The Chosen S2E4: The Perfect Opportunity Memory Verse: John 5:6

Oct. 6thth 2024 Scripture Reading: Leviticus 23:33-36; 42-44

**SLIDE 1**

We have reached episode 4 of season 2 of *The Chosen*. So far this season we have been introduced to James and John, the brothers whom Jesus nicknamed the “Sons of Thunder”. Then we saw the backstory of Nathaneal, who Jesus referred to as “an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” Philip, who was a former disciple of John the Baptist was also included in that episode. Last week we were not introduced to anyone new, but we got a glimpse of what the disciples might have experienced, what they might have discussed as Jesus spends a whole day healing an unending line of needy and hurting people. One of the questions raised in last week’s episode was something each of these Jewish disciples wondered: “If Jesus really is the Messiah, when are things going to start heating up? When do we start the battle?”

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 With that context, episode four now introduces us to Simon the Zealot. Now from Scripture, that is all we know. We know there was a disciple named Simon and we know he was a Zealot. Luke 6:15 and Acts 1:13 are the only two references we have and they simply mention Simon and attribute to him the descriptor, zealot. Now, we know the root of that word. A zealot is one who is zealous, someone who is eagerly devoted to something, who boils over with passion, who is deeply committed. And in this context, Simon was zealous for the law, the Torah. In fact the zealots were one of four main groups of Jews at the time of Jesus.

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There were the Pharisees, they were teachers of the law. They lived and worked among the people and their aim was to make sure everyone followed God’s laws. So they taught and interacted with the everyday people.

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Then there were the Sadducees, they were more the priestly class who worked in the temple and they were considered to be more amicable with the Romans. They were more willing to accommodate and follow along with the decrees of the Emperor.

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There were the Essenes, of which many think John the Baptist was a part since this was a group that sought to remove themselves from corrupt society. Their main desire was to be pure before God, so they literally lived beyond the city walls out in the wilderness, which is where John comes from when he enters the story. If you are familiar with the Dead Sea scrolls, those documents were thought to have been preserved by an Essene community.

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Finally, the fourth group would have been the Zealots. Their passion for God’s word, their commitment to God’s ways led them to focus on the idea of revolt. Zealots were willing to give their lives for their cause, but they were also willing to take lives as well. Their goal was to destroy Rome and declare independence for Israel. Now, there is some debate as to how organized the zealots would have been in the first century. We don’t know if they had training camps and a developed hierarchy or a complex web of informants like we see in the episode, but I suppose it makes for more dramatic storytelling to include all those elements. We do know they were passionate about their faith and their national identity and that they were willing to take up arms. As mentioned in the episode, their motto may well have come from Psalm 69:9

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 “Because passion (or zeal) for your house has consumed me, the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me!” So we see here a zealot takes on suffering and ridicule as part of their identity. This verse is applied to Jesus in John’s gospel when he clears the money changers out of the temple. Making a whip and overturning tables we are told was a zealous act. But we also keep in mind Jesus words to Peter spoken on the night he was betrayed; “He who lives by the sword will die by the sword.”

 So, let us take into account for a moment, who Jesus has chosen thus far: He has two sets of brothers who were fishermen, a tax collector, a disciple of John the Baptist from the wilderness, and, according to the show, a wine merchant and an architect and now a zealot. These are all Jewish men and yet you can see how tension is sort of baked into the cake.

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They not only hail from different economic standpoints, but they also approach God’s word from different vantage points. Matthew accumulated wealth by skimming off the backs of his own people in the service of Rome. Simon the Zealot would have been frustrated by what he would consider to be laziness or apathy from the rest of the disciples. And brothers may love each other in the end, but that doesn’t prohibit the normal arguing that would have taken place. If I were to put together a crack team of world changers, I would have extended auditions…I would have kept looking. But Jesus knows what he is doing and, just like the church today, we come from all walks of life, all different backgrounds, but we find unity in Christ. Paul writes in 1 Corinthains 1:26-30 READ.

**SLIDES 9-10**

We are all in Christ. He is our righteousness. He is our deliverance. Without him we are disparate people trying to find purpose in our own selves.

