



the crossing discussion guide

The Chosen

An Eight-Week Study through
The Chosen, Season One



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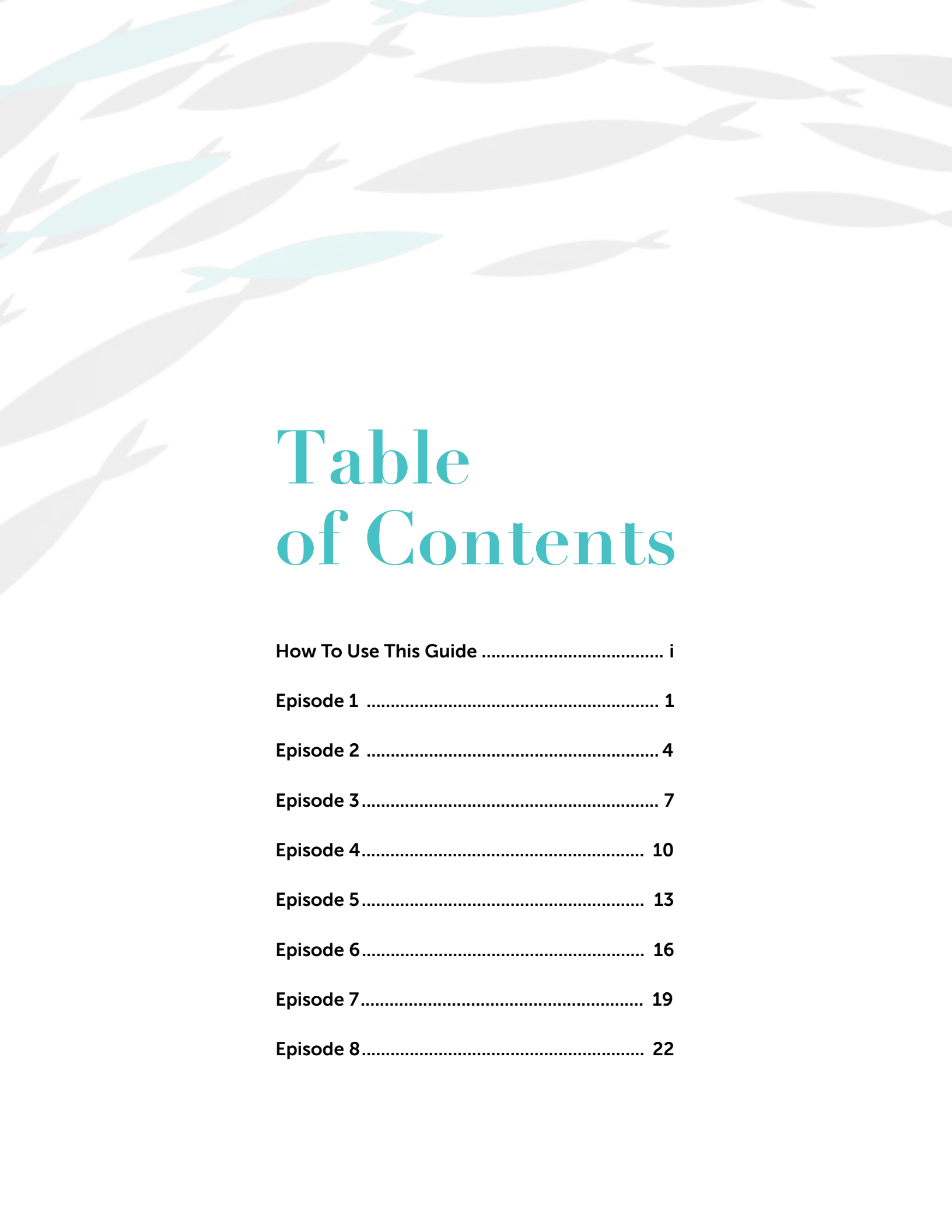


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The Chosen

How To Use This Guide

We're thrilled you've decided to watch and discuss The Chosen together with your small group. Our prayer is that it moves the hearts and minds of everyone in your group – yourself included – to believe Jesus is more.

We recommend you watch the episodes together as a group. Episodes range from 30-60 minutes, and the discussions range from 30-45 minutes.

How to watch The Chosen:

The first episode is available on Youtube. Just search, "The Chosen Episode One." Subsequent episodes are available for free to stream on The Chosen's app. To use the app, download it on your phone and open it. Click the TV icon in the upper righthand corner and select which streaming device you'd like to stream on. The app supports Roku, Fire TV, Chromecast, Apple TV, and Android TV. **Your phone and streaming device need to be on the same wireless network in order for the app to connect to your TV.** Alternatively, DVDs are available for purchase on [The Chosen's official website](#). If, at the end of the study, you and your group have been blessed by this video series, [consider donating](#) to help fund Season Two on The Chosen's website or app.

The remainder of this introduction is designed to help you understand the flow of each lesson. Every lesson contains the following elements. You may not get to all of the section or questions, and that's okay. The important part is that you facilitate the discussion and **choose the sections and questions that are most appropriate for your group.**

Big Idea: Explains the main takeaway of the lesson to be discussed.

Intro Question: Gets group members talking and relates to the topics to be discussed.

Summary: Provides a brief overview of the episode.

"For Leaders": Leader notes (in italics) are meant to aid your understanding and facilitation of the lesson.

"Quick Context" Box: Contains small pieces of contextual information to fill out an aspect of the episode that will help deepen the group's understanding of certain cultural aspects.

Episode Discussion Questions: Lists a mix of questions about characters, scenes, and specific quotes drawn from the episode. **This is the longest section. If you have to cut anything, we recommend starting here.**

Wrap Up: Designed to tie together the big idea of the episode.

Pray: Intended as a conclusion for each lesson. The leader can pray following the prompt, or you can invite one of your group members to do so. Consider using this as a jumping off point for prayer, adding more time to share specific prayer requests.

Going Further (optional)

Application exercises meant to be done throughout the week by and with the group. These exercises will emphasize the **head** (thinking), **heart** (feeling), or the **hands** (doing).

Scripture Memory (optional)

Includes a passage of Scripture related to the big idea of the episode. Members of the small group can choose to memorize the verse(s) throughout the week if they would like.

Additional Resource: Longer pieces of contextual information. Leader's should review these before the small group meeting to aid their understanding of the context of the episode.

The Chosen

Ep. 1 • I Have Called You By Name

Big Idea: The context, characters, and stories of the Gospel accounts of Jesus all serve to help answer the questions: Who is God and Who are we?

Intro Question: What have you learned about yourself and/or about who God is since the beginning of quarantine (mid-March)?

For Leaders: *Encourage participants to worry less about giving the **right** answer and instead give the **real** answer. Have everyone share.*

Summary: This episode serves to introduce several characters in the Gospels. We get a sense of the culture of Judea in the first century and what it was like to live during this time.

