

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 8 “I Am He”

Our season finale brings together several very significant passages of Scripture and skillfully weaves them into a beautiful and powerful tapestry, while also threading through the episode a motif that connects the different parts of the story and three women from very different times.

The first significant passage comes from Genesis 16:7-16—the story of Hagar, the servant of Abraham’s wife, Sarah, who becomes pregnant after Sarah proposes to Abraham that they try to have a child through Hagar. After being driven out by Sarah, Hagar cries out to the Lord, who responds to her, and lets her know that he has seen her and promises to care for her and for her son. This motif, that God is the “God who sees me,” is central to the entire episode.

The second significant passage comes from John 4—the story of the woman at the well in Samaria. This woman, whose history with men is one of repeated failure, whose current situation is one of shame and blatant sin, whose husband disdains even to look at her, finds herself the specific target of God’s sight. She will be one of the first to hear Jesus declare himself clearly as the Messiah, and one of the most effective witnesses to him.

The third passage is in Mark 1:29-31, where Jesus heals Simon’s mother-in-law, a miracle of healing he performed in secret, but which led to many miracles of healing he performed openly. Though she is hidden away from sight, Jesus demonstrates to Simon and his wife, that God has not been blind to her need (or to theirs).

Two other verses, though only briefly mentioned, are prominent in the development of Jesus’ teaching. Daniel 7:13-14 (see further below) is a key verse to which Jesus points in his use of the term “son of man” to refer to himself. Jesus also quotes from the prophet Hosea (6:6; see Matthew 9:12-13) to defend his practice of welcoming and befriending sinners.

Some things to look for:

1. Rabbi Shmuel, in his dispute with Nicodemus, insists that “the Law . . . is God.” This statement, which would have been seen as a bit of hyperbole by many Jewish rabbinical scholars, who rightly distinguished God from the Law he spoke, nevertheless represents a viewpoint and a tendency among the Pharisees to conflate God and the Law. That the Law was supreme for the Pharisees may be seen in the rabbinical declaration that on the Sabbath, God himself rested—and studied the Torah!

2. Rabbi Shmuel is also responsible for another revealing observation. When he refers to the incident in the previous episode where Jesus healed the paralytic, he notes that Jesus spoke of himself as the “Son of Man,” and rightly connects it to Daniel’s vision of the one “like a son of man” who came before God to be given dominion over the eternal kingdom of God (Daniel 7:13-14). The expression itself (“son of man”) was ambiguous enough that Jesus could use it in public

without alerting Romans to its significance. In ordinary Aramaic (the language Jesus spoke), the expression could be a way of speaking of oneself in a mildly self-deprecating fashion. It could also simply be used to mean “a human being.” But Jesus is using the term very intentionally: those who knew the Scriptures would have connected it to this vision of Daniel, and assumed, as Shmuel rightly perceived, that Jesus was claiming to be the Messiah. (In fact, as Shmuel realizes, he is actually claiming to be equal with God, to be divine himself.) Romans, who did not know the Scriptures, would miss the reference altogether.

3. According to tradition at the time, the well in Samaria was supposedly one dug by Jacob. There is no mention of this in the Bible, though Jacob did sojourn in this portion of the land during his life. It is quite likely that he, like his father and grandfather, would have had to dig wells whenever they could in order to care for their flocks and family.

4. The Hebrew expression, “*Eshet Cayil*,” meaning, “woman of valor (or of great worth, honor),” is a shorthand title for the poem of the godly woman in Proverbs 31. The phrase is mentioned only in passing in this episode (though the English translation and the reference to the poem in Proverbs has been used several times, most notably in Episode 2 about the Sabbath). However it is interesting to note that this episode features three women who would be unlikely candidates to deserve that title on first glance: Hagar, the outcast slave girl, the unnamed Samaritan woman with a sordid marital history, and Simon’s mother-in-law, the sick peasant woman.

5. Note that as Jesus’ fame and reputation are growing, something else is also on the rise—opposition to him and his message.

Some questions to consider:

1. How is the title significant in this episode? What is its connection to the motif of “the God who sees me”?

2. Have you ever felt like God wasn’t paying attention to you in your need? Did there come a time when you realized that “he saw you,” and brought you what you needed? Were you grateful at the time, or angry (disappointed, frustrated, resentful) that it took so long?

3. What do you find interesting about how (or where, or when, or why) Jesus did miracles?