

The Chosen

Season 5 - “The Stronghold of the Chosen”

Sources:

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*** Episodes 7-8 to be added soon

Episodes 1 and 2

Opening Prayer

“The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge, my savior; you save me from violence. I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.” (2 Sam 22:2-4)

“The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you.” (Ps 9:9-10)

“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (Ps 27:1)

“As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double.” (Zechariah 9:11-12)

Amen.

People in the Bible knew and understood well the importance of a stronghold. For many, having a stronghold meant the difference between life and death. But we today may have lost that meaning, that urgency to know what and where our stronghold is. What does it mean that the Lord is the stronghold of the Chosen?

A stronghold is a place of safety to protect inhabitants against attack. Knowing you are surrounded by high, sturdy, thick walls, it is a place of refuge from chaos, violence, and vulnerability. It's a place to rest, reassess, restore, and plan the way forward. And being Christian is knowing Jesus is the King of Kings; the only one who saves. Jesus is humanity's only true hope for peace, calm, and victory over evil. When our lives are rocked by the unthinkable, we must run to our stronghold. We must run to Jesus.

Season 5

In Season 1, we focused on Isaiah 43: what it means to be chosen.

In Season 2, we focused on Matthew 5: what it means to be blessed.

In Season 3, we focused on the good news: what it means to get back to the Garden of Eden.

In Season 4, we focused on the First Letter of Peter: what it means to be a disciple.

In Season 5, we will focus on Jesus being our stronghold, our safe place when hard times come.

Today we are covering episodes 1 and 2: *Hosanna* and *Prophesied*.

Episode 1 - Hosanna (John 12; Luke 19; Mark 21)

Biblical Characters - Jesus, the Disciples, Caiaphus, Pontius Pilate

Synopsis. The episode begins during the Last Supper with Jesus telling his disciples what will happen over the next few days. The disciples do not understand. The episode then jumps back to earlier in the week with Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. The crowds wave palm branches and shout, "Hosanna!" Pontius Pilate and Caiaphus meet and agree on their concerns about possible riots during Passover since the crowds this year are larger than ever. Rema's father comes to Jerusalem with relatives seeking revenge against Jesus for her death. Jesus begins teaching that his hour is coming. Jesus now finds it difficult to walk around the city due to his popularity. The episode ends with Jesus making a whip out of his bridle.

Notable quotes:

"You have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you." (Jesus)

- *"Do not be afraid" is one of the most stated instructions in the Bible. God consistently tells us that He will save us. Why should we be afraid when our hosanna, our Savior, has come?*

Episode Talking Points

In this episode, we learn more about the one who saves us: our hosanna.

Each episode of Season 5 begins with a Last Supper sequence.

- *Why did the writers start each episode with moments from the Last Supper?*
- *Have you ever reflected on your life to see where God prepared you for life events that you were not expecting?*
- *What does this say about your God?*

At every mass, we exclaim, "Hosanna in the highest!" That is, "Savior in the highest," because God is the only one who truly saves. The Jews in Jerusalem thought Jesus was going to save them from the Romans. We now know that Jesus came to save us from sin and death. But we are not too different from those Jews. How often do we base our opinion of who Jesus is, who God is, on how things are going? What should God be doing...for you? Too often, God's eternal goodness is based on our own personal happiness. We might be singing God's praises on Sunday, then rejecting His rescue efforts for our soul on Friday.

- *In what ways do you know that God is trying to rescue your soul from sin and death?*
- *In what ways do people today still shout "Hosanna" but then soon cry "Crucify"?*

How could people so quickly turn on Jesus, the known miracle worker? Perhaps the signs and wonders were all they were looking for. As King Herod says, he wanted to see Jesus perform a miracle for his curiosity and entertainment. Herod did not want to

increase his own faith by seeing the work of his God, his Creator, his Savior. Sadly, many people who believe in Jesus are too confident in their faith. They are blind to the fact that they themselves need saving; that they are lost, headed down the wrong path, and are leading sinful lives. Instead, they view miracles as God's showmanship: "Yes, there is a God...and you people need saving."

- *How confident are you that Jesus really knows you?*
- *Why do you attend healing services? Is it to satisfy your curiosity and entertainment? Or is it to testify to your own faith?*

The writers pulled from both Matthew and Luke to write the scene of Jesus entering Jerusalem. In Luke, several Pharisees tell Jesus to rebuke his disciples, but Jesus says even the stones would cry out. Then, Jesus laments about what will happen to Jerusalem. We see this on screen play out in images of blood coming from the city rocks and walls as Jesus enters.