Quick Context: The Pharisees

Jesus debated the Pharisees more than any other Jewish party – probably because the Pharisees lived among the people and were very influential. They practiced strict purity, often taking the form of separation from anything they considered impure. They tried to convince average Jews to pursue a similar purity, believing this purity is what God expected in order to usher in his long-awaited Kingdom. They sought to direct the life of the Jews through their interpretation of the law. These interpretations became so authoritative that they were viewed as a second law, an “oral” law. The Pharisees were the only party to survive the destruction of the temple in AD 70 and were the precursors to the rabbis of modern Judaism.

Character Overview

- **Nicodemus:** influential Pharisee; has a well-known and life-changing interaction with Jesus (John 3:1-21).
- **Lili/Lilith/Mary of Magdala:** a follower of Jesus; was the first to Jesus's tomb and talked with him in the garden (John 20:1-18).
- **Matthew:** Jewish tax collector working for the Romans; despised by his own people and bullied by his bosses; one of Jesus's twelve disciples; author of the Gospel of Matthew.
- **Simon & Andrew:** two brothers; two of Jesus's 12 disciples; Simon will come to be known as Peter, a leader among the disciples and a denier of Jesus who is restored and forgiven; author of the letters of 1 & 2 Peter.

Episode Discussion Questions

Overview: In what ways did this episode bring the story of the Gospels to life for you? What did you find new and interesting?

CHARACTERS

Nicodemus

- What did you notice about Nicodemus? His character? His life? How he is treated?
- What does Nicodemus believe about God (39:00)? What is the problem with this?

Lili/Lilith/Mary of Magdala

- What did you notice about her? Her character? Her life? How she is treated?
- How did Mary think of herself in light of her struggles?
- What impact do you think her father's words had on her (he was quoting Isaiah 43:1)?

Matthew

- What did you notice about Matthew? His character? His life? How he is treated?
- **APPLY:** Where and how do you identify with Matthew in your life right now?
- **APPLY:** Who/what do you feel intimidating and pressuring you, much as the Romans and Jews intimidated and pressured Matthe

SCENES

The Marketplace (16:00)

- What strikes you about the marketplace?
- Why would it be so repulsive to Nicodemus (and any other Pharisee)?

SPECIFIC QUOTES

Nicodemus asks his wife in exasperation, "Why must I perform?" (35:21)

- Why does he ask this question?
- APPLY: In what ways are you performing spiritually? Who are you performing for? Why? What might be the impact of such a performance on yourself? On others? On God?

For Leaders: *These are loaded questions. If you choose to ask them, be sure to leave time for people to discuss. It also will help for you to go first to model vulnerability and what an answer might look like for others.*

Wrap Up

Mary was questioning her identity. She remembered the promises of God (in Isaiah 43:1) but they did not fit with her experience and the story of her life.

- Where and how do you identify with Mary? What struggles are going on in your life that make you question your identity as a Christian?
- What can you do to remind yourself of who you truly are when you start to doubt?
- In what way(s) do you need others to do help you with this? How can you help others?

Ask someone to **read Isaiah 43:1** out loud.

- Where and how do you need to hear this truth this week?

Pray: Have someone pray for the group. Ask God to help you all keep this verse in your hearts and minds in the upcoming week.

Going Further

Reflect on these questions throughout the week. Try to take one question per day to spend some time thinking about it...

- List the "unclean marketplaces" you see today. Who is there? HEAD
- Where and how do you find yourself avoiding these? Why? HEAD, HEART
- How does God view these people and/or places? HEAD, HEART
- What could it look like to move toward and bless these people and/or places, instead of pulling away and judging them? (hands)

Scripture Memory

But now, this is what the Lord says—
he who created you, Jacob,
he who formed you, Israel:
"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine."

Isaiah 43:1

Next week, start off the lesson by discussing what it was like to memorize the verse and what impact it had on them the previous week.

Additional Resource

The Roman Empire & The Greco-Roman World in the Time of Jesus

The first-century Roman world of the New Testament was a cultural intersection of Hellenism (Greek language and culture) and Roman imperial rule. So, in order to understand this world and how Jews related to the Roman Empire, it is important first to explore the rise of Roman influence in the area.

The Roman Empire eventually grew to become one of the most powerful empires the world has ever known. Its expansion began in the 3rd century B.C. and reached its height by 27 B.C., when Octavian received the title "Augustus" and the lifelong title of Emperor. Thus, the empire had begun.

Roman government applied a centralized hierarchy of control, while simultaneously granting some freedom of local self-government. Large cities often retained the right to vote for their leaders, who served in economic, religious, and political roles. Some regions were governed by "client kings," whose monarchical rule was validated by the emperor. Palestine in the 1st century is an example of this, particularly under the reign of Herod the Great, the influential yet ruthless leader who ruled from 37 B.C. to 4 B.C.). The empire was divided into senatorial and imperial provinces, depending upon whether the Roman senate or the emperor appointed the provincial governors. Generally, the more outlying (and less militarily secure) provinces were ruled by imperial appointments (such as Syria and the regions throughout Palestine).

The Jewish people had mixed views of Roman rule. There was a broad spectrum of main Jewish groups, ranging from those who desired to overthrow the Romans using force (Zealots) to those who desired to partner with them in order to gain a position of power, favor, and influence (Sadducees).



"Additional Resource" adapted from the ESV Study Bible; "Quick Context: The Pharisees" adapted from the NIV Study Bible.

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Ep. 2 • Shabbat

Big Idea: Rest (Shabbat) is a crucial part of life. It is a time for refreshment and reflection on God's story, in which we find ourselves. When we rest, we are meant to remember Jesus: the one who has redeemed us and who is always with us.

Intro Questions: What is something you do that is restful for you? Why do you think it is important to rest? Does resting come naturally to you or do you find it more difficult? Why?

For Leaders: *Explain that the Shabbat dinner at the beginning of the episode is a great picture of the intent of the weekly Sabbath. It is a time for refreshment, reflection, and renewed vision for God's people throughout the centuries as they waited for the coming messiah.*

Summary: This episode continues to shed light on the characters we met in episode 1. It also introduces new tension, complexities, and lessons that apply to our lives today.

Quick Context: The Sabbath

The Sabbath (*Shabbat* in Hebrew) is the seventh day of the week according to the Jewish calendar. The term comes from a verb meaning "to cease" or "rest." The core idea is that people should cease from normal activities for a full day at the end of the work week, just as God ceased from creation activity on the last day of the creation week (Gen. 2:2-3). This practice was unique in its origins and served as an ethnic and religious marker, setting Israel apart from the other peoples of the ancient world. Eventually, the Sabbath became a day not just of rest but also of assembly in the synagogue and for members of a family to share the best meal of the week. Jesus's teachings and actions continually challenged the existing norms and practices about the Sabbath, creating tension between him and the Jewish religious authorities of the day.

Episode Discussion Questions

Overview: In what ways did this episode bring the story of the Gospels to life for you? What did you find new and interesting?

CHARACTERS

Simon

- Why is Simon spying on his fellow Jews?

