The Chosen: The Wedding Gift S1E5 Memory Verse:

October 8th, 2023 Scripture Reading:

**SLIDE 1: Title**

 Today we are taking a look at episode five of “The Chosen” miniseries. Hopefully you have been watching each episode along with us. Last week much of the focus was on Simon, the fisherman who just seemed to continually strike out, until Jesus called him into a new role, that of a fisher of men. And in that scene, we saw Jesus preside over a miraculous catch of fish. Today’s episode takes us to the village of Cana where Jesus performs what most people consider to be his first miracle. So we have a bit of a snag in the chronology here that I want to address. Which miracle did Jesus perform first? Why are the film makers doing things in the wrong order?

 I want to make two quick points here, one is, the filmmakers did lay out a caveat before episode one that some stories and timelines as they appear in the gospels may be adjusted or condensed in their presentation of the story. But it is also important for us to understand that the gospels themselves are not necessarily written in strict chronological order. Scholars have debated for thousands of years the exact timeline of events as they occurred in Jesus’ time. We tend to read the gospels as history, and the main priority of our history books is to tell us specifically when something happened. But the gospels writers were not writing with us in mind. They had different priorities in relating the story of Jesus. I would say, of all the gospels, Luke was probably most concerned with chronology. He addresses his gospel to a man named Theophilus and states right from the get go, in verse 3, “I have decided to write a carefully ordered account for you most honorable Theophilus. I want you to have confidence in the soundness of the instruction you have received.” SO even for Luke, who admits he has worked hard to make sure his account is accurate, the even bigger priority is that his reader would have boosted confidence in the content of what Jesus said and did. The gospels are ultimately about Jesus, not strictly about history.

 And, speaking of Luke, he is the only one who mentions anything about Jesus as a boy. He relates the story that opens this episode. Mary is frantically trying to find her son, the only begotten Son of God, the miracle child, the one who was to sit in the throne of David over an everlasting kingdom…this is the son that has disappeared and has been gone for three days in the largest city at it’s busiest time! I don’t know about you, but I have lost a child before. And I’ve done it enough times that I can remain pretty cool about it. I realize that most likely the kid in question is down the next aisle or around the next corner. But what if they are not…it they are not your heart starts to beat a bit faster and you start to take your steps a bit quicker. Your eyes switch to scan mode and your head goes on a swivel. You toss up an involuntary one word prayer… “Please…” And at some point in the process, amidst the panic you begin to feel like a bad parent. You think of all the ways you should have paid better attention, you should have tightened down that strap better, you should have never come the Manitou Days celebration in White Bear Lake in the first place. There is this incredible guilt. You are the one tasked with oversight of this child. You are responsible for their well-being. They are lost…probably fine, probably unaware that anything is wrong, but there is no denying the looming dread of the worst case. Now, in my defense, I have never lost a kid for three days and I have never lost the specially chosen Messiah like Mary did. We see her in her panic, trying to find Jesus anywhere and everywhere and to her relief she hears the voice of her husband reporting that Jesus had been found. Both parents are shocked to hear that Jesus was in the temple.

**SLIDE 2: TEMPLE**

 The centerpiece of Jerusalem, of all of Jewish life! The temple was the place where God had chosen to dwell. And the director does a great job at capturing the immensity and grandeur of this gigantic temple as the camera pans upward to show it towering over the rest of the city. And skinny little, dirty Jesus was not only in the temple, but teaching the teachers! He is rather confused at his parents’ panic. “Didn’t you know that is was necessary for me to be in my Father’s house?” Jesus asks. It’s hard to be mad at your child while being proud of them at the same time. Luke is quick to inform us in chapter 2 verse 51 that Jesus was obedient to his parents as imperfect and faltering as they might have been. Take a moment to think about that…the Almighty Creator not only became a human, but he put himself in a position wherein he would obey other sinful, broken, mistaken humans. I am sure Mary and Joseph did their best raising Jesus, but, like any parents, mistakes were made. Yet Jesus obeyed these imperfect people. Later in the episode as Jesus travels with is companions to the wedding, someone makes a comment about the possibility of important people being there and Jesus quips, “The important and powerful person I know will be there…my mother.” It’s a fictional line not found in the bible, but we will see how this comment does really reflect Jesus thinking about his mother Mary.

