The Chosen S2E5: Spirit Scripture Reading: Ephesians 6:10-20

Oct. 13th, 2024 Memory Verses: Psalm 140:7,144:1, 2 Corinth. 15:57, 1 John 3:8

**SLIDE 1**

 Today we are going to take a look at episode five of the second season of *The Chosen.* There are a quite a few plot developments that occur in this episode, but I think I will largely lay them aside simply because they are narrative points that have been added in order to add some drama and interest to the characters. Things like a potential jealousy between Matthew and Thomas when it comes to the woman in the midst, Mary Magdalene falling back into her old way of life, Jesus and John the Baptist having a conversation as they hash out the do’s and don’ts of ministry. All of these elements might help tell the story the show is developing, but they are speculative.

 What I want to do today is pick out a few moments that transcend speculation and apply to our lives as modern day disciples. And the first comes from the very beginning of the episode. Mary Magdlene is out with a basket picking fruit and we can notice that as she carries out her task, she is also holding on to a scrap of paper. On it is written Psalm 139:8

**SLIDE 2**

 “If I went up to heaven, you would be there. If I went down to the grave you would be there too!” We talked about this psalm quite a bit last week, but it struck me as rather important that Mary, who is actually just learning to read and write, was trying to memorize this verse while doing the otherwise mindless task of collecting fruit. How many of you have mindless tasks to do? My most hated chore to do is laundry.

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The main reason is because, in our house, there is so much of it. We have never actually been caught up with laundry. There is a sort of insidious futility to the whole process. Just when a load gets folded, and new pile of dirty cloths has already formed. And what’s more, once a load is folded, it still has to get put away, and who has time for that?? No one in my home. But when we are faced with a mountain of clothes, and our loft upstairs is overwhelmed, what do we usually do? We put on a movie and drag out the bins and we have a folding party. Everyone plays a part in getting the mind-numbing job done and most of the kids are okay with it because we have the equally mind-numbing TV on while we get the chore done. And if it’s not TV, it’s music playing, or it’s something playing on a phone…What I’m saying is, our standard practice of getting through the monotony of chores is…distraction!

**SLIDE 4**

Distraction is great because I don’t have to think! The TV does all the talking for me! I can basically become an automated robot going through motions and not engage my mind at all. In addition as it turns out, not only is my mind disengaged, but my heart is remains completely inert as well. There is a scene in this episode where Jesus has a conversation with Simon the Zealot. Now remember, as a zealot, Simon is ready to fight! He has trained hard, his dagger is sharp. He wants to see Rome taken down. In their conversation Jesus says to him, “I ask you to understand the nature of my mission.” Simon is a little confused. In his mind, his mission is crystal clear. “How?” he asks Jesus. And Jesus gut punches us all when he says, “It’s not so easy with distracted humans.” Which is to say, it’s not so easy with humans because humans are distracted! In fact, the latest data coming out regarding the attention span of adults comes in at a whopping 8.25 seconds…shorter than even that of a goldfish. Experts pin this decline on the average adult’s increased use of internet and phone usage. We are training our brains to short-circuit. Much like an addiction, we are conditioned to need some new stimuli constantly. And this is sure to impact the practice of our faith. How can I read the bible or spend time in prayer or study for any length of time if I am unable to focus? Now certainly, we can all reign ourselves in to a certain degree and we can get things done when needed. If the matter is important enough to us, we can apply ourselves and focus when need be. But be assured of this, God is not calling us to be goldfish, darting from one rock to the next. One of the ways we can intentionally combat this trend is to put away our phones, turn off the TV and give some of our attention to our God.

**SLIDE 5**

 When it comes to those mindless chores, how much better if I were to get the job done while trying to memorize scripture like Mary does in this opening scene! How much better to utilize my time by trying to learn scripture! Maybe I’m waiting on hold, or standing in line, or doing the dishes or weeding the garden or mowing the lawn…whatever it might be, if we can curb our need for distraction, set our mind upon God’s word and engage our hearts, we will find that our mind-numbing, time-consuming tasks are redeemed.

 But distractions are everywhere. And if we shut our eyes and plug our ears, distractions still loom within our own minds. And I know I have said this before, but Satan does not need us to be the worst kind of criminal, he would happily settle for distracted Christians. We see Satan’s direct influence **SLIDE 6** addressed in this episode as a possessed man attacks the disciple’s camp.

When asked his name, the man cannot communicate it. His mind and body have been overrun by some other presence. He does not have the capacity to focus. The demon names himself Belial which is a term for Satan that we find in 2 Corinthians 6:15. In such a state, this man has no ability to identify himself. The demon has taken over and he cannot even recall his own name. It is hard to say what passage from the bible this part of the episode is based on, but if we look at Mark chapter 1, we read an account of a man in similar circumstances.

**SLIDE 7-8** READ Mark 1:21-28

Now, I believe in the reality of demon possession. I believe that it is a part of the spiritual battle that rages all around us. And I believe that is why distraction is such a crucial tactic for our enemy. If he can get us off his scent, if he can get us to believe that he is not real and possession like this is a fairy tale or a misunderstanding or some ancient thing that does not happen anymore, then he has won. The fact is, possession like this can and does still occur but we also see demonic effects in other ways. Sometimes Satan gets a hold of people through addictions, be it alcohol, pornography, or even anger. Our addictions certainly have a physical dimension but we cannot dismiss the spiritual aspects of these struggles.

