The Chosen S2E8: Beyond Mountains Scripture Reading: Philippians 2:12-18

Nov. 3rd, 2024 Memory Verse: Matthew 5:3

**SLIDE 7**

Today we come to the last episode of season 2 of *The Chosen.* Of course, as a season finale, the filmmakers need to leave us hanging wanting to see what happens next. So this episode builds up to Jesus’ famous sermon on the mount. We are shown scenes of Jesus preparing, of the disciples preparing, of various townspeople preparing and then, just as Jesus walks out to speak in front of the huge crowd that had gathered…roll credits. So I guess we know how the next season is going to begin.

 But there are some interesting developments or observations that occur in this episode and some that are instructive for us. The first is the sermon itself.

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We find the sermon on the mount in Matthew chapters 5-7. If you have a red-letter bible you will see that these three chapters are in full color. There is no narrative here, Matthew records that words of Jesus only. Now, many scholars would conclude that these three chapters most probably represent a compilation of Jesus teachings. It is very possible that Matthew might have taken important teachings from over the course of Jesus’ ministry and he might have laid them out in a way that he thought fit well or in a way that he thought best represented the teachings of Jesus. This view of the sermon is more like a greatest hits collection of Jesus in retrospect. I must say that I myself have ascribed to this view. It’s what I was taught. I trust that Jesus said all those things at some point and that the Holy Spirit had a hand in guiding Matthew as he wrote out his version. Besides, if I am honest, the sermon on the mount as we have it in Matthew, just doesn’t flow that well. In my opinion, as someone who prepares sermons, the sermon on the mount seems like it jumps around and it feels a little like a sampling more so than a fully thought-through single sermon. That’s been my feeling about it.

 But I love how the filmmakers presented the sermon on the mount in this episode. Jesus is shown preparing,

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 toying with the wording of things, trying to make sure he gets the message just right. Matthew is shown working closely with Jesus. He furiously writes down all the thoughts that Jesus expresses. It’s not unusual for a teacher to have a scribe. Paul used one and we know the prophet Jeremiah did as well. They talk about the order of things and what might make for the best opening. The director of the show, Dallas Jenkins, has mentioned that this aspect of Jesus as he is presented preparing caused quite a bit of controversy within the fanbase of the show.

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 Jesus is God, why would he have to prepare a sermon? Wouldn’t he know what to say and exactly how to say it?

 Indeed, we affirm that Jesus is God, but we also affirm that he is human. Scripture itself testifies that Jesus learned obedience through suffering. We would not expect God to suffer, yet we know Jesus did. Working an honest day’s labor, starting fires, cooking food, walking everywhere he went, growing weary and needing sleep….these were the human limitations the Son of God worked within. Surely the labor of sermon prep was not foreign to Jesus. I believe he learned to honor his heavenly father as he worked to memorize the Torah as a boy and as he labored to communicate the difficult and ultimate truth about the kingdom of heaven as a man.

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whatever we might think of Jesus level of preparation, I love the idea that Matthew has recorded for us a single sermon in it’s entirety. I still think it feels disjointed and clunky, but I think that may be a problem with my perception, not a defect in the sermon. I want a smooth delivery with plenty of anecdotes and personal stories. I want to be drawn into the sermon with a little humor and it helps to have an organized flow of thought that holds my hand along the way. When we get to the end of the sermon, I should walk away with three salient points and a warm feeling inside. To most of us, that’s a great sermon. In fact, seminaries and bible colleges teach classes called homiletics.

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 In those classes we supposedly learn how to write and deliver sermons. Usually, the sermons presented are required to follow a certain formula and include specific elements. Now, taking a class on preaching is probably a good thing to do, but it seems that, overall, we have based the formula for sermons on human psychology and human preferences rather than what we have before us; this sermon of sermons from the King of kings.

 The sermon on the mount constitutes an entire series on it’s own, but I would like to take a close look at the introduction to the sermon, what we normally call the “Beatitudes”.

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 Beatitude means “blessing”. When I was a kid, I always thought Jesus was talking about the attitudes we should have. Essentially Jesus is saying “Be these attitudes.” But then you see the list of attitudes that Jesus gives, and it can be quite confusing. Some of these attitudes are not the sort of things most people aspire to be.

**SLIDES 8-9** READ Matthew 5:3-11.

 It is certainly an off-kilter way to start things off. It doesn’t really go down easy. There is no lighthearted bounce or ingratiating smile here. Jesus is honest, real. In the show, Matthew reflects on the sermon and he says to Jesus, “It seems like there is not a lot of good news.” Even in the intro we see that to be true. “Blessed are you when people insult you and harass you…when they speak all kinds of bad things about you”? Matthew’s comment would have likely been our thought as well. “Jesus, you have some great ideas here but you might want to lighten up a little bit. Maybe throw in a short anecdote, maybe even a joke or two? You want to make sure you are inviting and that people will want to hear more.” Jesus responds to Matthew’s honest critique. He says,

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“I am not here to be sentimental and soothing. I am here to start a revolution.” But he clarifies that this Christian movement is a revolution, not a revolt. Jesus is introducing the world to his kingdom…it is not more of the same, it is not a different flavor of some ideology. It is a new way of life that begins with a new heart that is birthed in a new relationship with God. There is no violent upheaval or strategic coups…there is the revolution of transformation….change from the inside out. We know enough from thousands of years of documented human history to understand that the world will not be changed with the inauguration of a new political leader, or the overthrow of a foreign dictator or a major shift in policy. These are more of the same. Jesus ushers in a revolution: the introduction to a new thing, a new kingdom that will never end and never be defeated.