Whether Simon knows it or not, he is operating out of an "ends justify the means" ethical framework. In other words, as long as the "end" is noble and just and good - the protection and care of his loved ones - the "means" to that end are justifiable (cheating and deceiving others).

- **APPLY:** Where do you see this ethical framework in the world today? Where do you/have you operated out of this framework? What are the problems with it?

Read [Matthew 5:1-12](#) (The Beatitudes)

- What stands out about Jesus's "ethical framework"? How does this challenge the "ends justify the means" framework? What can, and will, happen if and when we embody the Beatitudes in our lives?

For Leaders: *These are a lot of big questions. Be sure to take the time to discuss them, and don't feel the pressure to resolve or solve any differences in opinion.*

Matthew

- What similarities do you see between Matthew and Simon?

Matthew continues to serve Rome by spying on his own people. He doubts Simon's story and goes to Quirinius, the Roman praetor for verification at great peril to himself. Quirinius admires his "courage" (naivete) and encourages Matthew to continue spying. However, this episode also reveals more of Matthew's background. His father disowned him, and he has no one to observe Shabbat with. Matthew is an outcast.

- How does this additional context impact your view of Matthew?
- APPLY: Matthew's story highlights an unfortunate yet true reality: hurt people hurt people. Said differently, we often make poor decisions and hurt others because we ourselves have been hurt. How can keeping this principle in mind change our perspectives on others?

SPECIFIC QUOTES

When Mary discusses her transformation with Nicodemus in the marketplace she says, "I was one way...and now I am completely different. And the thing that happened in between was Him." (23:57)

- Summarize Mary's statement in your own words. What is she describing?
- Does this describe your relationship with, and experiencing following, Jesus? How so? If not, why do you think that might be?

For Leaders: *Encourage participants to worry less about giving the **right** answer and instead give the **real** answer. The goal is not to invalidate people's experiences. Instead, this is a great chance for you to create a safe place to be vulnerable.*

Wrap Up

- What stands out to you about the Shabbat dinner at Mary's?
- How does this dinner honor Jesus, her unexpected guest?

We can summarize Mary's efforts by saying she is "paying it forward." Even though she doesn't host the dinner perfectly, her effort is significant. Because she has been given the amazing gift of healing, she now seeks to love and serve others in gratitude. In many ways Mary's imperfect Shabbat dinner is a great picture of the efforts Jesus wants us to take in our own lives - He has redeemed us as a people, and now we are to "pay it forward" like Mary did. *We don't do good works to receive Jesus's love, but because we already have it.*

- APPLY: What might it look like to have a "shabbat dinner" for others? What is one practical way you could "pay forward" the love you've received from Jesus in the next week?

Pray: Ask God to help you carry out your plan to show other the love that Jesus has shown you. Pray that others would come to know and love and follow Jesus, in and through your efforts (or even despite them).

Going Further

Host a "shabbat dinner" of your own this week (HANDS). This could be something as simple as showing hospitality to a co-worker or acquaintance you normally wouldn't, or as elaborate as hosting people in your home or apartment for a meal.

Scripture Memory

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Matthew 5:6

Next week, start off the lesson by discussing what it was like to memorize the verse and what impact it had on them the previous week.

Additional Resource

Tax Collectors & Taxes in Judea & Galilee

Tax Collectors

As the chief financial officer of a province, the procurator was responsible for tax collection. The procurators of Judea turned this responsibility over to individual tax collectors contracted from the local population. For instance, Matthew was a Jew who was working from Rome (Matt. 9:9). It was customary for persons in the tax administration to keep a portion of the tax revenues for themselves, to whatever extent they could, and many certainly took bribes or granted special favors in the process. Therefore, tax collectors were equated with robbers. Residents of Judea, Samaria, and Galilee suffered under a heavy tax burden, which reached an estimated 50-80% of personal income.

Taxes in Judea & Galilee

Jews faced a double tax obligation: to Rome and to the Jerusalem temple. Temple taxes were relatively light – a tithe on crops paid to the priests and the Levites, and the half-shekel temple tax paid to the temple directly by Jewish males over 20 years of age. The taxes owed Rome, on the other hand, could be excessive. When Herod the Great served as client king of Rome, Rome set the amount of tribute and left it up to Herod to decide how it would be collected. Herod also instituted a sales tax and a tax in kind on crops, in part to satisfy Rome and in part to fund his own lavish lifestyle and building projects.

“Quick Context: The Sabbath” adapted from the ESV Archaeology Study Bible, 1389.

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Ep. 3 • Jesus Loves the Little Children

Big Idea: The person and teachings of Jesus is on full display in this episode. We'll discuss how the portrayal of his life and teachings challenge, comfort, and apply to our lives today.

Intro Question: Who and what has shaped your view of who Jesus is? Is it the church you grew up in? Your family? Your friends? The culture? A movie? A book?

Summary: When Jesus meets an unexpected group of "disciples," we begin to see the kind of Kingdom he is bringing. His simple yet profound teaching centers on a foundational prayer of the Hebrew Scriptures: the Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

Quick Context: Children in the First Century

In Mark 9:37 Jesus says, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me." This command to welcome children was a radical departure from the cultural norm. Unlike the present-day idolization of children, the first century was not a child-oriented time. Children were not romanticized as examples of innocence and purity. On the contrary, unable to keep the law, little children in were seen in Judaism as "weak" and not yet "people of the covenant." To receive such insignificant people as children was to humble oneself and truly become the servant of all.

Episode Discussion Questions

Overview: In what ways did this episode bring the story of the Gospels to life for you? What did you find new and interesting?

CHARACTERS

Abigail & Joshua

- Abigail and Joshua were the two children who initially met Jesus, and then invited their friends to meet him. Compare and contrast their different approaches when they first encountered Jesus.
- APPLY: Which of these approaches best represents your relationship with Jesus? Why?

Jesus

- What did you notice about Jesus? His character? His life?
- Read the Shema from [Deuteronomy 6:4-9](#).
- Why do you think these verses were so important to Jesus? What impact do you think they had on his life?
- Why do you think Jesus chose to review the Shema with the children? What do you think Jesus hopes will happen in their lives as a result?

SPECIFIC QUOTES

After the children recite the Shema Jesus says, "Beautiful; very good" (15:53).

- What do we learn about Jesus's character from this response?
- Does this response fit with your (earlier) picture of who Jesus is? Why or why not?

- **APPLY:** When and where have you sensed Jesus saying this to you?

It is common to view God as angry and vengeful. Some Christian traditions have only emphasized the wickedness and sinfulness of humanity, using verses such as [Romans 3:10-12](#) as proof of their assertion, "As it is written: 'There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.'" While humanity is fallen and in need of God's grace and redemption, to **only** emphasize and teach this truth is truncated, simplistic, and ultimately unbiblical.

Read [Psalm 8:3-8](#). Summarize this portion of Psalm 8 in your own words. What is the Psalmist saying?

When teaching the children, Jesus says, "The Lord loves justice, but it is not ours to handle; today is not the right time for justice." (22:00)

- Summarize this statement in your own words. What is Jesus telling the children here?
- Brainstorm why this might be challenging for a first century Jew to hear.