 The episode transitions in time to Jesus as an adult and we are introduced to a poor family scrapping to put together a wedding feast for their newly married son. Times have changed, but many things stay the same. Despite their humble budget, the family is doing whatever they can to be impressive. They want to be able to extend the highest standard of hospitality and make sure all the details are attended to properly. Jesus’ Mother Mary shows up and immediate looks for ways she can be of assistance. She takes on the burdens of the hostess and strives to help in anyway she can. Biblically, we do not know anything about this family. Obviously, Mary and Joseph knew this family in some way and the writers of the show make a reference to Jesus growing up as friends with the new groom. This fits well with the little we do know and it helps draw us into the event as it takes place.

 I want to take a moment to discuss wine, the fruit of the vine. In other scenes we see Simon’s wife Eden stomping on grapes and turning them to wine, and, at the wedding reception, wine does in large part become the star of the show. It is important to note, that for many of the villagers in Cana, wine would have been a very special treat. “Without wine,” as an old rabbinic saying goes, “there is no joy.” Bread, water and vegetables were their main diet. Meat and wine were decadent rarities. Wedding celebrations, like today, were highly anticipated, but unlike today, they usually lasted a whole week. If you imagine people traveling from far and wide to attend the occasion, it makes sense that visitors would want to hang around. This dynamic adds even more stress onto the hosting family as hospitality was such a foundational virtue. If at any time throughout the course of this celebration the wine were to run out, the hosting family and the new couple would experience much shame and humiliation. The film heightens this tension by making the in-laws of the host rich snobs who can never be pleased and then ballooning the attendance to the party to double what was expected. And after a while, the wine runs out. Mary, who has identified with the hostess, who wants everything to go as well as possible, feels an urgency to do something about this humiliating situation. And the best thing she can think of is to turn to Jesus. But Jesus is not prepared to do anything. Providing a wedding with wine does not play into the work he has of proclaiming the kingdom of heaven. As he clearly states, his time had not yet come. And yet, his mother, saying please, turns to the servants and tells them to listen to Jesus. Almost as a favor to Mary, Jesus decides that he will help. He commands that purification jars be filled to the brim and then he has a sample of it brought to the master of the feast. The wine is a hit, the best anyone has ever tasted! And the celebration continues without a hitch.

 There is one shot in this story that we do not want to miss. Again the moment of the miracle, the moment when the water turns into wine is not described in Luke. In the film Jesus has everyone leave the room. He then looks up to heaven and prays. As he does so, he takes his hand and dips it into the jar. As he lifts his had it drips with red wine.

**SLIDE 3: PICTURE**

But in the image, we see more than wine, we see a foreshadowing, a future picture of that same hand dripping with red blood. His own blood. The blood shed on behalf of sinful humanity. The blood that saves us and cleanses us from all sin. The wine Jesus provides at this wedding saves a family from disgrace. The blood Jesus provides at the cross saves all who would believe in him by his grace. So wine, as important as it was then, is made even more important now as we are experience every time we share in Holy Communion.

**SLIDE 4: THOMAS**

Throughout this episode, we are introduced to a new character Thomas, who is portrayed as a wine seller/party planner. From the gospel accounts, we know very little about Thomas, but he has famously earned a nickname: Doubting Thomas. And as he prepares the jars of wine for the journey to Cana, he questions whether their supply will be enough. His partner tries to ease his worry and Thomas responds, “I just want to be certain.” I think we can all relate to this line. Certainty makes us feel safe. It helps us know where we can stand, and how to plan for the next step. Certainty is more or less an illusion however. We are certain the car will run fine, we are certain the house will hold up, we are certain that tomorrow will be a lot like today…until it isn’t. Our plans, other people, the economy, our possessions, our tomorrows…none of these things are certain. But church I tell you, the word of God, that is certain! Remember what Luke said to Theophilus…”I want you to have confidence, to be certain, of the soundness of the instruction you have received.” I want you to know that you can know this gospel for certain. God’s word told Abraham that certainly his descendants would live in a land that is not their own, that they would work as slaves for 400 hundred years. And toward the end of the bible, Peter tells us that we can be certain of the words we have heard from the prophets, “because no prophecy came by human will. Instead men and women led by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:21). Now, we can know and believe that God’s word is trustworthy and certain, but that does not mean that we will never doubt. Of course questions will arise, and I believe we are encouraged to investigate those questions, to wrestle with them, to bring them before God and this community of faith and engage in those questions together. Thomas wants to be certain, we all do, but what do we do with our doubt?