God's rescue plan to save us from our sins and to allow us to be his heirs includes God sacrificing his only son on the cross. Without this sacrifice, Jesus would not have been killed...but we would not have been saved. Jesus is the Lamb of God, our Savior, and the lamb has to be sacrificed to save us. Many Christians in the past and even today miss this critical Christian doctrine. Christians have blamed Jews for killing Jesus and have sought revenge on the Jewish people. This is wrong. If they did not kill Jesus, then we would still be living in our sin and be condemned to eternal life without God. But saving us is not a solo act by God. God has always wanted to partner with us. So while the sacrifice of the lamb can save us, we still must actively choose to want to be saved. We must choose to run to the stronghold, Jesus, and not to the world.

[Watch - Entrance into Jerusalem 14:15-17:30]

- *Will holding that palm on Palm Sunday mean something different to you from now on?*

Reading

Let's read from the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 11:20-25):

"Then Jesus began to denounce the towns in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you." At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children."

Episode 1 prayer:

Lord Jesus, as I reflect on your intentional entrance into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, I'm awestruck by the simple fact that you're the true King. You didn't need to prove your kingship by riding a war horse because you've been ruling the world since you made it. In your perfect wisdom, you knew that the people welcoming you with shouts of "Hosanna" needed salvation in a greater way than they realized. Thank You for making me aware of my need for salvation from sin. Even as I wait for you to return and establish your ultimate reign as King, I have hard things to face this side of eternity. For these I cry "Hosanna-save me!" Help me trust in you, so that I can receive strength from you, in order to live faithfully for you. Amen.

Episode 2 - Prophesied (John 12, Matthew 26, Luke 22)

Biblical Characters - Jesus, the Disciples, Caiaphus, King Herod, Greeks

Synopsis. The episode begins again during the Last Supper with Jesus telling his disciples that they will be entering a hostile world because the world will reject them. But God will send them a helper. There is a flashback to Rema and Thomas, and we learn Rema's parents did like Thomas. Peter tries to preach, but finds it difficult. The Decapolis leaders meet the disciples saying they want to celebrate the Passover. Caiaphus meets King Herod and discusses how to handle Jesus. Caiaphus says he received a prophecy that one man will die so the Jewish nation will not perish. Rema's father meets Thomas and prophesizes to Thomas that it will be Jesus' last supper. Thomas sees a vision of Rema, but it turns out to be Rema's mother. Jesus enters the Temple courtyard and becomes angry that God's place of worship has been turned into a marketplace where people sin. Jesus uses his handmade whip to overturn the tables and drive out the merchants. Everyone is confused, especially Judas, by Jesus' actions which are disrupting the normalities of the Jewish celebration.

Notable quote: "Because I chose you out of the world, the world now hates you."
(Jesus)

- *Did you choose Jesus, or did Jesus choose you?*
- *Why would the world hate the Chosen?*
- *Have you ever felt not part of this world as if a foreigner in a strange land?*
- *In what ways does the world still hate the Chosen...?*

In this episode, we learn more about the prophecy of Hosanna.

Episode Talking Points

Did you ever notice in the Gospels that Jesus switches to calling Peter, "Simon", whenever Peter responds as a mortal human would think instead of a saint? Luke 22:31: "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail." In upcoming episodes, look for Jesus referring to Peter as Simon.

During the opening scenes of the Last Supper, Jesus provides the Apostles with several prophecies: that they would encounter difficult times moving forward, that he will send a helper (the Holy Spirit), that they will scatter when he is arrested, and that Peter will deny him 3 times.

Humans hate not knowing the future because it is our desire to be in control. We even dream about time machines that would enable us to control time. So, there are few things more compelling in life than prophecies that come true. From tarot cards, to tea leaves, to fortune cookies, to horoscopes, to mediums, we invent ways to try to discern what is coming. But there are things in the future we do not want to know. If we knew the time and place of our death, we would live in dread, unable to be fully alive. Sometimes knowing is too great a burden to bear. Our God lives outside of time, hence Jesus knows our beginning and our end. What could be more comforting than knowing that Jesus knows our life, and says he will protect those who choose to trust him?

- *Reflecting on your life, how much time have you wasted worrying about the future instead of trusting in God and enjoying the present?*

God's blessing to humanity is the ancient prophecies, so we would believe that Jesus is the Messiah. Yet, even Jesus' closest Disciples, those who ate, played, and prayed with Jesus, were unable to enjoy that the prophecies were being fulfilled in their midst. We, like the Disciples, focus too much on the natural end and miss the supernatural "what will be". If prophets like Moses, Isaiah, David, Zechariah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and John the Baptist are to be believed, then we must surrender our lives to Jesus. Give Jesus access to every part of your life. Strive to take hold of the blessings, provisions, and protection that come from following the Savior, our stronghold.