For Leaders: *The Romans were brutal, extorting the Jewish people and crucifying dissenters. Many wrongs and injustices were done to the Jews at the hands of the Romans over the years. Jesus's words meant that the Jewish people could not take matters into their own hands; they could not right the wrongs done to them and overthrow Roman rule themselves.*

- **APPLY:** Jesus's command to leave vengeance to the Lord still stands today. Romans 12:19 quotes Deuteronomy 32:35 in saying, "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'"
 - What is challenging about these words for us, today?
 - Rather than simply leave this as a negative assertion ("don't seek justice"), what are we as Jesus's followers to do instead? What should vengeance be replaced with? What will be the result?

Wrap Up

How has your picture of Jesus challenged, broadened, deepened, or changed as a result of this episode?

Pray: Ask God that our picture of Jesus would conform to the reality of who he is according to Scripture. Pray that this picture would change the way we live our lives on a day to day basis.

Going Further

Deuteronomy 6:8-9 commands the Israelites to write the words of God as "frontlets for their eyes" and "on the door posts of their house." The principle underlying this command is to place the word of God where you will see it, thus focusing and reminding you of the story you find yourself in. Try doing this yourself.

- Write out Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and put it in a strategic place where you will see it throughout the day (HEAD, HANDS).
- Read and reflect briefly on it every time you see it over the next week (HEART)

Scripture Memory

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.
Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Next week, start off the lesson by discussing what it was like to memorize the verse and what impact it had on them the previous week.

Additional Resource

Rightly Understanding Jesus's Teaching on the Shema

Jesus was once asked by a teacher of the law what the greatest commandment was. He responded with a portion from the Shema (Matthew 22:37). However, if we read these words closely, we may be troubled by the way Jesus phrases his quote from Deuteronomy 6. Moses says Israel should love the Lord “with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your **strength**” (Deut. 6:5). But Jesus says we should “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your **mind**”. In other places, Jesus commands us to love God with heart, soul, mind, **and** strength (Mk. 12:30). We must not view these light variations as points of tension or disagreement. The variations show that we should love the Lord with our whole selves.

- We love God with **heart and soul** when we embrace him in our deepest convictions and commitments.
- We love God with the **mind** when we understand our past and our present as he does and dedicate our future plans and goals to him.
- We love God with our **strength** when we dedicate our physical bodies, its muscles and energy, to him. We love God with our strength if we follow him with a determined will and with moral resolve in the face of adversity.

“Additional Resource” adapted from Matthew Vol. 2 (Chs. 14-28) by Dan Doriani, p. 315; “Quick Context: Children in the First Century” adapted from Mark, by Robert H. Stein, p. 444.

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Ep. 4 • The Rock On Which It Is Built

Big Idea: Jesus meets us where we are and calls us to follow him.

Intro Question: Think of time when you had a big problem in your life that was made worse by trying to fix it yourself. What happened? If you could go back and do it again, what would you change?

Summary: In this episode, Simon is at the end of his rope. He takes increasingly desperate actions to appease Roman demands, only to be met by Jesus.

Quick Context: Galilean Fishing Boats

These pictures show the actual remains of a 2,000-year-old Galilean fishing boat, and picture of what it looked like in the first century. It could hold 15 men and was 26.5 feet long, 7.5 feet wide, and 4.5 feet high.



Episode Discussion Questions

Overview: In what ways did this episode bring the story of the Gospels to life for you? What did you find new and interesting?

CHARACTERS

Simon

- What did you notice about Simon? His character? His life? How he is treated?

Simon's brother Andrew runs to tell Simon he has found the Messiah (20:30). But Simon is skeptical because he does not think that even the Messiah will be able to help him out of his problems. With this, Simon viewing the Messiah as a tool to fix his own problems and concludes that he'll stand a better chance on his own.

- **APPLY:** How do people today view Jesus as a tool to fix their problems? Share a time where you have done. What is the problem with viewing Jesus in this way?
- **APPLY:** How have you experienced skepticism about Jesus from others? Where does this skepticism come from?

SCENES

In a last-ditch effort to pay off his debts, Simon spends all night fishing by himself (28:15).

As he does, he rants and raves to God. Simon is essentially lamenting the fact that, even though God made amazing promises to bless his people (Gen. 15:1-6), those promises seemed to continually fail.

- How do you experience this tension in your own life? On the one hand, as Christians we read about God's promises to us in and through Jesus. Yet on the other hand, life experiences (disappointment, frustration, failure, etc.) seem to be the norm.
- What should we do about this? How should we respond?

For Leaders: *Consider going first in order to set the tone for vulnerability and give members an idea of what to say.*

Read 1 Peter 1:3-9

- What promises does Peter give? What insights do we gain about hardship?
- How are Christians supposed to live with the tension between God's good promises and the hardships they experience?

Wrap Up

What aspect of the final scene, where the fishermen pull in the big catch, was most striking to you? Why?

Read Luke 5:1-11

- Compare what you read with what you saw. What does the scene from this episode bring out for you that you might miss when just reading the biblical account?
- What does this scene teach us about who Jesus is?
- APPLY: How are you encouraged and challenged by Jesus's call to follow him?

Pray: As a group, share areas where you are in need of help and encouragement to follow Jesus. After you share, pray to close your time together, asking for God's help as you follow him.

Going Further

Choose one or both of these options to do this week...

- Share with someone about ways in which you are feeling desperate and struggling right now. (HEART, HANDS)
- Gently – but intentionally – encourage someone else to open up about their struggles, being careful to listen and empathize with them. (HEART, HANDS).

Scripture Memory

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—

may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed
1 Peter 1:6-7

Next week, start off the lesson by discussing what it was like to memorize the verse and what impact it had on them the previous week.

Additional Resource

Understanding Parables

How are we to read and understand Jesus's parables? It helps to start by looking at what Jesus himself has to say about his use of parables. (A brief answer is given in Matthew 13:9-17). Jesus declares that his parables reveal the "good news" of the kingdom to those with open ears and hearts, people who are eager to hear his message. However, the parables are "bad news" for those whose ears and hearts are closed to his message of salvation, revealing only judgment. Parables have two, opposing effects, depending on the hearer. To some they are a rich treasury of truth; to others they are an offense.

As episode 4 reveals, Jesus's stories are rarely as simple or as straightforward as they seem. In fact, they communicate profound, theological and moral truths. And they often answer the testing questions that the Pharisees and the teachers of the law bring to Jesus throughout his public ministry, even if these challengers don't realize it themselves. Jesus's answers are hidden within the parable, in a manner that is much more personally challenging personally than a straightforward reply would be. Parables can be very simple, or they can work on the following four levels:

- Level One:** A marvelous story that captures the imagination of the listener
- Level Two:** A story that teaches moral behavior
- Level Three:** A story that reveals something about the kingdom of God
- Level Four:** A story that reveals something about Jesus himself

"Additional Resource" adapted from Learning Evangelism from Jesus by Jerram Barrs, 57-58; "Quick Context: Galilean Fishing Boats" description and images are from the ESV and ESV Archaeological Study Bibles.