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Depression is another way in which we allow Satan to creep in and distract us. Medication can be a help to many when it comes to the symptoms of depression, but we would do well to be aware of our spiritual state as well. What about something as basic as attitudes? Have you ever said something that was out of character and hurt someone else in the process? Have you ever done something and afterwards thought, “Why did I do just do that?” Maybe you have had someone in your life act that way toward you. And you might say, “Well, sure, we are humans. We all have idiosyncrasies and foibles. We are not perfect. We all have our hang ups and we all feel down at times…” To that I would say, true, we all struggle in some ways. That is normal for us as humans. But it is also normal for us to be entrenched in a spiritual reality that we cannot see or hear…a reality that can at times rear it’s head.

**SLIDE 10**

 Paul writes in Ephesians 6:12, “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”

To be human is to struggle. To be human is to be distracted. But we struggle not so much against ourselves or against our bodies or against chemical imbalances. We struggle with spiritual forces. Darkness, wickedness, demons.

Now, I want to be clear, as we saw in Mark’s passage, Jesus casts our demons! Amen? Jesus does not sit down to negotiate or reason with the powers of this dark world. He casts them out! He gets rid of them! So, if you are a child of God, if you trust and believe in Jesus as your Savior, if you are filled with the Holy Spirit, then you are protected.

**SLIDE 11**

You cannot be possessed as this man was. You can’t because a greater power is in you, the One who casts out demons is in you. Hallelujah! But full protection does not mean that we cannot be influenced by Satan and his minions. Each of us are tempted each and every day. Each of us are drawn to sin, to ignore God, to forget his way, to be distracted. Next thing you know you are coming to your senses saying, “Why did I just do that? How did that happen?” You were influenced, prompted by the powers of this dark world. The Apostle Simon Peter would eventually communicate this truth to us with crystal clarity in 1 Peter 5:8,

**SLIDE 12**

“Be clearheaded. Keep alert. Your accuser, the devil, is on the prowl like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” What is Peter saying here? He is not talking about an animal at the zoo, he is talking about something *like* a lion, meaning a spiritual reality, a spiritual presence that has an appetite and it’s on the hunt for you. Don’t come under it’s influence. Don’t give demons a chance. Don’t assume that just because you can’t see them, they are not there. Keep alert. Be clearheaded. Don’t be distracted.

**SLIDE 13**

In the scene by the river as Jesus and Simon the Zealot are talking Jesus takes Simons dagger, admires it for a moment, and then, with a slight smile, tosses it into the water. Simon objects of course. He asks, “You have no use for that?” And Jesus replies, “I have a better sword…you’ll see.”

We see this sword from Jesus in the story from Mark.

**SLIDE 14**

Verse 25, Jesus speaks harshly to the demon, “Silence! Come out of him!” The unclean spirit shook and screamed, then it came out. Did you see his sword? Take a look at Revelation 19:11-15…there it is! There is his sword coming out of his mouth. Can you imagine seeing a magnificent king riding into battle on his great white steed, covered in his own blood and holding a sword, not in his upraised fist, but in his mouth?

Jesus has a better sword, his word. He speaks, and it is done. To the void of space, he speaks, “Let there be light…” To the raging storm he speaks, “Peace be still..” To the dead little girl he speaks, “Child arise…” To the demon seeking to devour he speaks, “Come out!” To the onlooking world as he hangs on a cross he speaks, “It is finished!”

Jesus has a better sword…his word.

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It comes from his mouth, it tears down strongholds, it routes demons, it raises the dead. And one of the best things about this word is not even that it is so powerful but that we get to hold it in our hands, we get to know it in our minds, we get to be changed by it in our hearts. This word of God can slice through a zealot’s zeal, a pharisee’s rules, a fisherman’s net, a tax collector’s savings, and a Methodist’s shell. Oh, c’mon, you know we like to stay in our shells…it’s comfortable in there. We need a word from God, for his sword to come and cut us free from our shell, from our agendas, from our fears, from our own plans, from these clinging demons trying to influence us… We need his sword to cut us free from distractions.

Is your life distracted? Are you unfocused? Is Jesus just there in the mix somewhere? Do you feel the influence of some demonic powers that need to be eradicated? I hope you do, because if you do, it means that you are aware, you are staying alert. And when it comes to the prowling lion, we can lay him out cold, by the power of His word. We are not going to overcome distractions and demonic influence by ignoring them. We need power! The power of the sword of God’s word.

We all have this power available to us. We hold it here in our hands. We access it with our eyes, We believe it in our hearts. So, as Mary Magdalene was shown memorizing scripture as she when about her chores, I want to present you with a few verses to try and do the same. These verses are not just snippets of scripture, they are not just words, they are God’s words. They have power. “Let there be light…Peace be still…Child arise…Come out!...It is finished.”

**SLIDE 16-17**

Psalm 140:7 “My LORD God, my strong saving help – you’ve protected my head on the day of battle.”

Psalm 144:1 “Bless the LORD my rock, who taught my hands how to fight, who taught my fingers how to do battle!”

1 Corinthains 15:57 “Thanks be to God, who gives us this victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

1 John 3:8 “The person who practices sin belongs to the devil, because the devil has been sinning since the beginning. God’s Son appeared to this purpose: to destroy the works of the devil.”

**SLIDE 18**

Take at least one of these verses this week and arm yourself with the power of God’s word. Recite it while you are out and about, repeat it while you are working, pray through it while you wait in line. God is speaking. Are we listening? His sword is striking. May we be open to the blow. Amen.