



— WEEK FOUR —
“FOR YOUR REDEMPTION”

— CHECK-IN —

How are you? What’s one cool thing God has done in your life in the last week? And because we’ll be talking about two followers of Jesus who receive a (possibly unfortunate) nickname, let’s get personal. Do you have a nickname? (This could be triggering for some, so let’s keep it positive.) Did a coach call you “chief?” Maybe grandma called you “punkin’.” (Yes, nicknames from grandmothers must be food related.)

— OPENING PRAYER —

**God of Redemption, use our failures.
Channel our passion to further your kingdom.**

— INTRODUCTION —

We have covered a lot of ground to this point, with stories from Mary, Matthew, and Nicodemus. (It's getting too long to review, so it's up to you to go back and catch the ones you missed!) As we've looked at each character, both their embellished story from the tv show, *The Chosen*, and their Biblical source, investigating the brokenness that drew them to Christ has helped us face our own brokenness. The goal? To help us prepare our hearts for the celebration of Easter. We start the second half of our series with the story of two brothers who were called to be followers of Christ... but who had a bit of a personality struggle to overcome. But first...

Warm-up Question: Jesus's followers including a few sibling pairs... do you have siblings? What's your relationship with them like? Could you imagine going into business/ministry with them? (Hold space for those who may not have the best relationship with their siblings.)

— THE CHOSEN —

Let's remember why we're doing this. Jesus's most devoted followers were drawn to him because... in him they found healing for their *brokenness*. And we are diving into these characters and their stories because in them we identify our own brokenness, such that we might be drawn to Jesus in the same powerful and healing way they were. Today, we meet two of the stars of the show, both in the gospels and in *The Chosen*.

JAMES & JOHN

So, as we have every week, let's start with what we know about these boys. First, depending on whose account you're reading, James and John were two of the very first disciples Jesus called to follow Jesus. They were fishermen along with Simon and Andrew and lived in the Capernaum area. And so, they're probably #3 and #4 called to follow Jesus. Second, Jesus trusts them. They're leaders in the group and are among Jesus's inner circle. If he wants his most trusted followers, it's Simon Peter, and James and John.

Now, we don't get a whole lot about their time before following Christ. And though we know how they find him, that's next week's story. So, for today, we're going to fast-forward a bit in order to find the brokenness that drew them to Christ. And that comes from the third thing we know about them... they earn themselves a nickname. It's not one that's necessarily flattering, but it's

definitely one they earn and one that gives us a hint to the brokenness that draws them to Christ.

Let's set the stage. To this point, Jesus and his followers are still in Capernaum. But where we pick up our story for today, Jesus decides it's time to jump into the lion's den and go south to Jerusalem. To get from Capernaum in the north, to Jerusalem in the south, the fastest route takes you right through Samaria. But, (and it's a big "but,") Jews and Samaritans did NOT get along. To the point where, when Jews traveled from Galilee to Jerusalem, they would add a day or more to their journey go all the way around, just so they wouldn't have to go through Samaria. And Samaritans were 100% okay with that. (For more info on *why*, go watch Pastor Mike's reflection from Sunday.) But, Jesus wasn't one to adhere to convention, and taking any opportunity he could to prove a point, he decided to go straight through hostile territory. And this is where we learn something important about James and John and their brokenness. Let's take a look:

Read Luke, chapter 9, verses 51 through 56.

James and John were so upset they asked Jesus to call down fire from heaven to consume these Samaritans. An overreaction? Just a little. But this scene gives us a clue as to why James and John were drawn to Jesus and how Jesus healed *their* brokenness.

Question 1: Consider this scene from Luke. What stands out to you about James and John's reaction and how Jesus handled the situation? How would you have reacted... first to being disrespected, but also to being rebuked by Jesus?

It does not appear that James and John... or Jesus... found this funny at the time. But if you look at it with a little hindsight, it's kinda humorous. We don't know exactly what happened. Maybe the Samaritans hurled some insults. Maybe they just shut their doors and wouldn't let Jesus get a room at the Shechem Holiday Inn. We don't know. What we do know is that it got under the skin of James and John to the point where they ask Jesus to call down fire from heaven to smite them. (Anyone ever been driving on the interstate, cut off in traffic, and asked God to bring down fire from heaven on an unsuspecting Ford Taurus? No?)

