

Sunday 29th May 2022
Sermon on Luke 6:12-16 (cf. John 5)
Theme: “The Chosen: Simon the Zealot”
“God’s Kingdom comes not by force, but by the words
*** Series on *The Chosen* (8)**

Introduction:

So, have you been watching *The Chosen* in the last months, or the last year or so? What I love about it is that it brings me face to face with the Jesus that I know and love....

In the month of May, we are continuing a series of messages about some of the people who followed Jesus in his earthly ministry.... It is based on the Bible, *and the Gospels in particular*, but it also includes insights from the YouTube series, “The Chosen”....

What is “The Chosen” series? And what’s its aim? Well in a nutshell, the series aims to provide a back story for the characters in the Gospel so that you and I will get to know the characters better, and in the final analysis be driven back to Scripture to read for ourselves about the characters.

Let me read what one commentator has to say:

The Chosen is the first multi-season show about the life of Christ.... The Chosen tells stories of radical transformation among the followers of Jesus.... The Chosen spotlights the real-life men and women who knew Christ....

The Chosen includes scenes and dialogue directly from Scripture, but it also includes scenes and dialogue not in the Bible. Viewers learn on the opening scroll that it is “based on the true stories of the gospels of Jesus Christ”.

Some location and timelines “have been combined or condensed” and “backstories and some characters or dialogue have been added.

“However”, the scroll says, “all biblical and historical context and any artistic imagination are designed to support the truth and the intention of Scripture” (*Michael Foust, 4 Things You Should Know about THE CHOSEN on YouTube*).

Well, let’s continue our look at some of the followers of Jesus.... This morning we’re going to look at Simon the Zealot, his story, and what it means for us....

Part 1: “A Biblical view of Simon the Zealot”

Well, who was Simon the Zealot, and what do we know about him? Well, not much....

In fact, we only have his name as being one of the apostles, “*the Sent Out ones*”, of Jesus.

His name only occurs twice in the New Testament: once in the list of the Apostles, *given by Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, and once more in the list of the apostles who had gathered together in a room in Jerusalem after Jesus’ ascension (*Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13*).

His name, Simon “the one who is called the Zealot” gives us the key, though, to who Simon is. As William Barclay says in his book, *The Master’s Men*:

We know nothing about him personally, but, if he was a Zealot, we know very well what kind of beliefs he once held, and what kind of man he once was, for we have ample evidence to enable us to form a picture of the Zealots and their characteristic beliefs (p. 91).

The Zealots were the last of the last of the great Jewish parties to emerge, and they were the most fervent of all of these groups. Pastor Harry Wendt has a slide which summarises these groups, *TDD, 12F*:

*** The Pharisees**

The Pharisees accepted as authoritative all the books in the Hebrew Scriptures, all 613 laws in the Pentateuch, and all the oral traditions. They said that when the Messiah came to Judaea, all the Jesus scattered around the Mediterranean sea would return to Judah

*** The Sadducees**

They accepted only the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures as authoritative, and concentrated on those sections dealing with worship and rituals in the Temple. They accepted as authoritative the 613 laws of the Pentateuch, but rejected the oral traditions of the scribes and the Pharisees.

*** The Scribes**

The Scribes were students, interpreters, and teachers of the Law. They devoted their lives to the study of the Law so that they might obtain wisdom.

*** The Zealots**

The Zealots were Zealous for God's Word in the Hebrew Scriptures, and urged the use of force to win freedom from Roman control and to usher in the Messianic Age.

So in short, "the Zealots were fanatical Jewish patriots who were zealous for the Law, and bitter haters of the foreign power, namely the Roman invaders" (p. 92, 93).

They were prepared to use force to get rid of the Romans, and establish God's Kingdom, God's rule, in the land of Israel. That's why they are depicted in Harry Wendt's slide as people who were prepared to use the dagger to accomplish this. Their daggers were known as *sicas*, which they carried below their robes, and which they plunged into the bodies of their enemies at every possible opportunity (p. 93).

So what would Jesus have thought of all this?

Did Jesus think that the Kingdom of God, *the rule of God*, could be brought about by force?

No, very much no!!

Let me remind you of a few things from Jesus' life which together make it very clear what Jesus thought about all this....

- 1) Cast your minds back to the temptations of Jesus by Satan when Jesus was in the wilderness.... What was Satan trying to get Jesus to do? To take the high road in order to set up God's Kingdom, *his rule*: the high road of self-importance and power and status, and in the final analysis "force".