In the film, before the miracle occurs, Jesus calls Thomas to follow him as one of his disciples. Thomas is a bit sidetracked, worried about the wine crises. He is listening to Jesus, waiting to hear some sort of solution, but Jesus is making no sense. Thomas says in frustration, “From the directions you provide, I see no logical solution to the problem.” Have you been there before? “Lord, I don’t understand, this doesn’t seem to be making sense!” And Jesus replies, “It’s going to be like that sometimes Thomas.”

**SLIDE 5: And Jesus replies, “It’s going to be like that sometimes Thomas.”**

In other words, if you follow me, you will not always be certain. If you follow me, problems will not always have a logical solution. If you follow me, your perception of this world and how it works will be changed, and you along with it. Certainty and logical solutions are not values in the kingdom of heaven. Trust and obedience are. Jesus trusted in his Heavenly Father and he also obeyed his earthly mother. Thomas cannot comprehend what has happened before his very eyes, the party continues even better than before, but for Thomas, the certainly upon which he once stood has caved. He will need to find a new foundation on which to stand. We all do.

There is more to discuss in this episode. Nicodemus visits John the Baptist and has a very interesting conversation, but I want us to take a look at Simon and his wife Eden. We see a new Simon report to his wife his recent experience with Jesus. He is a new man in her eyes, no longer downcast and defeated, but now excited and filled with purpose. Simon knew, he was certain, that this Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, but he did not know and was uncertain of what that would mean for his life. That speaks to each of us. We are all in that same boat.

He compares himself to Elisha. In the book of 1 Kings, after Elijah had challenged and defeated the prophets of Baal, he flees to Mount Horeb. Elijah is burnt out and ready to die. He figures he is the only one left who is faithful to God. But God reassures him that he is not alone and he tells Elijah to go find a man named Elisha. Elijah does so and finds Elisha out in the fields plowing. Elijah throws his cloak on him and calls him to follow. Elisha immediately leaves his plowing, in fact he kills the oxen and burns the equipment, he bids his parents goodbye, and follows Elijah, intending to never look back. Simon sees himself as one who drops everything to follow after the man of God. But look at what God says to Elijah in verse 16 of chapter 19, “Anoint Elisha from Abel-meholah, Shaphat’s son, to succeed you as prophet.” Elijah was finding a replacement for himself. Now, we would not say that Jesus was picking Simon to be the new Son of God, the new Savior of the world, but Jesus was calling Simon to be a Christian, a term that literally means “little Christ.” Jesus was calling disciples to replace himself in this world. After he rose and ascended into heaven, Jesus left behind a cadre of men and women who loved the Father just as he did. Who loved other people just as he did. Who proclaimed the kingdom and served the poor and healed the sick and found victory through humble obedience just as he did. You and I as disciples of this same Jesus are little Christs, acting and speaking and loving as he does.

**SLIDE 6: You and I as disciples of this same Jesus are little Christs, acting and speaking and loving as he does.**

 Simon tells Eden that Jesus said he would fish for people, and Simon adds, “I don’t even know what that means.” But along with this uncertainty, Simon expresses a willingness. At one point he tells Jesus that he would follow him to the ends of the earth. To where? Who knows? To do what? I’m not sure. Will safety and comfort be certain? Absolutely, they will not. But who else has the words of eternal life? No one. The Word of God is certain, and it is that alone on which we can stand. And as modern day Elishas, as little Christs, we ask others to follow us and become disciples as well.

Amen.