The Crossing Discussion Guide

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Ep. 5 • The Wedding Gift

Big Idea: Jesus's first public miracle begins the trajectory of his three-year public ministry, which changed the world forever.

Intro Question: Read [John 2:1-12](#) and discuss these questions **before watching the episode**.

- What specific details stand out to you in this story?
- What do you think it would have been like to be a guest at this wedding?
- What do you think it would have been like to be one of Jesus's disciples at this wedding?

Summary: This episode paints a vivid picture of Jesus's first miracle. We will circle back to the story in John 2 later to discuss how this episode brought the passage to life.

Quick Context: John the Baptist

John the Baptist was born to an elderly couple who lived in the Judean hills outside Jerusalem (Luke 1:5, 39-40). His father was a priest, so John had access to priestly circles, though likely not as a Jerusalem insider. This allowed him to witness the activities of the Jerusalem priesthood, leading to his eventual criticism of its excesses. John chose to withdraw from the temple community and go into the wilderness, where in the role of a prophet of old he exhorted a wide variety of people, including priests, to righteous living (Matt. 3:1-3).

Episode Discussion Questions

Overview: In what ways did this episode bring the story of the Gospels to life for you? What did you find new and interesting?

CHARACTERS

Simon & Eden

The episode begins with Simon telling his wife Eden about his experience with Jesus, and she is thrilled. She rejoices, then encourages and empowers Simon to follow Jesus.

- Why was Eden's reaction significant? What impact do you think it had on Simon? What might have happened if she had reacted differently, discouraging him instead?
- **APPLY:** Can you think of a time in your life when someone encouraged and empowered you to follow Jesus? What was that like? What difference did it make? What about a time in your life when someone *didn't* encourage you to follow Jesus in some way? What was that like? How did that effect your relationship with Jesus

For Leaders: *Feel free to simply do one or the other of these for time's sake: a time people were encouraged or a time they were discouraged.*

SCENES

The mysterious prison interrogation between Nicodemus and John the Baptist continues (26:00-28:15)

- Why do you think this scene was included in this episode? Why is it important?
- What is Nicodemus trying to find out from John?
- How does John respond to Nicodemus? What part of it is offensive to Nicodemus?

For Leaders: *John the Baptist quotes Proverb 30:4, "Who has gone up to the heaven and come down? Whose hands have gathered up the wind? Who has wrapped up the waters in a cloak? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is the name of his son? Surely you know!" Nicodemus is offended because he realizes John is moving him to admit that this verse points to a single person: The Messiah himself. Nicodemus's understanding of the OT is that God's "son" is his entire people—Israel. It would be blasphemy for Nicodemus to admit that the man who healed Mary is the long-awaited Messiah.*

SPECIFIC QUOTES

When the wine runs out at the wedding (39:30) Mary asks Jesus to do something about it so that the host family will not be ashamed. However, Jesus says it is not his time.

- Why does he ask this question?
- Why do you think Mary persists and says "please?"
- Why do you think he chose to do it?
- In the end, did Jesus change his mind? Why or why not?

Wrap Up

Re-read [John 2:1-12](#). After watching this episode, how did your understanding of this miracle deepen or change?

The water turning into wine doesn't get a lot of "airtime" in these verses (8-9). And it is briefly stated that this was Jesus's first public miracle (2:11). Yet this episode makes the moment that Jesus turns the water into wine much more dramatic and filled with meaning and implication.

- Why was this a significant moment for Jesus? Asked differently, why does Jesus say with a seemingly heavy heart, "I am ready Father"?

For Leaders: *Until this point, Jesus has done private, individual miracles. This miracle in Cana, however, is much more public. He knows word about him will begin to spread, setting the trajectory of his public ministry. And of course, Jesus knows what lies at the end of the road of this public ministry*

- **APPLY:** What can you take away from this episode? How might it change the ways you think, feel, and act this week? (Small answers are okay).

Pray: Ask God that the group would not become overly familiar with Jesus, so that we cease to be amazed by who he is. Guard us from having our "thinking" get in the way of our desire and ability to follow Jesus.

Going Further

Simon's wife Eden encouraged him in his calling to follow Jesus. As we've seen, this kind of encouragement can make a big difference in the lives of others.

- Who can you encourage this week? How will you do so?
- Commit to encouraging someone in some way at least once a day this week. Write out your plan to help make sure it happens!

Scripture Memory

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

1 Thessalonians 5:11

Next week, start off the lesson by discussing what it was like to memorize the verse and what impact it had on them the previous week.

Additional Resource

Stone Vessels and Ritual Purity

Large stone storage jars from the first-century period have been found by archeologists in Judea and Galilee. These are typically lathe-cut from single blocks of limestone. The use of solid stone for water vessels adheres to Jewish purity laws. In the Old Testament, to be “impure” or “unclean” was a religious (not physical) status of insufficient ritual purity, making you unfit to enter into certain religious places or to perform certain holy acts. For example, priests were to be ritually pure in order to conduct their temple service, so they avoided contact with ritually impure people or substances. Contact with the dead is one example of contamination that renders one unclean (thus the priest and the Levite walked around a seemingly dead man in the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:29-37).

According to Jewish tradition, if clay pottery has come into contact with some ritually impure substance or person, that pottery itself becomes forever impure and should be destroyed (Lev. 11:33). Numerous archaeological discoveries in modern Israel testify to ancient pottery intentionally damaged and thrown away (often pierced with holes or deliberately broken), likely due to its perceived impurity. However, stone was considered insusceptible to retaining any such contamination. After the impure contents of a stone vessel had been emptied and the vessel cleansed, it could be reused. Stone vessels, which were more expensive to produce than pottery, were typically only used by those seeking to maintain ritual purity. The water jars in John 2:6 were religious vessels used for ceremonial purity washings



“Additional Resource” adapted from the ESV Archaeology Study Bible (1,543); “Quick Context: John the Baptist” adapted from the ESV Archaeological Study Bible (1,372).

The Crossing Discussion Guide

The Chosen

Ep. 6 • Indescribable Compassion

Big Idea: Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love God and love others. That second part is really easy to say, but much harder to practice.

Intro Question: When was the last time you saw a homeless person? What was your reaction? Do you find yourself drawn to such people or find yourself wanting to keep your distance? Why?

Read Luke 5:17-26 and discuss these questions before watching the episode.

- What specific details stand out to you in this story?
- What do you think it would have been like to be present at this scene?
- What do you think it would have been like to be one of Jesus's disciples?

Summary: The characters, from their different perspectives, experience the same story: the healing of a paralyzed man. With so many people witnessing Jesus's teaching and miracle, word about him is beginning to spread. This episode brings to life a story that gives perspective to our greatest need and cultivate compassion for others in need

Quick Context: Roofs in the First Century

Houses in ancient Palestine often had external stairs leading up to a flat roof. Roofs of houses in Israel were usually covered with weeds, branches, and mud, which Luke may have called "tiles" in Luke 5:19. Though tiles were not widely used at this time, evidence exists that they were in fact used for some roof construction in Palestine, suggesting that the house where this paralytic was healed may have been owned by a wealthier person.

