keep our eyes open to the unexpected.” To something that is coming.

**SLIDE 7: Picture**

Think of it this way: when you drive into Yellowstone National Park, you might pull over and take a picture at the sign as a nice little keepsake. But how many of us would snap the picture, get back in the car, turn around and head for home? No, we acknowledge the sign and understand that it is pointing us to the actual glory and beauty of this amazing park. We acknowledge the sign and continue on with great expectation for bigger and better things! Don’t stop at the sign…don’t accept the sign as the main thing. We don’t seek after miracles, we seek after the provider of miracles. We don’t need a magician; we need a King whose kingdom is not of this world…whose kingdom is coming.

**SLIDE 8: Why do you come to Jesus?**

 Why do you come to Jesus? Is it because you can’t walk, or you have a skin disease? Why do you come to Jesus? Is it because you have seen his glory and acknowledge his power? Why do you come to Jesus? Is it because you have nowhere else to turn? Or maybe you feel the weight of sin and need to find relief from the guilt, or maybe you understand your brokenness and need to be fixed. Or maybe Jesus was the one your parents seemed to promote. Maybe we come to Jesus because why not? A lot of other people seem to find value in him. Or maybe you don’t come to Jesus. Maybe you are trying to tackle this world by yourself. Maybe you feel capable and up to the challenge. Maybe Jesus is the backup plan in case of emergencies.

 I’ll tell you why I come to Jesus….I come to Jesus for hope. And I come for hope because I have no hope in other people. I have no hope in our political system. I have no hope for a better world of our own making. I have no hope for my children’s future, and I certainly have no hope in myself. My hope is in Christ and in the promises of God that he came to fulfill. My hope is in a Kingdom, one that has come but has yet to come fully. A kingdom of eternal life, eternal worship and eternal joy. My hope is in Christ who, through his death and resurrection, offers me restored relationship with God. That is why I come to Jesus.

 What is easier to say: “Come to me and I will fix your current problems? Or, come to me and I will provide for you for all of eternity.”

 Why do you come to Jesus? Are you looking for temporal healing or ultimate forgiveness? A magician or a King? A good man or a holy God? Why do you come to Jesus? It’s time for us to nail down our answer to that question and once we’ve got it, tell someone else. Amen.