

Notes for “The Chosen” series (Season 1) small groups Pastor Barry Foster

The following notes offer some background information, brief explanations related to Scriptural content and context, and suggestions for things to look for when viewing the episode. One practical note: you may find that it is easier to understand what is being said if the captions are turned on when viewing the show.

Episode 5 “The Wedding Gift”

Episode 5 focuses mostly on Jesus’ first public miracle—turning the water into wine at the wedding in Cana. (See John 2:1-12.) As we begin, Jesus is still gathering disciples and has not yet begun his public ministry. The miracle changes that.

But there are two other significant parts of this episode. We open with Jesus’ visit to Jerusalem at age twelve, which introduces us to his mother, Mary. (There will be a notable link with the wedding involving her.) We also hear and see more of Nicodemus’ interrogation of John the Baptizer in prison.

In this episode we get to see the creators’ interest in showing us the disciples. They are becoming fully-developed characters with different personalities, who are crucial to the telling of the story. We meet another of the disciples, Thomas, the famous doubter, and learn a bit more about some of the others.

As in all cultures, weddings were significant events. Jewish weddings typically involved a week of feasting and celebration, and included extended family and community members. Marriages were usually arranged by the parents. The groom’s parents might choose his bride for him, though sometimes he would choose a woman, and his parents would then negotiate for him. Couples were formally betrothed to one another once the marriage agreement was completed. Betrothal was nearly as binding as marriage; from that point forward until the ceremony, each continued to live with their respective families, but a writ of divorce was needed to break the marriage agreement. The marriage covenant could be oral or written, but usually involved three gifts which sealed the agreement: (1) the marriage present was a gift of goods or money from the man to his bride’s family, as compensation for the loss of her services; (2) the dowry was a gift from the bride’s parents to the bride (land, servants, goods, or money); (3) a gift from the groom to the bride (jewelry, clothes, or money). Betrothal lasted for a year or more, during which the groom prepared a home to receive his wife. Normally, on the day of the wedding, the groom and his companions would walk in procession to the home of the bride and escort her back to his or his parents’ home for the wedding ceremony and feast. Singing and dancing accompanied the feasting. After the wedding ceremony, the couple would retire to the bridechamber, or *huppah*, a specially prepared tent or room where the marriage would be consummated. (Jews today still use a *huppah* as a canopy for the wedding ceremony.) The feast would continue for the rest of the week (or more).

Some things to look for:

1. Note the importance of honor and the need to avoid shame (dishonor), and the connection between honor and wealth. Jewish society at the time was strongly dominated by the dynamic of honor and shame—it was a defining mark of their culture.

2. Nicodemus (the Pharisee) and John (the prophet) have a fundamental disagreement over what it means to be faithful to God. Compare their perspectives and assumptions.

Some questions to consider:

1. Why does Jesus perform the miracle at the wedding? How does this miracle reveal Jesus' person and mission, and to whom? How is it hidden from others? Why is Jesus hesitant to perform miracles in public?

2. How do the creators make the disciples appear as "real people"? What do you see in their interactions with one another and in the development of their personal stories that makes them believable characters?

3. How does Nicodemus' visit to the prison and discussion with John help each of them?