- *Do the prophecies Jesus fulfilled bolster your confidence in him as your stronghold?*

Jesus' fulfillment of the prophecies changed the world, but there are Biblical prophecies yet to be fulfilled. And we know that God keeps all his promises. Prophecies in Isaiah, Daniel, the Gospels, Philippians, and Revelation have yet to take place. They assure us that one day, Jesus will return, and every knee will bend before the Lord of Lords during judgement day. But our faith in Jesus means we do not fear this end. In Jesus, we have hope. In Jesus, we have the promise of victory over sin and death. In Jesus, we have confidence in knowing our suffering will cease. In Jesus, we have assurance of fairness and justice under his eternal reign. In Jesus, we have the guarantee of his presence and protection as we wait for eternity to commence.

When watching the Temple Marketplace scene, notice how the writers use this scene to explain (1) why Jesus got upset about the Temple courtyard practices and (2) why the Jewish leaders got upset with Jesus for challenging the status quo.

[Watch The Temple Marketplace 13:50-17:05]

Reading

Let's continue reading from the Gospel of John:

“And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it just as it is written, ‘Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!’ His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.” (John 12:14-16)

Episode 2 prayer

Dear King Jesus, I understand that your entry into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey was a fulfillment of prophecy in Scripture. But I admit that, like your first followers, I don't always catch on to your all-knowing, all-powerful, ever-present ways until later. But because you're the Beginning and the End, the Creator and sustainer of life, and the promised Messiah, I know you're the only way for me to enter into a right relationship with God. Thank you for being trustworthy and dependable, for loving me in spite of my tendencies to rebel, and for your persistent and sovereign pursuit of me. Help my trust in you and your word to grow, including the hard parts. Firmly establish my hope in you. Amen.

Episodes 3 and 4

Opening Prayer

Let's pray the "Dayenu":

If He had brought us out from Egypt, and had not carried out judgments against them? It would have been enough!

If He had carried out judgments against them, and not against their idols? It would have been enough!

If He had destroyed their idols, and had not killed their first-born? It would have been enough!

If He had killed their firstborn, and had not given us their wealth? It would have been enough!

If He had given us their wealth, and had not split the sea for us? It would have been enough!

If He had split the sea for us, and had not taken us through it on dry land? It would have been enough!

If He had taken us through the sea on dry land, and had not drowned our oppressors in it? It would have been enough!

If He had drowned our oppressors in it, and had not supplied our needs in the desert for forty years? It would have been enough!

If He had supplied our needs in the desert for forty years, and had not fed us the manna? It would have been enough!

If He had fed us the manna, and had not given us the Shabbat? It would have been enough!

If He had given us the Shabbat, and had not brought us before Mount Sinai? It would have been enough!

If He had brought us before Mount Sinai, and had not given us the Torah? It would have been enough!

If He had given us the Torah, and had not brought us into the land of Israel? It would have been enough!

If He had brought us into the land of Israel, and had not built for us the Temple? It would have been enough!

And now let us add to it:

If He had allowed the Temple to be destroyed, and had not raised it up in three days? It would have been enough.

Amen.

The "Dayenu" is an ancient Jewish poem sung at the Passover Seder, meaning "it would have been enough". The poem lists a continuing series of blessings God bestowed upon the Israelites during and after the Exodus, with each stanza concluding with the refrain, "It would have been enough," to emphasize that even a single one of these acts would have been a sufficient gift to warrant praise. It is a joyous and repetitive song that celebrates God's kindness and power.

- *How many times does the Bible ask, "What does it take for you to have faith in God?"*

- *How many times has God asked you, "Is it enough?"*

Today we are covering episodes 3 and 4: *Raised and Everything Is Good*.

Episode 3 - Raised (Mark 12, Luke 20, Matthew 22-23)

Biblical Characters - Jesus, Disciples, Pharisees.

Synopsis. During the Last Supper, Jesus proclaims he is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through him. Jesus tells his Apostles that he and the Father are one. The scene switches back to the Temple marketplace where Jesus tells the Pharisees that if they destroy this temple, then in 3 days he will raise it up. The Pharisees and Rema's father plot to trap Jesus. The Pharisees try to trap Jesus during his sermon, but Jesus tells them the parable of the vineyard. When Jesus finishes with, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, but give to God what is God's," the crowds are torn on whether Jesus is the Messiah...or not? The Apostles do not understand, so they seek out Jesus. Jesus prophesies to them the destruction of Jerusalem and their deaths. The episode ends with Jesus weeping for Jerusalem, then seeing King David.

