

Notes for “The Chosen” series (Season 2) 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 “Thunder”

Season 1 ended with Jesus revealing himself to the woman at the well in Samaria and coming to the town of Sychar at her invitation. We will pick up the story there after Jesus has been teaching in the town and attracting much attention. But as is usually the case, there is an opening scene that takes us to another time and place.

This time, however, the scene is not in the past but in the future. The disciples are older, having gathered after being separated for some time. The occasion is the death of “Big James,” and the group is “sitting *shiva*”—the seven-day period of mourning observed by Jews upon the death of a family member or friend. James was the first of the Twelve to be martyred, about the year 44 CE; see Acts 12:1-2 for the biblical account.

John is interviewing the other disciples to record their memories of their times with Jesus. His intention is to write an account telling who Jesus is that is based upon eyewitness testimony, one that will complement the account that Matthew is writing. Note his concern to explain that Jesus was more than a mere mortal man, which will be a key theme in the introduction to his gospel (John 1:1-18).

The hostilities between Jews and Samaritans are an important element in the story. Historically, both groups hated each other. Ethnic and religious pride on both sides kept the two peoples’ animosity toward one another well-fueled. The Samaritans were descended from Gentiles who were brought into the land by the Assyrians after the northern kingdom of Israel was conquered in 722 BCE. They intermarried with those who had been left behind to tend the land and developed their own form of religion that included the worship of Yahweh. The Samaritans had their own version of the Torah (the books of Moses), which was the only sacred text they acknowledged. They had their own temple on Mount Gerizim, and different customs.

Ramah and her father demonstrate the tension inherently involved in Jesus’ calling of women to follow as disciples, as well as the cost of following him. In that culture, fathers were responsible for their daughters until they were married. Even afterward, if the daughter’s husband were negligent or abusive, the father could take it upon himself to intervene to protect his daughter. Not only does Ramah’s decision to follow Jesus cause her father great pain, it is also a point of shame—her actions (which go counter to everything in the culture) cause him to lose face before the rest of his community. The gospels do not explain how it was that women were able to choose for themselves to follow Jesus, something that was quite unusual, even shocking, for that time. They simply note the presence of women among Jesus’ disciples.

Some things to look for:

1. John refers to Mary, Jesus’ mother as “mother,” and she calls him, “son.” On the cross, Jesus indicated to John that he was to consider her his mother, and to Mary that she was to consider him her son. Jesus was directing John to care for his mother as he would for his own.

(See John 19:25-27.)

2. The gospels note that the Twelve frequently argued about who was greater. Look for examples of jostling for position, influence, status, and authority among the disciples, both overtly and subtly.

3. The writers have taken the liberty of treating an important parable of Jesus (Luke 10, the good Samaritan) as an actual historical event, in order to dramatize the encounter between Jesus and a Samaritan man in great need. The role reversal is significant, but the main point this encounter makes is the grace and love of God, who seeks out the one who is sick rather than being content to stay with those who are well.

4. There is a motif that quietly weaves its way through the episode—the contrast between light and darkness. Look for various ways it plays out in the dialogue, settings, and staging.

5. Note well the concluding blending of the introduction to John's gospel and the opening of the creation story in Genesis.

Some questions to consider:

1. Both Jews and Samaritans expected the Messiah to usher in a time of perfect peace and end the suffering of the world. Jesus says that he has come to bring into this world a kingdom that is not of this world. What is his answer to the question about suffering? How does his ministry relate to that question?

2. Do you consider yourself worthy of being forgiven? Of being helped? Healed? Are there people who are not worthy of God's blessings? How does one become worthy enough to receive what God has to give?

3. How can we keep fresh in our minds and in our habits Jesus' commitment to go to the ones who are sick rather than concerning ourselves with the ones who are healthy?