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Jesus also tells Matthew, “I don’t want passive followers.” A revolution can never come about if left in the hands of passive followers. A passive follower gives up in the face of inconvenience. A passive follower loses interest after a while. A passive follower picks and chooses what they want to hear. A passive follower will not try to convince others of their position or their beliefs. Jesus and his sermon on the mount do not leave room for passivity. It really is the best sermon ever!

The writers of the show have likened this intro to Jesus’ sermon, these beatitudes, to a map. **SLIDE 12** If you want to find Jesus look for those who are poor in spirit, who grieve, who are humble, who hunger for righteousness, who show mercy, who have pure hearts, who are harassed for righteousness sake, and who are insulted because of the name of Jesus. Again, we are not talking about people who are the cream of the crop. This “map” if we want to call it that, does not point us toward the successful, the wealthy, the charismatic, the smiley, the presentable, the ones who draw the most views or have the biggest churches. Jesus is elsewhere. And in this world, he can be surprisingly hard to find. But he has not left us without a map.

 Maps are so important as they tell us where we are and where we are going. When the worship team rehearses, we lay out a song map for each song (picture).

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It usually begins with an intro and from there we go into verse one, then the chorus and so on. I always write down the map in the margin of the page. It is nice to have because you can glance at it and know where to go next. Do we sing the bridge a second time? Do we go back to verse 1 here? When is the ending? All this is answered with a quick glance at the map. A map is especially important when we are learning a new song. As you probably know it is important that all members of the worship team are playing the same part of the song at the same time. If I am playing a song by myself, I can flub the order and change things up, but when it comes to playing together as a group, we want to be following the same map. A map provides guidance, but it also instills confidence. If I know where I am going, and I know everyone else is going with me, I can take that next step with boldness and with purpose. If I am not sure where to go next and I am sort of taking a stab at it, if I’m not sure others are moving with me at the same time, I am going to feel very hesitant and cautious. Hesitant and cautious are often synonymous with passivity. No one wants a passive worship leader who is tenuous and questioning. Our worship should be bold and declarative; full of faith and purpose. Passive worship is an oxymoron. Even if the idea puts a bad taste in my mouth. We are made to engage in worship, not just observe. The possibility of danger being present where Jesus might lead can make us hesitant. This hesitancy then becomes passivity and it eventually eclipses our desire to follow him.

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But we come now to these disciples…men and women who have followed Jesus knowing the ultimate destination, but not knowing too much about what comes in between here and there. These unknowns could easily stir up a sense of hesitancy in these disciples. “I don’t know what is coming. I don’t want to take that next step.” Jesus does not want passive followers. He desires that we fully embrace blessing with both arms. And how do we do that? We follow the map! We live into the revolutionary transformation that Jesus wants to bring about in our lives. As I said earlier, a revolution cannot be brought about among passive people. We are included in the process.

Our effort and our commitment are needed. Our salvation is incarnational. The term “incarnational” refers to Jesus being born at Christmastime. Jesus is the incarnation of God;

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God enfleshed. It is a miracle – an impossible thing because we understand Jesus to be fully God and fully man. He is not half and half – or God on some days and man on others. He is not God in a man suit or some sort of costume. He is 100% God and 100% man; fully both. So when I say our salvation is incarnational, I mean God does all the work, and we do all the work. It’s not that God does his half: dying for us and achieving our atonement and making a way for us to be saved from sin and the grave, and then we do our half: obeying him and living a life of good deeds. No, God does it all…he sees the process of our salvation through from beginning to end, and at the same time, we do it all as we continually surrender and submit and die to ourselves. Paul puts it very helpfully in Philippians 2:12,

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“Work out your salvation with fear and trembling…” Work it out, practice your faith, live a life of good works, be active in your repentance and be alert in your fight against sin. In other words, don’t be passive. This revolutionary transformation is not just going to happen to you. It is not a magic spell, it needs to be worked out. We see the same truth expressed in Colossians 1:29 as Paul talks about maturity and growing in our faith he writes,

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“For this purpose I also labor, striving according to his power, which mightily works within me.” Our maturity, our salvation, is incarnational. It is fully the work of God and fully the effort we put forth. Paul is striving but not in his own strength. He is laboring according to the power of God…he is working out his salvation with fear and trembling… and notice what gets the work done…it is God’s power that mightily works, but where does it work? In me. In you. In Paul. In all Christians who are willing to let the revolution begin within them. In all Christians who are willing to follow this map, God’s power works mightily.

**SLIDE 18**

A map, even a map from Jesus, does me no good if I am not willing to read it and follow it. I have to get up and take certain steps in order to follow this map. I have to work it out, I have to do some striving, I have try my best trusting that God’s power is at work within me. Passive followers will find not use for this beatitude map. Passive followers will not strive for maturity or work toward a life of blessing. Passive followers will sit this one out.

But we are here, in this church, as followers of Jesus. We are not here to be passive. We are not here to wait for some magic spell from God to make everything right. We are here to get to work, to labor according to his power. We are here to follow his map that leads to transformation deeper relationship with him. At first glance, it might not seem like a lot of good news…it might seem too hard and we might question if the journey is worth it, but if we are not passive, if we actively cling to Jesus as he leads us, if we work out our salvation and live into these beatitudes, we will find that our lives are revolutionary in this world that is bent on revolt.

**SLIDE 19-21**

READ Matthew 5:3-12

This is our map. May we follow it boldly and with purpose.

 Amen.