Notable quotes:

"Would that you, even you, had known the things that make for peace. But now they are hidden from your eyes" (Jesus) - Luke 19:42-44

Episode Talking Points

In this episode, we learn more about being raised.

In the book, *The Hero's Journey*, Joseph Campbell's research found that every culture tells the same hero story: departure, initiation, and return. Every culture absolutely loves this story; hence, this story is repeated over and over again, from generation to generation. Interestingly, Jesus' story aligns with Campbell's findings. Jesus is called from a seemingly ordinary life. At first, he reuses his mother's request to cross the threshold. But by turning water into wine, Jesus departs his previous way of life and initiates into the adventure. In Jesus' adventure, he gains allies through his disciples, is tested by the Pharisees, Romans, and Satan. Jesus goes through the ultimate ordeal, death on a cross, where we think Satan has won. But through the resurrection, Jesus is raised and returns victorious. Thus, Jesus saves everyone who loves him. Jesus' story is the hero's story. Perhaps, God loves his story of salvation so much that he implanted it in our human hearts long before Jesus, so that we humans would always know the love of God. In telling and retelling the hero's story, we involuntarily glorify God: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

- *Have you ever thought of Jesus' story as "the hero's story"?*
- *In a hero's story, what would happen if the hero did not go through the final ordeal?*
- *What would have happened if Jesus had not been crucified?*

In this episode, Jesus provides many instances of foreshadowing his final ordeal and ultimate return. In every instance, Jesus calmly reminds his disciples, "Do not be afraid." Why would Jesus keep telling them this? Because Jesus knows the hero's story. Jesus not only read the script; Jesus is God's Word...Jesus literally is the script. Jesus knows how it ends. But like moviegoers of an epic series, the apostles are on the edge of their seats wondering what will happen next? Why does their favorite character keep predicting doom and gloom, and do actions that seem to move the action in that direction? Maybe because Jesus wants to get to the good part: the resurrection. That's

the importance of Jesus being raised. No resurrection, then no atonement for human sins. No atonement for sins, then no eternal life with God. No eternal life with God, then the villain wins. And as Joseph Campbell found out, cultures do not like stories that end with the villain winning. It is engrained in our human soul. Saints weep when souls are lost to Satan, and we do, too.

- *Have you ever felt sorrow when a seemingly bad person dies?*
- *Why should Christians not be angry with the Romans and Jews who killed Jesus?*

Did you notice how the writers use foreigner coins as a trope, a motif? In Episode 2, the Greeks had to turn in their coins with pagan gods so they could purchase sacrificial animals with Hebrew coins. Seems odd that it is fine to use these pagan coins as money to buy Hebrew coins to buy sacrificial animals because they can't be used by the animal directly. Somehow, this money conversion "purges" these coins. It's like saying God, the creator of the universe and forgiver of sins, actually cares about currency being used. Then in Episode 3, the Pharisees ask Jesus about using Roman coins with Caesar's figure on it. Jesus says coins are made by man, not by God. Do with man-made things what man wants to do with them. But do with God's things what God wants to do.

- *You are made by God. What are you doing with what God made?*
- *What are you doing with other humans that God made?*

[Watch - Jesus in Jerusalem 51:10-55:05]

- *How is Jesus the ultimate stronghold against death?*
- *Are the things that bring peace still hidden from your eyes?*

Reading

Jesus said there will come a time when not one stone will be left upon another. Yes, he was referring to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. But Jesus also was referring to God building the new temple: the Church. Jesus is the cornerstone, and each of us is a living stone that builds the kingdom of God. As Peter writes in his first letter:

"As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God, chosen and precious, you yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: 'Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.'" (1 Peter 2:4-6)

Episode 3 prayer

Dear Jesus, I can only imagine the fearful thoughts of your first disciples when they faced the idea of losing you. I'm grateful that you've granted me the "bigger picture" because of what they experienced and recorded in Scripture. They got to see you raise

Lazarus from the dead, but I have so much more. Thank you that I can look back in history, not only to your death, but also to your victory in rising from the dead, proving your power over sin and death. I admit, I don't always view the circumstances in my life through the lens of your abundant provision. So, help me recognize that you, the Risen One who raises others, can supply me with everything I need. Thank you for praying for me to the Father. Amen.