Do you remember how Jesus answered Satan's temptations to turn stones into bread, and to jump from the highest point of the Temple and to let God catch him, and to bow down and worship Satan in order to get "all the kingdoms of the world"? Basically, Jesus told Satan to "get lost", because the way in which God was going to set up His Kingdom through Jesus, His Son, was not by forcing people to be part of His Kingdom, but by gently knocking on their hearts (*Matt. 4:1-11; cf. Mark 10:35-45*).

- 2) So how did God bring in His Kingdom, *his rule in the hearts and minds of people*?

Not by military force or any supernatural, magical changing of things, but simply through Jesus' words....

Sure, God backed up Jesus words' by giving Jesus the power to do miracle after miracle, and sure Jesus' work included his suffering and death for us on the cross, *and indeed this was the climax of his whole ministry*, but the means of bringing God's Kingly rule into the hearts and minds of people was basically through Jesus' words.

Remember Jesus' parable of *The Sower and the seed...* (Mark 4:1-20). Who is the Sower? Jesus! And what's the seed? Jesus' message about God's love and His forgiveness, *his message calling people to "repent and believe the Good News"* (Mark 1:15). That's how God changes people and brings them under His rule, *rather than their own rule*. That's how Jesus understood that God's Kingdom would come: not by force, but by his words.

- 3) One final scene from Jesus' life.... Do you remember what happened in the Garden of Gethemane when Jesus was arrested?

Listen to how John tells us about what happened:

¹⁰ Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the High Priest's slave, cutting off his right ear. The name of the slave was Malchus. ¹¹ Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back in its place! Do you think that I will not drink the cup of suffering which my Father has given me?" (John 18:10-11).

In other words, Jesus is saying to Peter:

"Do you think that I've come to set up God's Kingdom by means of the sword? No way!! Do you really think that even now I'm going to go the high road of might and power, rather than the low road of suffering and dying on a cross for the sins of everyone!?"

So if Jesus was very much against the approach of the Zealots, *and he was*, then how on earth did Simon, a member of this group, become a disciple of Jesus? Well, the short answer is: "We don't know...".

But what we do know is:

- * Jesus has the same “zeal” for God and for God’s Law that Simon had. Remember when Jesus overturned the money changers’ tables in the Temple grounds, John tells us:

¹⁷ His disciples remembered that the scripture says, “My devotion (*lit.* “zeal”) to your house, O God, burns in me like a fire” (John 2:17; cf. Ps 69:9).

- * When people met Jesus and listened to him, *really listened to him*, often their whole life changed, *as it did for the Samaritan woman at the well from last week.*

But we are still left with the question: “How on earth did it happen that Simon the Zealot became Simon, the apostle of Jesus?”

Part 2: “The story of Simon in The Chosen”

Well, that’s what the writers of “The Chosen” try to give us in their video series. Let me share with you the Back Story that the writers of “The Chosen” give for Simon the Zealot, *a back story that I think helps us to understand the sort of person Simon was....*

Simon is portrayed as being the young brother of a man named Jesse. The episode begins with Jesse climbing a tree, falling and breaking his back, *so that he is unable to walk.* After Simon is born, the two become great friends: they play together, do things together, and Simon takes Jesse into town in a wheelbarrow of sorts.

On one such occasion, Simon sees a Roman soldier beating up a Jewish man, and Simon decides to do something about this. One night he leaves his home secretly, *just leaving a note for his brother,* and joins the Zealots.

Listen to the note that Simon leaves for Jesse, because it gives an insight into why Simon becomes an Zealot, and why later he leaves the Zealots when Simon sees Jesus heal his lame brother:

“I am going to join the Zealots of the Fourth Philosophy in the spirit of our great King David who sang: ‘Zeal for your house has consumed me’ (Psalm 69:9).

And from Zechariah:

**‘Behold at that time, I will deal with all your oppressors,
I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and
I will changed their shame into praise and renown
In all the earth’ (Zeph 3:19).**

The note finishes with these words:

“Jesse, when you stand on two feet, I will know that the Messiah has come. I will fight for the freedom of Zion in order to see that day”.

Jump forward some thirty odd years, and Jesse is depicted as being the paralysed man at the pool called Bethzatha in Jerusalem, *the man who Jesus heals there*. Remember the story that John tells in his gospel about a man who had been paralysed for 38 years, and had been striving to get into the pool “when the water is stirred up”, so that he might be healed, *or this is what people believed (John 5:1-7)*.

Meanwhile Simon has been training to be an Assassin for the Zealots, and he is given the task of killing a Roman magistrate in Jerusalem. We see him practicing for the task, *with a fire in a wagon as a distraction, before Simon draws his sica and puts the knife to the throat of a man pretending to be the Roman magistrate, and saying, “No Lord, but God!!”, as he pretends to cut the man’s throat*.