Episode Discussion Questions

Overview: In what ways did this episode bring the story of the Gospels to life for you? What did you find new and interesting?

CHARACTERS

- What characters stuck out to you this episode? Why?

For Leaders: *Feel free to spend some time here because there were a lot of characters present: Mary of Magdala, Matthew, Abigail and Joshua (kids), Shmuel the Pharisee, Nicodemus, Gaius the Roman soldier, Simon & Andrew, and more.*

SCENES

- Which scenes struck you in this episode? Why?
- What stood out to you when Jesus was teaching in the home? What part of his teaching, the questions or answers, intrigued you?

SPECIFIC QUOTES

Jesus says to the paralytic, "Son, take heart. Your sins are forgiven" (43:57)

- Why do you think this is the first thing Jesus says? What does this mean?
- Why did Shmuel (the Pharisee) believe this to be blasphemy?

For Leaders: *By proclaiming that the man's "sins are forgiven," Jesus is announcing that he has the authority to forgive sins; he then demonstrates this authority by healing the man. Jesus's counter-question ("which is easier to say...") involves the difference between "saying" and "doing." It is easier to say that a person's sins are forgiven (which cannot be proved or disproved) than to tell him to rise up and walk (which can be proved or disproved). Jesus's healing of the paralytic thus serves as proof ("so that you may know") that he, as the Son of Man, has the authority to forgive sins.*

Wrap Up

Re-read [Luke 5:17-26](#):

- After watching this episode, how did your understanding of these verses deepen or change?
- How do you think this miracle impacted the characters who were present? (Consider some or all of the characters who were present: Abigail and Joshua, Matthew, Simon, Mary, Nicodemus, Shmuel, Zebedee, the Roman soldiers, the Egyptian woman and the other friends of the paralytic, the paralytic).
- What does this passage (and episode) teach us about Jesus?
- What does this passage (and episode) teach us about what friendship looks like in and among God's people?

For Leaders: *Here are 3 things to be sure to emphasize:*

1. *Being a faithful friend means sacrificing our time, energy, and possibly reputations to help friends in need.*
2. *Being a faithful friend means being willing to let others serve us and meet our needs, which of course requires us to let them know what those needs are! (The cliché and oft-repeated answer, "I'm fine," isn't going to cut it).*
3. *Friendship isn't an end in itself. Notice who the friends were taking the paralytic to: Jesus. That is a great metaphor and reality of friendship in God's kingdom. On the one hand, we are called to "take our friends to Jesus," reminding them of his love for them. On the other hand, we need to ask ourselves where our friends are taking us. Are they taking us to Jesus or some other place?*

Pray: Ask God that we would be the kind of friends who take others to Jesus and who encourage them to be faithful to him.

Going Further

This week make a list of your friends (HEAD, HANDS). Ask yourself the following questions...

- Where are you taking your friends? How can you serve them more?
- Where are you being taken by your friends? How are they helping you follow Jesus? How are they taking you somewhere else?
- Are there friends you need to distance yourself from? Are there other friendships you need to cultivate?

For Leaders: *Don't let these insights sit in our minds. Bring them out and discuss them; share them with the group next week.*

Scripture Memory

"Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!"

[Luke 5:12b-13](#)

Next week, start off the lesson by discussing what it was like to memorize the verse and what impact it had on them the previous week.

Additional Resource

Lepers and “Clean vs. Unclean”

Lepers

Lepers were not only outcasts of Jewish society, they were feared and hated. Why? God freed the Israelites from Egyptian slavery in order to make them a set apart (holy) people with the task of being a blessing to the nations around them. They were the means by which God’s kingdom of love, justice, and mercy were to spread throughout this sin-infested world. In order to be “set apart,” they had to live in a certain way. The book of Leviticus is like a manual for Israel on how to be a set apart nation.

Anyone with leprosy was considered unclean and needed to remain apart from the people of God. (see “Clean vs. Unclean” below for more on these distinctions). According to Leviticus 13-14, if you have leprosy, you are ritually unclean. Leviticus 13:45-46 gives us vivid and painful instructions, “Anyone with such a defiling disease must wear torn clothes, let their hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of their face and cry out, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ As long as they have the disease, they remain unclean. They must live alone; they must live outside the camp.” They had to shout this because someone who touched a leper also became ritually unclean.

Clean vs. Unclean

The concept of “clean vs. unclean” is laid out in detail in the Book of Leviticus as well. Modern readers may be tempted to think of that which is “nonhygienic” or “hygienic.” In Leviticus, however, these words do not refer to hygiene at all. Rather, they refer to ritual states (the word “holy” is also used in many contexts to describe the state of being clean). Understanding the concept of ritual states is very important to understanding Leviticus as a whole.

Leviticus sets forth three basic ritual states: the unclean, the clean, and the holy. On the one hand, these categories guide the community with reference to the types of actions a person may (or may not) engage in and the places that a person may (or may not) go. For instance, those who are unclean may not partake of a peace offering (7:20), while those who are clean may (7:19). A modern analogy might be that of registering to vote: a person who is “registered” may vote, whereas a person who is “unregistered” may not. There is also a difference between “ritual states” and “moral states.” One who is in the ritual state of holiness is not necessarily more personally righteous than a person who is simply clean or unclean (just as a person who is “registered” to vote is not necessarily more righteous than a person who is not)

“Additional Resource” adapted from the ESV Study Bible Introduction to Leviticus (212); “Quick Context: Roofs in the First Century” adapted from the NIV Study Bible (2,080) and ESV Study Bible (1,960).

The Crossing Discussion Guide

The Chosen

Ep. 7 • Invitations

Big Idea: Following Jesus means we get to know him as we read and learn about him in Scripture. But it also means that we are continually challenged by, in awe of, and even confounded by him

Intro Question: Describe a time in your life when you learned something new and it “changed everything” for you, or made you see something in a completely different light. What about it triggered this change for you?

Summary: Nicodemus finally gets to meet the mysterious man he has been hearing about for several episodes. This meeting is recorded for us in John 3:1-15. Nicodemus is confused, yet he worships and leaves with an invitation. This is a significant and relevant conversation for us.

Read John 3:1-15 and discuss these questions before watching the episode:

- What do you learn about Nicodemus? About his questions?
- What do you learn about Jesus? What is Jesus saying, particularly in verse 14?

For Leaders: *“Son of Man” was the most common way in which Jesus referred to himself. The title originally shows up in Daniel 7:14, and was a claim to be the king of all creation. This is why so many Jews were scandalized by Jesus.*

Quick Context: The Bronze Serpent

In the introduction we see Moses forging a bronze serpent. This is a reference Numbers 21:4-9 where the Israelites complain not only against their leader Moses, but against God himself. They lament being freed from Egyptian slavery and loathe God’s provision of manna for them. Because of this, God sends a plague of serpents on the people. However, as in the past, Moses intercedes on their behalf and God responds with mercy. How? The construction and exaltation of a bronze serpent, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live” (Num. 21:8).