Episode 4 - Every Good Thing (John 13, Luke 22, Matthew 26)

Biblical Characters - Jesus, the Disciples, Caiaphas, Pharisees, Sadducees.

Synopsis. The episode begins again at the Last Supper with everyone saying the Dayenu, which is a traditional Passover song. Judas leaves to betray Jesus, and Jesus gives them the new commandment to love one another as he has loved them. Returning back to the timeline, the Pharisees and the disciples are trying to understand the consequences of Jesus' teaching so far this week. If Jesus is the real Messiah, then his actions are not making sense. There is talk of possible penalty and death. To avoid a scene with the crowds, leaders of the Sanhedrin agree to arrest Jesus at night. But for this action to work, they need someone to tell them where Jesus will be at night. The episode ends with Jesus asking his female disciples to stay away from Jerusalem for the next few days.

Notable quote: "Back then, there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." (John and Jesus)

- *"How does this common phrase from the Old Testament apply to today's world?"*
- *Do you have a king to follow, or do you do what is right in your own eyes?*

"And if I don't do whatever big thing you've imagined I should do at this time, will you still believe?" (Jesus)

- *Are there times in your life when Jesus asked you the same question?*
- *How difficult is it to have faith when events do not go as you prayed?*

In this episode, we learn more about every good thing.

Episode Talking Points

The Pharisees thought they were in competition with Jesus and were afraid of losing the people to Jesus. Seeing both Jews and Gentiles flocking to Jesus, they said, "Look, the world has gone after him." (John 12:19). The Pharisees also thought Jesus was a false prophet; hence, their resistance to Jesus was viewed as holy and righteous. Unlike what Ezekiel prophesied, the Pharisees were being good shepherds, since they were protecting the flock from this wolf. They were blind and deaf, prisoners of their traditions, self-perceptions, and misguided priorities. They could not see that Ezekiel's prophecy was indeed coming true before their very eyes. But many people seek Jesus because of what Jesus could do for them more than wanting Jesus, God.

- *Are we chasing Jesus for signs and wonders? Are we chasing Jesus to get miracles and blessings?*
- *Why do you seek Jesus?*

The antithesis of believing that Jesus is enough is to cling to things, or even other people, in our broken and dying world. God created the world and saw that it was good (Genesis 1:31). But we wrecked this good world with our sin and disobedience. Because many do not follow the true King, they do what is right in their own eyes... which always leads to disorder, suffering, and death. Creation points to the Creator, the one we were made to be in relationship with, to love, and to be loved by. Hence, the greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, mind, and soul. So when we desire things in the world more than we want Jesus, we settle for something less, often for things much less than good. We choose things that are temporary, and therefore our desires are not satisfied. We are left wanting more or something different. Conversely, if we trust in Jesus, our stronghold, the provider of every good thing, we receive everything that we need.

- *What in your life are you clinging to more than Jesus?*
- *What are you missing in your life? Who will provide this to you, the World or your God?*

When one reads the Gospels, one reads that Jesus attracted “the world”, both Jew and Gentile. Why do people pursue Jesus, from his earthly moments until today? We do not pretend that we totally understand Jesus, nor that Jesus gives us everything we ask for, nor that everyone who seeks him will call him “Lord”. The world is drawn to Jesus because Jesus understands the world. Jesus is the true King, and he is actually in control. We are designed to know our Maker. To that end, Jesus fills the empty space inside our souls. Tragically, we don’t always choose to remain under his authority. We don’t relinquish whatever personal power we think we have. We don’t always accept the terms of God’s offer of salvation. As a result, we become a person who comes to look at something out of curiosity with little intention of engaging beyond its initial wonderings.

- *Are you still looking with curiosity, or are you all in for this Jesus thing?*
- *Who do you know who may see Jesus as a curiosity rather than as their Creator?*

By having a right relationship, Jesus is constantly sharing with us every good thing: access to God the Father, King of Kings, Lord of Lords. We have access to the one whom the world goes after, and whom many ultimately reject. But not us. We are no longer blind and deaf to the fact that we are the Chosen. We who are in Christ lack nothing because in Jesus, we have every good thing. Jesus is our fully stocked stronghold.

Commonly, Orthodox icons show John resting his head on Jesus’ shoulder. The writer’s ensured this image was part of the series.

