

Notes for “The Chosen” series (Season 3) 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 1 “Homecoming”

Season 2 ended with Jesus ready to preach his “Sermon on the Mount,” and introduced us to the character of Judas of Iscarioth. Season 3 picks up right where we left off, though (as usual) we first get a glimpse at a scene from the past, in this case, concerning Matthew’s history.

In episode 1, we are introduced to two new minor characters, both of whom are mentioned in the New Testament. The first is Jairus, the administrator for the synagogue in Capernaum. Jairus is known for appealing to Jesus to heal his daughter (see Mark 5:21-43 and the parallel passage in Luke 8:40-56). The second is Joanna, whose husband, Chuza, is the steward over Herod Antipas’ household. (Herod Antipas was a son of Herod the Great, and the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea.) According to Luke 8:1-3, Joanna was one of the women who accompanied Jesus with the disciples while he was touring in Galilee and provided financial support for the ministry from their own means. Since this passage describes Jesus’ ministry during the earlier portion of his time in Galilee, Joanna would have been among the group of disciples who were with him the longest. It is therefore not a surprise to see that she is also listed among the group of women who followed Jesus’ body to the tomb, returned after the Sabbath intending to finish preparing the corpse for burial, found the tomb empty, were greeted by two angels, who told them that Jesus had risen, and reported this to the apostles (Luke 23:55-24:11).

New Testament scholars generally concur that what we term the “Sermon on the Mount” (Matthew 5-7) is Matthew’s compilation of Jesus’ teaching rather than a verbatim transcript of what he said that day. Luke, for instance, includes much of the same material, but scatters it in different places in his gospel. And it would not have taken more than half an hour to say all that is recorded in Matthew 5-7, yet the context clearly indicates a fairly lengthy time of teaching. There certainly was an event in which Jesus gathered a large crowd of disciples and taught them for a lengthy time. Much, or even all, of what we find in Matthew 5-7 may have been included in his teaching at that time. But since Jesus was an itinerant preacher, he would have repeated many of his sayings a great many times, which could account for the differences we find in some of the versions of his sayings.

Episode 1 gives us some glimpses into that famous sermon, with pertinent connections to various sayings in it for several of the disciples. We get to see some very practical attempts by his followers to do what he has said. We also see some excellent examples of people who were confused by what he said, or dismissed it altogether—both of which were highly likely responses.

Machaerus (the “black fortress”) is mentioned as the site where John the Baptizer was imprisoned. This is quite likely. Machaerus was one of the fortresses built by Herod the Great as defenses for his kingdom. Located about nine miles east of the Dead Sea in one of the wadis (gullies that occasionally filled with rain water), the castle towered about 3,860 feet above the Dead Sea and 2,546 feet above the Mediterranean. It was here that Herod Antipas had John executed. The ruins are still visible.

Some things to look for:

1. The title, as well as some of the themes from Jesus' sermon, point to a key idea that is the focus for this episode. Look for ways in which Jesus' sayings touch the disciples in particular areas of their need.

2. The episode offers three different means by which Jesus' teachings might have been preserved—all of which are not only plausible but highly likely. See if you can spot each of them.

3. We are also given a peek into the character of Judas, who appears to be sincere when he says that he thinks Jesus might be the Messiah, and wants to spread his message throughout the world. Yet there are hints of some possible stumbling blocks that could be in his way. The writers put words in his mouth that represent a belief about the Messiah that was commonly held by many who yearned for his coming. (Listen for it!)

Some questions to consider:

1. Try to imagine that you don't know the end of the story concerning Judas. What do you find in the show's portrayal of Judas that seems believable? What do the hints that are dropped about him suggest to you? What else do you know about him from Scripture?

2. How does Jesus' welcome and acceptance of Judas model for us what we should do in welcoming and accepting others who are interested in Christ or the church?

3. Which of Jesus' sayings from the sermon strike you the most deeply? Why?

4. What can you see happening in the disciples' relationships with one another that point to the challenges they faced as followers of Jesus? What do you see there that can help us as we learn how to be followers together in the church?