

The Chosen – Season 1, Episode 4 – The Rock on Which it is Built

Jesus asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Simon answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

*Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah,
for this was not revealed to you by [other people], but by my Father in heaven.
And I tell you that you are Peter (which means “rock” – Jesus’ new name for Simon),
and on this rock I will build my church,
and the [power of death] will not overcome it.” (Matthew 16:15-18)*

You may remember that in episode 3, Simon made a deal with the Romans to betray his fellow Jews, in order to escape the crushing weight of tax debt threatening him, his wife and his brother Andrew. Andrew has come to Simon, excitedly claiming to have met the Messiah (the Savior that God has promised for millennia), but Simon is done waiting for God to save Him. He feels that his fate is in his own hands and that he must get himself out of his problems ... by making a deal with the enemy, Rome.



But lest we lather up too much judgment for Simon, aren't we just like that ourselves? As good Americans, it's tempting to believe that "the good life" has to come from within ourselves ... our brains, our hard work, our goodness, our capabilities, our wealth. Us, us, us. We make our own fate, right?

But where is the Lord in all that? Does God not sovereignly rule over the universe He created? Yes, in fact He does. Does He not care for us? Has He not created us for a purpose? Yes, He did. And so, what if real life – the life God lovingly and carefully designed us to experience – comes from Him and not from all our self-promotion, self-sufficiency and self-determination? What if our lives are in fact all about Him, Him, Him?

Simon learns this lesson in our episode today. Or at least, he begins to.

About this Episode

Episode 4 begins with Simon in a Roman boat on the Sea of Galilee. Simon's hometown of Capernaum is little more than a fishing village on the coast of that enormous lake. Remember, Simon has promised to help the Romans catch whoever has been fishing on Shabbat (and therefore avoiding Roman taxes). He assumes it's some nameless merchant guild, but he is surprised to discover that he's betraying people who are a lot closer to home (Zebedee and his sons, James and John), and is faced with a difficult decision.

Meanwhile, Quintus, the local Roman political leader, sends Matthew the tax collector to spy on Simon and write down everything he sees. Don't miss the foreshadowing and irony in this, since about 50 years after this episode, Matthew will compile these notes (and many others) into the first book of the New Testament.

And then there's the Pharisees – the religious leaders of the day. They see themselves as the religious purity police, so they are deeply concerned by anyone they don't authorize who teaches the people anything they haven't authorized. So, John the Baptizer (Jesus' cousin, whom Andrew has also met) is a major problem for them. Matthew would later write it down this way: In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, "Repent [turn away from disobeying God], for the kingdom of heaven [a new way of life, both now and eternally, in which Jesus is King] has come near." This is the one spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord!'" (Matthew 3:1-3)

But not all the Pharisees are upset and scared. Nicodemus is much more thoughtful, sensing that the events unfolding before him might just be from God. We'll follow his investigation more closely in future episodes. In fact, this episode ends with Nicodemus visiting John ("the baptizer") in a Roman prison.

But the climax of the story today is when Simon makes a desperate bid to catch enough fish to pay his debts before Rome comes for him. As Matthew points out, this is "mathematically impossible," but all Simon can think to do is to keep slamming himself and his abilities against the problems of his life. So, "I'm still going fishing," he says. But Jesus has other plans for the trajectory of Simon's life, and we'll see the turning point in the climax of this episode. Matthew will later record that Jesus has selected Simon for a purpose no one could have imagined... Jesus, the Messiah, who rules this world, will someday give Simon a new name ("Peter," which means "rock") and build His church on the faith Simon (Peter) begins to develop right here in a little fishing boat on the Galilean Sea.

You're watching miraculous history in the making! Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground.