Episode Discussion Questions

Overview: In what ways did this episode bring the story of the Gospels to life for you? What did you find new and interesting?

SCENES

Conversation between Nicodemus & Jesus (21:00-31:30)

- What did you find interesting, intriguing, or moving about this conversation?

Nicodemus starts off by exclaiming, “I don’t know where to start - I have so many questions.”

- **APPLY:** If you could sit down with Jesus, what are some pressing questions you would ask him? Why?

One specific question Nicodemus asks is, “What have you come here to show us?” Jesus replies, “A kingdom...a certain kind of kingdom that a person cannot see unless he is born again.”

- What does Jesus mean?
- Why do you think he is being so cryptic and is not speaking more plainly?

- **APPLY:** It's clear that Nicodemus, the great and wise teacher of Israel, does not understand what Jesus is saying. Where and how do you identify with Nicodemus in regard to your relationship with Jesus? In what ways are you still confused/confounded by Jesus?

For Leaders: *Don't feel the pressure to answer people's questions. Thank them for their honesty and explain a huge step is in simply voicing these questions. God is not surprised or angered with our questions about him. If needed, take mental notes about questions and follow up with participants as needed about additional resources that will help them take a next step. Reach out to a staff member if you need help concerning resources.*

SPECIFIC QUOTES

For Leaders: *If you have time, feel free to ask this question. It is a bit of a tangent from the main theme of this lesson, but it is a worthwhile and relevant topic...*

At the very end of the episode Matthew leaves his post to follow Jesus. The Roman soldier Gaius is confounded, "Have you lost your mind? You have money, protection, and no Jew lives as good as you. You're going to throw it all away."

If that is true - and it is - why did Matthew decide to walk away and follow Jesus? Matthew jumped at the chance to have a new family, a place of belonging, a place of acceptance value respect and love.

- **APPLY:** Has this been your experience of Christian community? Why or why not? What is one thing that is in your control that you could do to create this kind of community for others?

Wrap Up

Re-read **John 3:1-15**. After watching this episode, how did your understanding of these verses deepen and/or change?

- Based on what we saw in the intro scene, what is Jesus saying in John 3:14-15?

For Leaders: *(1) Jesus further explains the new birth. Just as God miraculously granted (physical) life through Moses and the bronze serpent, God miraculously gives (spiritual, eternal) life through Jesus, who, unlike the snake, has life in himself. (2) "Lifted up" combines the two notions of Jesus's being physically raised up on the cross at his crucifixion and Jesus's glorious exaltation to God's throne at his ascension (Jn. 8:28).*

- **APPLY:** Generally speaking, what is something you saw in this episode or read about in John 3:1-15 that was challenging to you? Why? How and where do you need to **think** differently, **feel** differently, or **act** differently as a result?

Pray: Pray for group members, that Jesus would continue to give us eyes to see and love the kingdom that Jesus has already brought. Pray for others who have not been "born again" and who do not yet see and love Jesus's kingdom. Ask God to help them see.

Going Further

Come up with at least 20 questions that you would ask Jesus if got a chance to sit down and have a follow up conversation to his talk with Nicodemus.

- Narrow that list down to the top three (HEAD).
- Spend this week wrestling with, studying, and praying about these three questions. Ask yourself, "Why is this a pressing question? Where is it coming from? Who do I need to talk about it?" (HEART).

Scripture Memory

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.

John 3:14-15

Next week, start off the lesson by discussing what it was like to memorize the verse and what impact it had on them the previous week.

Additional Resource

The Kingdom of God

From beginning to end, the Bible proclaims God's eternal sovereignty over all things. He reigns supreme as both creator and sustainer of all that exists. Yet, unexpectedly, the Bible also recounts in detail how Adam and Eve rejected God's authority as universal king with disastrous consequences for the history of humanity. Life on earth becomes chaotic as others usurped God's rule. After this catastrophic beginning, the Bible tells of how God gradually and patiently reestablishes his reign over creation by redeeming humanity and subduing his opponents.

The New Testament shows that Jesus is central to this process of redemption. His death, resurrection, and ascension are the means by which God extends his reign across the earth. Those who acknowledge that Jesus is king become members of the kingdom of God. While the kingdom is already present and growing on the earth, the Bible anticipates a time when Jesus will return in glory as universal king to reward the righteous and punish the wicked. When this happens, God's reign will extend unchallenged throughout a renewed earth.

In the Old Testament, the one who is predicted to usher in this kingdom is called the "Messiah." This derives from the Hebrew term for an "anointed one." New Testament authors present Jesus of Nazareth as the fulfillment of these Old Testament expectations. In Matthew's genealogy (Matt. 1:1-17), we see a link between David and Jesus, specifically that Jesus is the long-awaited descendant of David. Jesus is the true and everlasting king (2 Samuel 7:12-16).

Yet he is an unexpected king. In spite of displaying exceptional powers over nature, Jesus refuses to establish God's reign as others expect him to: through military power. Instead, he embodies a life of love and self-sacrifice, which culminates with his death and resurrection. This is the means by which God's kingdom was consummated and solidified on earth. Satan's rule over the earth is now broken and humans are freed from his control. Jesus's death opened the way for those who were enslaved to evil.

What is this kingdom like here and now? Through a series of parables, Jesus provides important insights into the nature of the kingdom of God (Matt. 13). The kingdom will grow gradually, starting as something small, but eventually reaching great size. Those who become members will face persecution from both Satan and from those who side with Satan (knowingly and unknowingly). Since the coming of the kingdom does not immediately end all evil, Jesus reveals that he will return at the end of the growing phase as the universal judge in order to separate the righteous from the wicked. At this time, with the destruction of everything evil, God's kingdom will become all that it was meant to be from the beginning.

"Additional Resource" adapted from the NIV Study Bible (2,662-23).

The Crossing Discussion Guide

The Chosen

Ep. 8 • I Am He

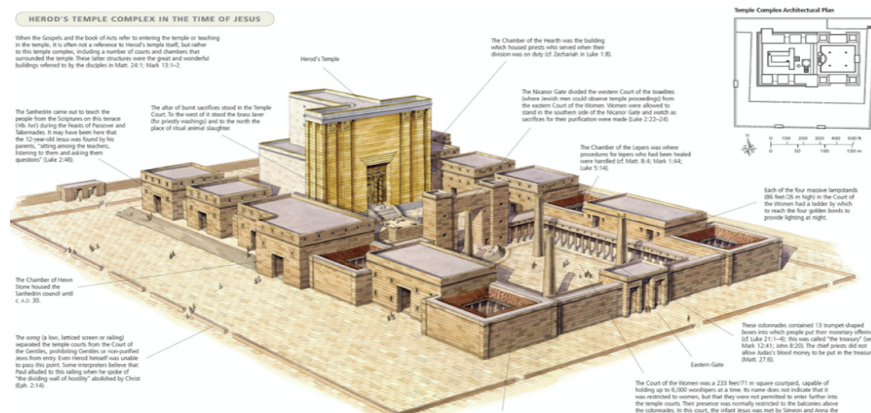
Big Idea: Jesus died and rose from the dead for the “wrong” people.