 This episode does a good job of depicting the very important Jewish festival of Booths, or as it is sometimes called, the Feast of Tabernacles.

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It’s one of three festivals in which Jewish people will actually travel to the temple in Jerusalem in order to celebrate. We see throughout the episode the disciples constructing a temporary hut that will be used to commemorate the years their ancestors spent living in the wilderness. Not only do the booths serve to help Israel remember its past, but, as Jesus mentions in the episode, booths are a “leveler of people”. Rich and poor alike find themselves sleeping outside during this festival. In the end, Christ himself is the leveler of people. All will bow low before him. But the unity of disparate peoples does not end in bowing. The bible tells us that for those who humble themselves, the Lord will raise them up. Our allegiance to Christ as King comes with great reward.

In the episode, as Jesus and his disciples are sharing a meal in the handmade booth, ­­­­­­­­­Big James recites a section of Zechariah 14 which is a description of the “Day of the Lord”.

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In scripture, “The Day of the Lord” is a euphemism for the end of time, that is, the final day, that day when the Lord himself returns. As one study bible put it, “Good eventually wins, but it’s going to get ugly”. Zechariah prophesies a battle that involves all the nations that takes place in Jerusalem. Violence and plundering will destroy Jerusalem. Light will disappear, the land will become like a desert. Plagues will abound, but verse 16 says,

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“All those left from all the nations who attacked Jerusalem will go up annually to pay homage to the king, the LORD of heavenly forces, and to celebrate the Festival of Booths.” The question for Jesus is, “How can this be? How can it be that even those who are not Jews could come and share in this sacred meal, a meal that is meant for remembering wandering in the wilderness? That is our story!” Jesus asserts here that, in fact, everyone has wandered in the wilderness. Everyone has wrestled with God. Everyone is invited to come home, to share in his holiness, to be restored, but sometimes, we prefer to go back to Egypt. We prefer to live in the safety of what is expected. Sure it might be slavery, but at least I know what tomorrow brings. Freedom can be risky…freedom can go off the rails real fast. How will we get food? Where will we go anyway? Do I want to be free if it means I end up dying in the wilderness? This question might seem simple to answer at first, but it’s worth taking the time to think about it carefully. Do I want to be free even if it means I end up dying in the wilderness?

**SLIDE 14**

 Do you really want to be free? Do you want to get well? In John chapter 5, Jesus stands before an invalid man, a man who had been sick for 38 years. Would you turn with me to the story? John 5 ( Page 1295 in your pew bible). READ 5:1-9.

38 years he had spent at this pool. This is more than a length of time, it’s more than a number. As John writes he is referring to a number that every Jewish person would be well acquainted with. It’s found in Deuteronomy 2:14, as Moses recounts the wilderness journey of God’s people he writes, “It took us thirty-eight years to go from Kadesh-Barnea until he crossed the Zered Ravine. It was at that point that the last of the previous generation, everyone of the fighting age in the camp, had died…” So John’s readers, right off the bat would understand that this invalid, though he spent his time by this pool, he lives in the wilderness. And what he was doing there is a little ambiguous. In fact, you might notice something strange in the bible, look closely at verse three, “a crowd of people who were sick, blind lame, and paralyzed sat there.” And then what follows verse 3? Verse 5…”A certain man was there who had been sick for 38 years.”

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So there is no verse 4, but look at the notes on the bottom of the page and there we see the missing verse. It gives an explanation as to why people might be gathered at this pool. Apparently they are waiting for the water of the pool to be stirred.

When that happens, the race is on as it is only the first person who enters the pool who will be cured. This is a contested verse because it does not appear in the earliest manuscripts. It is most likely that John, who is not so concerned with fine details, did not write this. After all, John does not even tell us what festival Jesus is attending, he simply says, “a Jewish festival.” So we cannot be sure how or when this verse was added, but we can assume that these sick and lame people were looking for some sort of healing that they believed could be derived from this pool. In the show, the writers indicate that the pool had become a pagan shrine of some sort. This is based on other historical information, but we can’t be sure what the religious state of this pool would have been in at the time of Jesus. In any case, we do know that his man was utterly alone. He had no one to help him. Then Jesus enters the scene.

