

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 3: “Physician, Heal Yourself”

As usual, our episode begins with a flashback. In this case we see Jesus as an infant at home with his parents, then playing with another child of about the same age. Unless you turn on the captions, you would not realize that the other child is not a sibling, but a child named Lazarus, the son of a neighbor or friend. John 11:1-44 is a famous passage in which Jesus raises Lazarus from the grave. In verses 1-5, we learn that Mary and Martha are his sisters, that they live in Bethany, and that Jesus had a close friendship with the three of them. The creators of this series have chosen to picture that friendship as having begun in childhood in Nazareth, which is a plausible explanation, but certainly not something that could be proven. It does allow for an introduction to the three characters: Lazarus, who is a loyal friend to Jesus, Martha, who is the “rules-follower,” and Mary, who is the outspoken and not-so-easily-restrained girl, captivated by Jesus and eager to recognize him as Messiah. Why the sisters are unmarried is not addressed (nor is it explained in the Bible).

This episode focuses entirely on Jesus’ final visit to his home town of Nazareth, and follows the longer version of this story that is found in Luke 4:14:30 (see also Matthew 13:53-58; and Mark 6:1-6). This event happened sometime close to the middle of Jesus’ time of ministry in Galilee, as Mark and Matthew indicate. Luke moves the story to the front of his account of Jesus’ ministry for thematic purposes, but includes an introduction in verses 14-15, and a reference in verse 23, which indicate that Jesus has been active in ministry for some time before coming to his home town.

Four things are notable about this visit: (1) Matthew, Mark, and Luke all point out that Jesus was not received or honored by the residents of Nazareth, but disbelieved and rejected. (2) Matthew and Mark emphasize that he did not do any miracles there because of their unbelief. (3) Luke emphasizes Jesus’ self-identification as the one who fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah 61 (the Messiah). This is important, for Jesus was very careful about when, where, and to whom he was speaking when he acknowledged that he was the Messiah. Most of the time he deflected when he was asked directly or challenged about his claim, or he answered in very cryptic ways that would not arouse the suspicions of the Romans or encourage wrong understanding about what he came to do. (4) Luke also emphasizes quite pointedly that Jesus was challenging the Jewish belief that their status as God’s chosen people meant that salvation was not available to Gentiles.

The setting for this visit to Nazareth is the celebration of the New Year, the festival of Rosh Hashanah (Hebrew for “the head of the year”), which occurs in September or October. The expression, “*L’shanah tovah*,” is a traditional new year’s greeting that means, “to a good year,” and expresses your wish that the year would be one of blessing and good favor for the person. Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, follows the festival, and is a time for reflection and repentance, asking God to forgive all of the sins of the previous year.

Some things to look for:

1. Two of Jesus' brothers are mentioned briefly (James and Judas), along with an allusion to some conflict they have with Jesus. Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3 list four brothers: James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas; Mark's version includes a reference to his unnamed sisters, who are said to still be "with us," that is, in Nazareth (and presumably, married to others rather than still in Mary's home). John 7:3-5 describes a conversation in which Jesus' brothers' challenge him, and notes that they did not believe in him at that time. But Acts 1:14 includes Jesus' brothers among the believers, and Paul mentions meeting James, the brother of the Lord, whom he calls an apostle, though not one of the Twelve, and includes him in his list of those to whom Jesus appeared after his resurrection (Galatians 1:19; 1 Corinthians 15:7). The author of the letter from Jude describes himself as the brother of James (Jude 1). This has traditionally been understood to indicate that he is Judas, the brother of James, the author of the letter from James, both of whom are Jesus' half-brothers. That they do not identify themselves as his brothers probably reflects the recognition of the early church that Jesus' family members did not have a special status in the church. (See Matthew 12:46-50.)

2. Mary says that the two brothers of Jesus are staying in Sepphoris, a large Roman city approximately four miles from Nazareth, which would have been where many of the men from Nazareth might have been able to find work. Like Jesus and his father Joseph, they would likely have been employed as builders—masons and carpenters or craftsmen.

3. Joseph has died some time before Jesus began his ministry. This is inferred from passages like Mark 6:3 which refer to Jesus as the son of Mary, rather than the son of Joseph; Mark 3:21, 31 which describes Jesus' family as his mother and brothers; and Matthew 13:55 which refers to Jesus as the "carpenter's son," without naming Joseph.

Some questions to consider:

1. Jesus is portrayed as not very athletically gifted. Why do you think the creators chose this way of depicting Jesus? How does thinking about Jesus in this way fit with your usual way of thinking about him?

2. What is the cause of the opposition to Jesus from the people in Nazareth? To what do they object? Why do you think their resistance to him was so strong? What resistance to Jesus have you seen in people you speak to about him?