Intro Question: Where and how do you feel like you are “wrong.” In what ways do you feel you don’t measure up? Job performance, personality, physical appearance, education, upbringing? Is it in the choices you’ve made, or haven’t made?

Summary The Samaritan woman at the well was the wrong woman in every way: the wrong race, the wrong religion, the wrong gender. She was well-known as a sinner in her community. But all of this made her the right woman for Jesus. Similarly, the wrong kind of people were at Matthew’s dinner. Jesus is in the business of calling the “wrong” kind of people to follow him. And yet, as Nicodemus shows, this choice to follow him isn’t always an easy one.

Quick Context: Herod’s Temple Complex

This episode gives us a picture of the dinner party at Matthew’s house. But the Pharisees show up to crash the party. They question Jesus about interacting with these “sinners” who are not allowed into the temple. This map of Herod’s Temple Complex provides a visual of what they had in mind. Notice the walls surrounding the temple. Those are to keep Gentiles, tax collectors, and “sinners” out. However, Jesus was more concerned about the spirit of mercy than the letter of the laws about sacrifices (Hosea 6:6).



Episode Discussion Questions

Overview: In what ways did this episode bring the story of the Gospels to life for you? What did you find new and interesting?

SCENES

Matthew’s Dinner Party (8:41-13:36)

- Who was present at this party? Why were they the “wrong” kinds of people?
- Why did the Pharisees show up? What were they so upset about? (11:00ish minute mark)
- How did Jesus respond?

Nicodemus’s (painful) choice (32:20-34:20)

- Summarize what is happening in this scene.
- Why does Jesus say to Nicodemus, “You came so close.” (33:31)? Why is Nicodemus distraught?

For Leaders: *The tension between Nicodemus's worlds is tearing him apart. On the one hand, he is a respected teacher, renowned and loved by many in the Jewish world. On the other hand, he has seen and heard amazing things from Jesus. Indeed, Jesus explicitly asks him to leave his former life to follow him! He wants to do so, but that would risk his reputation and his status. He has to choose between Jesus and the world.*

- **APPLY:** What are the "worldly" temptations that you find enticing? (These can be good things like respect, a good job, etc.) What good gift(s) are currently tempted to cling to and follow instead of Jesus?

Woman at the Well (37:43-49:14)

- What sticks out to you about this scene? How did it bring the familiar story to life for you? What new details were added that helped deepen your understanding of the story?
- Why was the Samaritan woman at this well an outcast?
- What does [John 4:13-14](#) mean?
"Jesus answered, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'"

For Leaders: *The living water Jesus offers is a reference to the Holy Spirit dwelling within believers (Jn. 7:37-39). When Jesus says these people will never be thirsty again, he is referring to a person's deepest spiritual longing to know God personally.*

- What are other types of "water" do you see people drinking that is not satisfying? How and why is Jesus different?

Wrap Up

Read [John 4:39-41](#):

"Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I ever did.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers."

- **APPLY:** Who are the people you know who are "thirsty"? (Think specific individuals **and** groups). What, if anything, could you do to mirror the Samaritan woman?

Pray: Spend some time thinking and praying for people who do not yet know Jesus.

For Leaders: *Be careful to avoid gossiping about other people. As group members discuss individuals, encourage them to use wisdom and care in using specific names. Perhaps share about a "friend" or "co-worker" rather than naming people. The goal here is to honor those who the Lord has put on your hearts.*

Going Further

Come up with a list of 2 or 3 people in your life who you interact with on a regular basis and who don't consider themselves Christians (or who might be the "wrong" kinds of people). This could be acquaintances, friends, family, neighbors.

- Spend 5-10 minutes every day this week praying that they would come to know Jesus.
- Pray about the ways in which you can be like the Samaritan woman in showing and/or telling them about Jesus (HEAD, HEART, HANDS).

Scripture Memory

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

[John 4:13-14](#)

Consider continuing the practice of Scripture memory! Try picking one verse per week over the winter break until your group meets again in the Spring.

Additional Resource

The Woman at The Well

For Jews in the first century, and for Jesus's disciples, there would have been four main problem with the woman at the well in John 4:

1. The problem of her race: In 932 B.C., the kingdom of Israel split into two after a civil war with Judah in the south and Israel in the north (1 Kings 12). Two hundred years later, the kingdom of Assyria conquered the northern kingdom of Israel, but the southern kingdom of Judah remained intact. The Assyrians assimilated the people of the northern kingdom into their own empire through intermarriage. The Samaritans were the result of the blending of these two cultures. In Jesus's time, the Jews hated the Samaritans even more than "pure" Gentiles, for Samaritans had "polluted" the blood of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and his twelve sons). It was for this reason that Jews often took one of the longer routes around Samaria rather than travel directly through it on the shorter road. Going through Samaria allowed Jesus to cut three days off their journey.

2. The problem of her religion: The woman's religious views were mixed, which would have been an issue for a devout Jew encountering her. The religion of the Samaritans was a blend of the worship of the true God with the pagan idolatry of peoples from other nations that had also been conquered by the Assyrians (2 Kings 17:21-41). Samaritans accepted only the books of Moses as Scripture (the Pentateuch) and had built their own temple on Mount Gerizim (about 30 miles north of Jerusalem). They claimed that this temple was the proper place to worship God. There was such fierce religious hostility between these two peoples that in 128 B.C., the Jews had fought against the Samaritans and burned down their temple, which they viewed as a place of abominable sacrilege.

3. The problem of her gender: At this time, Jewish rabbis or teachers did not have women as disciples. Women were not allowed to be witnesses in court because they were considered to be irrational and untrustworthy. In fact, some Pharisees prayed the following words of thanksgiving to God: "Thank you God that I am not a Gentile, but a Jew; that I am not a slave, but am free; not a woman, but a man." It was not normal for a respectable Jewish man like Jesus to engage in conversation with a strange woman as though she were his equal. Yet Jesus honored her by asking for her help to get a drink of water.

4. The problem of her sin: This woman is known by all to be a sinner. She has married five times and she is now living with a man outside of any marriage covenant. Divorce was fairly easy for men to initiate (Matt. 19:3). But a woman who had been divorced five times would be despised by everyone. People would wonder what was wrong with her to make so many husbands cast her aside. Her divorces would erode her rights, so a man wouldn't have to marry her in order to sleep with her. She would be scorned and hated by other women as well, for they would see her not only as a failure in her five separate marriages but as a danger to their own. Because of all this stigma, the woman at the well would have been regarded by everyone around her as a "real sinner."

"Additional Resource" adapted from Learning Evangelism from Jesus by Jerram Barrs (37-38).