Interesting note here... when you look at the Greek, the question they ask Jesus reads more like "will you give US the permission and the power to destroy these people?" They aren't even asking Jesus to do it. They want to do it themselves. That's how ticked off these dudes are. And what does Jesus do? It says he turned and rebuked them. Yeah, when you get a rebuke from Jesus, you know you done messed up. They failed here. There's no other way to put it. They failed. And this was a big one.

If they're going to be the leaders Jesus needs them to be, he's got some work to do. They seemed to have some anger issues. They

seemed to not understand the love Jesus had for all people, not just them. They missed the point of Jesus bringing the kingdom of God to Earth not to smite the unrighteous, but to save the world through him. James and John's brokenness was... their failures. And this is what drew them to Jesus. He chose them...

DESPITE THEIR FAILURES

And it also gives us a clue as to how they got the nickname they did. In a moving (and humorous) scene from the show, Jesus describes them as the "Sons of Thunder... like a storm on the sea, thunder exploding out of their chests at every turn." But, the last line of the scripture says they went on to another town. So, Jesus didn't kick them off the team. Jesus didn't put them in time out, or send them back to Capernaum. He recognizes the failure but reminds them they are still chosen despite their failures.

Question 2: Part 1 – Do you feel you respond appropriately to situations, or do you have a tendency to overreact? Has this been an issue in your past? How do you tend to react to a tense situation like this? Part 2 – Maybe anger isn't your issue... is there a tendency you have for which Jesus might give you a less-than-flattering nickname? (For kicks and giggles, what might that nickname be?)

In this episode of the *The Chosen*, John's response to the nickname, *Sons of Thunder*, he asks, "Is that a good thing or a bad

thing?” And Jesus was spot on with his response, “today, that was a bad thing.” Today, it was a failure. Their emotionally-driven responses, their passion, their commitment led to the wrong outcome this time. How often do we feel like our failures disqualify us from being Chosen by God? How often do we feel like our failures disqualify us from being *loved* by God? Our failures eat away at us and make us feel unworthy to be in Jesus’s presence. They make us feel guilt and shame. Our *failures* are unlike Mary’s demons or Matthew’s condition or Nicodemus’s position, because our failures are conscious decisions on our part, to do the wrong thing, go the wrong way, hurting people and ourselves in the process. And like James and John in the tv show, like puppies caught having eaten our master’s slippers, we feel like we let Jesus down.

And yet, Jesus chooses us anyway. Jesus loves us anyway. But what’s even more powerful here... Jesus says, “I need *you* to help show the way... strong passion can be a good thing when channeled for righteousness.” And that’s what Jesus does, he helps the boys channel their intensity. The emotion, the passion, the dogged commitment that in this scenario that led them to want to smite the Samaritans... is the same emotion, passion, and dogged commitment that will lead them to sit with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane before his crucifixion, that will lead John to write the gospel testimony of Jesus’s story, that will lead James to be a leader of the apostles who would start the early church. This passion that lead them to want to defend Jesus to the

death against Samaria would eventually lead them to want to defend Jesus to the death FOR Samaria. That's what Jesus does. He doesn't just choose James and John *despite* their failures, he looks beyond that to what he can use. Jesus chooses them...

FOR THEIR REDEMPTION

Jesus redeems these misuses of their passion by giving them authority to do the miracles Jesus does, to lead the other disciples while he is still alive, and to shepherd them when they are starting the church after his death. They are chosen for their redemption... the redemption of their failures.

Question 3: Consider your answer to question 2. How might Jesus redeem that tendency of yours, and use you to show others his love? How can Jesus turn your nickname around?

— CLOSING —

Jesus chooses you for your redemption. Jesus chooses you so that he can take that failure, that tendency that can lead to something negative, and channel the gift within you for his purposes. Let Jesus redeem your failure. We're going to fail. We're going to mess up and do things that would probably deserve a rebuke from Jesus. But take a lesson from James and John. It's okay to mess up. It's okay to fail. Because Jesus looks beyond our failures to the passion behind it, and if we let him... will channel that gift for his purposes.

Let Jesus repurpose your failures, because you are chosen for your redemption.

**Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations.
Close in prayer.**