[Watch Jesus and John 23:03-25:05]

- *In times of trouble, do you stay close to Jesus, your Stronghold?*

Reading

Let's read from the Gospel of John:

"Jesus was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth ... For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in the closest relationship with the Father, has made him known." (John 1:10-14, 16-18)

Episode 4 prayer: Jesus, I'm starting to understand more and more that you alone are what my heart truly longs for, that you alone are what I need, and that I'm created by you and for you. Thank you for your bountiful provision of everything I need, and for your generous gifts of salvation, life, and purpose. I need you as my Stronghold amid my circumstances, and I want to submit to your loving authority so that I can experience the rest you promise to your followers. Please help me to pursue you, even during daily distractions. Help me recognize what you're providing already, and to be thankful. Amen.

Episodes 5 and 6

Opening Prayer

"And Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.'" John 12:23-26

Today we are covering episodes 5 and 6: *Glorified* and *Eternal*.

Episode 5 - Glorified (Mark 11, Matthew 17, 21, 26)

Biblical Characters - Jesus, Disciples, Pharisees, Caiaphas, Ananus

Synopsis. The episode begins during the Last Supper shortly after Jesus said that one of the twelve would betray him. All the apostles, including Judas, are wondering who it is? The episode then jumps back to Ananus, son of the High Priest Annas, coming into the city. Meeting with Caiaphus, it is revealed that they have permission to arrest Jesus, but doing so during the day will cause a revolt. But arresting Jesus at night means they need a betrayer to tell them where Jesus is. Jesus reminds his apostles to have faith no matter what happens, even his arrest and crucifixion. The wife of Pontius Pilate continues to have dreams about Jesus. The apostles argue over the meaning of the Messiah being killed. Judas tells the apostles his idea that Jesus will prevent his death before it happens. Shmuel thinks Judas can be the betrayer. The episode ends with Mary Magdalene meeting an old friend: Nicodemus.

Notable quotes:

"You have been faithful in spite of your anger." (Jesus)

"I don't want you consumed with things that are of this world, when there is so much more to come that is greater and more important." (Jesus)

Anger itself is not a sin. One's thoughts and actions while angry can lead to sin. Jesus is telling Thomas that despite Thomas' anger towards God, Thomas continues to be faithful to God and not sin due to his anger.

Episode Talking Points

In this episode, we learn more about being glorified.

The Chosen portrays Judas as tragically misguided. In Judas' mind, he was not betraying Jesus. On the contrary, he was helping the Messiah by turning Jesus in so that Jesus could reveal his glory. We, including Judas, think our actions and thoughts are right and just. We rationalize that we love God, want to help God, want to bring the

kingdom of God. Hence, our actions must be good, must be right, must be what God wants. But sometimes, we get it completely wrong.

- *Reflect upon your life. Where are the times you got it completely wrong?*
- *Ask yourself, "Are you the one who betrays Jesus?"*

It made sense to Jesus' disciples that Jesus should be glorified, and the proper response to Jesus' miracles and heavenly preaching should be to exalt Jesus to the highest possible place, the Messiah, the promised deliverer of the Jewish nation, the one prophesied over the past 1500 years. They expected an earthly kingdom greater than Solomon's, greater than the Babylonians, greater than the Greeks, greater than the Romans with Jesus as the king and the disciples as his closest advisors. But Jesus kept telling them the opposite. Jesus told them he would be killed. Jesus told them they would have to follow in his footsteps. And God's kingdom works differently than earthly kingdoms:

- To lead, we must serve.
- To gain, we must lose.
- To live, we must die.

No wonder why they didn't understand. Everything in our world works the opposite way in God's kingdom. One could even say the world of Star Wars is more plausible to us than the Jesus' teachings and the resurrection were to the disciples.

- *Looking back at the last 2000 years of history, what evidence shows that Jesus' way is in fact the right way?*
- *Reflecting on your life, in what ways did you resist Jesus's ways? Do you still resist?*

Jesus makes it clear that following him means dying to oneself. St. Paul writes in Galatians, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20

But what does it mean to die to oneself?

We die spiritually. We render ourselves no longer in control, no longer in the lead, no longer determining our own way. We choose God's way. We are dead to our pre-Jesus ways of doing that allowed our sinful desires and pursuits to control our thoughts and actions.

We die symbolically. Baptism is the outward expression of our spiritual commitment to reject our old and sinful ways and to be reborn into a new life with Jesus. The water not only represents a cleansing of our soul, but also represents passing the threshold between this earthly kingdom ruled by Satan and the heavenly kingdom ruled by God. We are no longer ourselves but are reborn as sons and daughters of God.

We could die physically. Satan is not happy losing souls to God, hence Satan seeks out those who walk on Earth yet no longer belong to his earthly kingdom. Jesus was tempted to bypass his passion, but chose to die to oneself and choose to follow God's way. Ten of the original apostles followed Jesus in physically dying to oneself as have the thousands and thousands of martyrs.