Well, to cut a long story short, Simon goes to Jerusalem to murder the Roman magistrate, and while he is there, he goes to

see his paralysed brother Jesse by the pool at Bethzatha or Bethesda. Jesse bemoans that Simon hasn't been to see him in all the time that he has been there, and Simon tries to explain why he is a Zealot, and why he is devoted to doing God's will and why he is devoted to killing whatever Roman invaders he can. Then Simon leaves to assassinate the Roman magistrate....

Jesus then comes and heals Jesse. Listen to some of the dialogue:

Jesus: Shalom.... I have a question for you.
'Do you want to be healed?'

Jesse: Who are you?

Jesus: We'll get to that later

Jesse: Will you take me to the water?
Jesus shakes his head.

Jesus: Look at me.... I'm asking about you. This pool has nothing for you. It means nothing and you know it.... You don't need this pool. You only need Me. So.... Do you want to be healed?
Jesse not his head, and assents

So, let's go. Get up, pick up your mat and walk.
Jesse stands up, with the religious leaders watching.

Jesse: Who...??

Jesus: Pick up your mat.... That life is over. Everything changes now.

Remember that Simon said in this note to Jesse, *when he left to be a Zealot:*

"Jesse, when you stand on two feet, I will know that the Messiah has come..."

So when Simon sees Jesse on his two feet, he abandons his plans to kill the Roman magistrate, and instead tries to find the

man who healed his brother Jesse and who Simon believed had to be the Messiah (*cf. Zeph. 3:19*).

Simon is watching the disciples of Jesus, and tries to rescue them from a demonic man.

Instead Jesus rescues Simon by yelling at the demonic man, "Out! Out of him!".

Listen to the dialogue between Simon and Jesus:

S: Did you heal my brother in Jerusalem, Rabbi?

J: Yes (*nodding*)

S: Then you are... *the Messiah (implied)*

J: Yes

S: And where are your... *soldiers, army (implied)*

J: They are right here (*pointing to the his motley crew of women and disciples*).

Not the fearsome warriors you pictured by my side when you were in the catacombs training to be a Zealot.

Let's go for a walk, Simon, son of Zebulun....

Jesus and Simon go off for a walk, and the conversation ends with Simon saying, "I will do anything you ask", and Jesus saying:

J: Show me your weapon.

Simon gives Jesus his sica

Impressive...

Then Jesus throws the dagger into the river Jordan.

S: You have no use of that?

J: I have a better sword.... You'll see. We have much to discuss. Just be patient.

S: Without my sica dagger, why do you need someone like me?

J: I have everything I need. But I wanted you!

Part 3: “What we are reminded of”

Well, three things, I think:

- * Firstly, we are reminded that the Kingdom of God, *the rule of God in the hearts and minds of people*, doesn't come about by military force or by any supernatural, magical changing of things, but simply through Jesus' words....

So if we want to grow as God's child, *if we want God to more and more be part and parcel of our lives*, there is only one way to do it: and that's by spending time regularly listening to Jesus' words, *particularly his words in the Gospels....*

- * Secondly, we are reminded that if we want to bring others into the Kingdom of God, then we can't twist their arms to become Christians: we can't force them to believe.... All we can do is to gently knock on the door of their life, by sharing ourselves with them, *and in the process sharing with them about Jesus.*

Remember that painting by Holman Hunt entitled *The Light of the World....* Jesus is depicted gently knocking on the door of someone's life, *not forcing his way into that person's life.* In fact, as has been pointed out many times, there is no door knob on the outside of the door. The door allowing Jesus into a person's life has to be opened by the person himself or herself....

- * Thirdly, we are reminded that God uses 'unknown' people like you and me in His Kingdom, *well people like you and me who are not important and who will not be remembered by this world in ten years, let alone in hundreds of years.*

As we said, Simon the Zealot is only mentioned twice in the New Testament: one in the list apostles, and once in the list of those who gathered together after Jesus' ascension. He is relatively unknown, compared to many of the other apostles and followers of Jesus.

So it is with you and me.... I am reminded of a photo of C.S. Lewis and his friends that Alistair McGrath refers to in one of his books. Alistair McGrath could pick out C.S. Lewis and his brother and some of his friends, but many in the picture were “unknowns” (*Deep Magic, Dragons and Talking Mice*, p. 170-171).

Yet God knows who we are, and He has called us, *like He called Simon the Zealot*, to be part of His Kingdom, and He has important things for us ‘unknowns’ to do in His Kingdom, *just as He had important things for Simon the Zealot to do....*

Blessing:

May God bless you and me as we grow as His children *by listening to the words of Jesus*; as we share with others the good news of Jesus *by tapping gently tapping on the door of their life*; and as we live as God’s beloved ‘unknowns’.