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 “Do you want to get well?” Is this a stupid question? It is like asking a slave, “Do you want to be set free?” Or maybe even like asking a sinner, “Do you want to be forgiven?” It seems the obvious answer is, of course, “Yes”! Cure my sickness, loose my chains, remove my iniquity…but sometimes, sometimes we are not up for taking on a new identity. Sometimes we would rather stay the same, we’d rather stick with what we know. We get entrenched and we find ourselves too deeply rooted in our slavery, our sickness, our sin. Jesus asks, “Do you want to get well?” And notice the man’s answer. Verse 7, “I don’t have anyone who can put me in the water…” I think this episode does a great job writing a script around this conversation. Jesus replies, “That’s not what I asked you…” This is not about special water or about the fact that you are alone in your situation. Self-pity is useless. This pool is useless. Remaining in bondage, in illness, in sin and rebellion against God is useless…And what’s more you know it is. Christ comes to set the captive free, to bring healing, to forgive sins. He comes to make all things new.

**SLIDE 17**

I love how this show depicts very clearly that Jesus gets a kick out of healing people. He loves to do it! He enjoys it. The gospel accounts record many instances of Jesus healing, but they usually describe the person being healed. Of course, we want to know how they react and the effects of their healing, but we never hear Jesus’ reaction. But I think the filmmakers get it right. They show Jesus break into a big smile, his eyes dance a little and he shares in the joy that comes with healing.

Jesus loves to heal.

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One thing I think they missed in this episode was the reaction of all the other folks who were laying around that same pool. Why did only one man receive healing that day? What about the others? Why just one guy? We have that same question about our own experience. Why do some prayers seem to be answered and other go unheard? Why do things work out for some people and not others? Is God being selective? The answer is yes and no.
 This show, in it’s entirety is called *The Chosen.* That term in and of itself indicates selection. God selected one man out of the entire population of humanity to be the grounding for a new, chosen nation. He goes by the name Father Abraham. And from Abraham came the Chosen Hebrew people who were later called Israelites. The ones who wrestle with God. From the Israelite people, God selected one fair maiden to give birth to the Chosen One, the Messiah himself. He then went on to choose disciples who would go on to establish the church and change the world. So yes, God is selective…We can’t deny that he chooses some and not others, but God’s choice is not exclusive. It is not that God chooses some and ignores others, but he chooses some for the sake of all. The nation of Israel was chosen by God for the sake of the entire world. They are selected not to enjoy some sort elite status, but rather to live as servants of the Lord for the sake of the whole world. Jesus was chosen for the sake of the whole world. Each disciple was chosen for the sake of the whole world. And you? And me? We are not here to keep it to ourselves. We are here to pick up our mats, to show everyone our new life and to point them to the One who makes newness possible. Eventually Jews and gentiles will meet together at the same table celebrating the same Lord and remembering our time in the wilderness, because we’ve all been there at some point, we all need healing, we all need to be set free. Thank God he chose someone who could bear all our iniquities and carry all our shame and lead us in the way of everlasting life.

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“Do you want to get well?” Forget the man-made pools you have trusted in, forget the long years you have waited. Jesus comes, the Sun of righteousness, with healing in his wings. This healing is not for ourselves, it is for the sake of the whole world. So let us get up, pick up our mats and walk. When we do that, when we live out the healing power of God, surely someone will want to know what happened, and for the sake of the whole world, we can say it is Jesus who has made me well. And for those of us who are still longing for that touch from the Lord, hold on. Philo, the great Jewish philosopher of the first century wrote, “God never ceases doing, but as it is the property of fire to burn and snow to chill, so it is the property of God to do.” God is a God of action. He does what we cannot. Jesus said in verse 17 of that same chapter, “My Father is still working, and I am working too.” Hold on, my Father is still working, and I am working too. So let us rise, pick up our mats and join in that work. Hallelujah! Amen.