- *Does it scare you that Jesus says those who are unwilling to lose their life are not worthy to follow him?*
- *Does your love of this earthly kingdom get in the way of embracing God's kingdom? Do you have a foot in both?*
- *How is this love for earthly vs heavenly kingdom related to the concept of purgatory?*

A fruit tree does not need its own fruit. It takes nutrients from the earth, then gives these nutrients to others via the fruit it bears. If the fruit tree does not bear any fruit, then the fruit tree is keeping all the nutrients for itself. Therefore, it is judged to be worthless and is cut down. In this episode, Jesus comes across a leafy fig tree. But upon closer inspection, Jesus found it was not bearing any fruit. Jesus curses the tree for not bearing fruit, which puzzles the Apostles. The Apostles say it is not the season for figs. Even though it was not the season for figs, the fruits of the fig tree begin to appear at the same time as the leaves. A leafy fig tree should be bearing sugary green, unripe fruit. So, even though outwardly the fig tree was showing big leafy leaves, closer inspection found there was no promise of fruit, not even the green, unripe fruit. It was an empty, fruitless tree living on the riches of the earth but providing nothing in return.

Compare Jesus' cursing and resulting withering of the fig tree to Jesus cursing and emptying of the temple worship space. Outwardly, the temple worship space had the appearance of heavenly worship. But on closer inspection, the worship space was engaging in empty, sinful activity. Such a display was worthy only of judgement, and that is what Jesus gave.

- *Upon closer inspection of you, will Jesus at least find small, unripe fruit?*
- *Reflecting on your life, are you living off the graces of God yet providing nothing heavenly in return?*
- *Will you continue to be fruitless and die, or will you die to yourself in order to bear fruit?*

But why would one die to oneself? What do you gain by losing your life? Jesus told his followers that dying to oneself leads to eternal life in heaven. Paradise is possible to those who put their faith, their trust in Jesus. Life in Jesus does not end with physical death, but glory awaits on the other side. Jesus promises that through the resurrection, our soul and body will be glorified. Jesus is our substitute, our sacrificial lamb, the one who dies in our place and shares the victory with us. God raises us up with Jesus and seats us with Jesus, so we get to experience God's love and mercy for all eternity. For now, we struggle with a sinful and broken world, a world that follows Satan, defiance of God, as its king. But God has revealed everything we need to know to navigate this world and its hardships and to find our Stronghold, Jesus.

[Watch - Apostles wrestle with Jesus' prophecy 28:15-34:20]

- *Have you ever thought how tough it must have been for the Apostles to understand that the Messiah, the Son of God, God incarnate, would have to die before he is glorified? And that they, too, would be persecuted and killed because of Jesus? This is not exactly the Messianic mission they signed up for.*

Reading

Let's read from Ephesians:

"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." Ephesians 2:1-8

Episode 5 prayer

Dearest, highest, most honorable Lord of the universe, I humbly come to you, recognizing that you're gloriously seated on the throne of heaven. You deserve the praise of your people. Thank you for choosing to give up your majesty and splendor for a time to come to earth, to live a perfect life, to die undeservedly for my sins, and to raise to life again. You are the conquering hero who deserves all glory. I'm in awe that you choose to love me even though I don't deserve it or even fully understand it. I ask that you help me remain in a posture of faith in you, my glorious King, even as I face the temporary struggles and confusion of this life. Amen.

Episode 6 - Eternal (Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, John 13)

Biblical Characters - Jesus, the Disciples, Caiaphas, Pharisees, Nicodemus, Matthias.

Synopsis. The episode begins during the Last Supper when Jesus breaks the bread and says the blessing. Jesus tells them that if they keep his words and follow his way, they will have eternal life with God. Jesus sees John the Baptist sitting in Elijah's chair and smiles. Nicodemus learns there is a plot against Jesus and seeks Mary Magdalene to warn Jesus. Judas makes a deal with Caiaphas. Atticus makes a deal with Rema's father. Atticus meets Simon Zee and gives him two swords. Yussef tells Nicodemus about the plot to arrest and kill Jesus and asks him to help Jesus...but they just don't know what will happen next.

Notable quote: "Why is he systematically turning allies into enemies?" (Nicodemus)

- *Why did Jesus say that he came to divide the world? (choose: righteous vs unrighteousness way of living)*

In this episode, we learn more about eternal life.

Episode Talking Points

Let's begin by pointing out this is the first time we learn the person watching the disciples is Matthias. Matthias will later take Judas' place among the apostles (Acts 1:23-26).

We loathe death and all that comes with it. Death can come suddenly through a cardiac event, can come slowly through a terminal illness, can come shockingly through a car crash, can come sadly through an accidental overdose, can come violently through murder, or can come quietly through growing old. There is no escaping death. Think about it, even Jesus had to die, be it on the cross or through old age. Human bodies are not eternal in this earthly age. Perhaps what is even worse is imagining what comes after death. Does a dying person "go to sleep", then immediately "wake up" in a new reality? Is there an intermediate dream state? Death and resurrection remain a mystery. What we do know is what Jesus told us:

- Dying with Jesus leads to eternal life with God.
- Dying without Jesus leads to eternal life without God.
- The Father will honor the one who dies with Jesus.

Once fully rejecting the concept of an afterlife, scientists are rethinking their skepticism. The number of documented and scientifically researched yet unexplainable "near-death" experiences is too many to ignore. These testimonies now scientifically suggest that we do not fully "die" at death. That consciousness, sometimes outer bodily, can remain for a period of time after our death. And for unexplainable reasons, sometimes the "dead" are returned to life. We believers are not surprised when scientific evidence matches what God has been saying all along.

- *What do you feel when you think about death?*
- *What will you miss about this world that makes you want to hold onto this world?*
- *Are there any near-death experiences that impacted your faith?*

How can something so feared and resisted even by those who believe in salvation be precious? How can the death of his servants be precious to the Lord? The Bible tells us:

- That's when our forever begins.
- That's when our pain and suffering ends.
- That's when our faith will become our sight.

Earthly death ushers in heavenly life with the one who created us, with the one we were intended to experience in perfect communion, with the one who will give us meaning, purpose, and peace. Jesus was with the Father in the beginning, which means Jesus has and always will exist. Jesus is not restricted by time or space or death. Everything belongs to and finds purpose in Jesus. When we choose to follow Jesus, we get to be where he is. In the Bible, what promises did God not keep? What falsehoods were spoken by Jesus? What commands spoken by Jesus did not come to desired effect? What prophecies spoken by Jesus did not come to fruition? Thus, why would these promises of eternal life with Jesus be untrue?

Jesus told the disciples he was going away, but they couldn't process it. They were understandably horrified by the notion of no longer walking and talking with the Messiah on whom they had become totally reliant. Unlike the disciples at the Last Supper, we have a post-resurrection understanding that Jesus never leaves us. Through his resurrection, we always have access to Jesus. But this access requires prayer, silencing our mind, and being open to seeing and hearing God's answer. It requires much more faith than those who interacted with Jesus during his time on Earth. After the resurrection, the disciples understood what Jesus had said. And they wrote it down in the Gospels, so that we understand and might believe.

- *Where was Jesus going?*
- *When was he going?*
- *Why was he going?*

The Stronghold at Masada that we talked about at the beginning of this season was indeed a sight to behold. The mountainous rock formation was better than any man-made structure. Inside, people received relief from knowing it was an impregnable fortress. They experienced the peace of mind from being hidden in the rock. Jesus is our eternal Masada, the eternal Stronghold we desperately need, our "Rock after Ages":

Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee.
Let the water and the blood, from Thy wounded side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure; save from wrath and make me pure.

Not the labors of my hands can fulfill Thy law's demands.
Could my zeal no respite know, could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone, Thou must save, and Thou alone.

Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling.
Naked come to Thee for dress, helpless look to Thee for grace.
Foul, I to Thy fountain fly; wash me, Savior, or I die.

While I draw this fleeting breath, when mine eyes shall close in death.
When I rise to worlds unknown, see Thee on Thy judgement throne.
Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee.

[Watch Mary and Nicodemus 14:52-19:45]

- *Do you believe who Jesus says he is?*

Reading

Let's read from Revelation:

"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever." Revelation 22:1-5

Episode 6 prayer:

I praise you, Jesus, eternal Lord of the universe. Having no sin of your own, and having every reason to stay in glorious eternity, you came to Earth to pay the price for my sin. I couldn't save myself or live in heaven forever by my own strength. So you chose to die in my place, making eternity available to me. Thank you for facing death—for enduring it, for conquering it—on my behalf. Thank you for wanting to share forever with me. While inconceivable to many, I choose to believe you. You're my rock of strength, the stronghold who shelters me in the hardship I face this side of eternity. Help me to serve you and to invite others to join you. I eagerly look forward to being with you in person someday. Amen.