

On hearing his words, some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet."

⁴¹ Others said, "He is the Messiah."

Still others asked, "How can the Messiah come from Galilee?" ⁴² Does not Scripture say that the Messiah will come from David's descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?" ⁴³ Thus the people were divided because of Jesus. (John 7:40-43 NIV2011)

The Chosen One

Life just wasn't that good. It wasn't like you lived in constant fear; just most of the time. The leaders liked to remind you to never get too comfortable. They and their minions could do whatever they want whenever. Any attempts at resistance were quickly shot down. They tried to tell you this is for the best! But you knew better. This was no way to live. But what could you do...He comes from the most unlikely place. He's pretty rough around the edges insisting he's not a hero! But they see what he cannot. He's a man of the people. He's just like him and her and everyone else. He's most certainly not perfect. He has his flaws that draw you closer to him. He checks all of the boxes for what a hero should be. Of course, it's inevitable that some don't see it that way. He doesn't check the right boxes for them. They can't stand the man! They had all heard the stories long foretold of the one who would come and save the people. But it could not be this guy! And so there's division amongst the people. But whether you like him or not, want to follow him or not, does not change the fact that he is the chosen one.

Whether it's Lord of the Rings, Chronicles of Narnia: Lion, Witch and the Wardrobe, The Matrix, more recent Avengers movies, or it's your Old Westerns, that's a pretty common theme for hero-based stories. Here's someone who could be the Chosen One but will the people recognize him, will they want her, will they accept their role and lead the people, will they defeat the villain? Is this the Chosen One?

That's what the people are trying to figure out in Jesus' day too. It was the last day of the week-long celebration called the Feast of Tabernacles. People from all over would have come to Jerusalem to celebrate this feast; that includes Jesus. As he had been doing since about the middle of the week, Jesus again speaks to the crowd of people. And the people listen. And what they heard left them thinking and discussing once again: who is this guy? It's plenty obvious that there is something different and special about this Jesus guy. Some of them came to the conclusion, "Truly this man is the Prophet." They could tell Jesus speaks with a special power and authority that their other teachers of the law did not have. Here's God's mouth-piece who comes on God's behalf to give a message to the people in line with Moses, Elijah, and Isaiah.

Other were saying, “He’s not just the Prophet. No, he is the Messiah.” They too heard Jesus speaking. They see the lines connecting the dots of the Old Testament. And, by God’s grace, they come to the conclusion Jesus is greater than a prophet; he is God’s chosen one, that is the Messiah!

Others aren’t ready to go that far. Sure, Jesus checks some of the boxes; but, let’s not get too hasty. They know the Old Testament too. They remember that prophecy from Micah 5:2. The Messiah would come from David’s descendants and his hometown Bethlehem. Everyone knew Jesus came from Nazareth, up north, in Galilee. There’s no way he could be the Messiah, the Chosen One. And so there’s division because the people can’t decide who Jesus.

Who is Jesus? We’re still having that discussion today. It might not be in the temple courts. You maybe don’t have it with anyone else. But we wrestle with this in our own hearts too. We wrestle with it because there are so many different ideas what Jesus should be or should be doing. Is he God’s Chosen One? What does that even mean? Is he a good-speaker or moral lesson giver? I don’t know how many times I have heard someone say, “I think Jesus would want me to do this.” Or, “I think if Jesus were in this situation he would do *that*.” As if Jesus is more or less a “Magic 8 Ball” or fortune cookie that makes decisions for your life or as validation for the choices you have made. He’s the hero who comes to support you and your life choices. He’s the chosen one who defeats the enemy of indecisiveness and will guide your life. Jesus is your friend...and that’s all.

There are many who like the idea of Jesus as the hero from whom we can learn. He’s a prophet of the day who teaches and says good things for moral living. He fixes people to make them better in our world. He’s someone who gives a good philosophy on how to treat other people. He’s one of many heroes to choose from who will teach you how to live a happy and fulfilled life. But that’s it.

Another group knows Jesus because they have knowledge of the Bible. They’ve gone to church and heard the stories. They went to Sunday school and Catechism class. They maybe even attended a Lutheran School for a few if not more years of life. They can give you the academic answer for who Jesus is: he’s true God and true man. He died and rose again. They know all the right answers for the test. But like those in Jesus’ day who knew the Old Testament, they fail to grasp it. They allow their own opinions to speak louder than the truth of God’s Word. They think they know enough and have little desire to grow more because they already decided what they want to be true. With such a group, Jesus becomes more like a comic book superhero that you learn all the factoids about because he’s interesting at the time. It’s a good story to know because Mom and Dad thought it was important. You know you should know it too because you’ve been told it’s good

for you. But they fail to know who Jesus really is. And so, all that knowledge is of little benefit because they do not believe. Jesus is not really the Chosen One. He's simply one you choose when it's convenient for you. Then life's questions remain unanswered. Then life isn't what you had planned and you are at a place in life you don't like and feel trapped. You feel alone. You were betrayed. You feel lost and kind of floating along in life. You hear the promises Jesus gives, and "I know, but..." because you learned the promises. You learned the knowledge. But you do not believe he's the Chosen One who does what you need. And so, you are left looking for something else.

But if that's all Jesus is, and if that's how we present him, no wonder the joy of Christmas is subdued this year and short-lived. Jesus isn't the hero many think they need. We shouldn't be surprised that the peace of Christmas has more turmoil than usual. That type of Jesus isn't going to do a good enough job. It shouldn't shock us that so many miss the point of Christmas. If that hero is just another academic exercise of fact learning, why should I have any interest in him?

So who is Jesus? It's simple. He is the Messiah. He is God's Chosen One. He is the fulfillment of the Father's plan from the beginning. The Father sees the devil oppressing his children. He hears the devil's accusations bringing up the past that keeps you awake at night and leaves you in cold sweats. He sees the devil lie to you again and again and you believing him again and again. He sees those temptations knocking on your door and how we open our lives to them. He sees how even at your best of times you are tripping and falling into them again. He sees how the fear of death for yourself and loved ones grips you. He sees this sinful world beat you up and leave you feeling alone. He sees how even your closest loved ones hurt and fail you when you need them the most. Who would want anything to deal with that mess?

He comes from the most unlikely of places. He's not the hero you were looking for. His own do not recognize him. They do not receive him. He's not the hero we deserve. But he's the Chosen One we need from David's line, born in Bethlehem just as Micah said. But he's not reluctant to take this mantle upon himself. No, he willingly comes to be your brother and dwells among us so that all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God. But in order to do this, he has to be like you. That means since you and I have flesh and blood, he too shares in our humanity. He is fully human in every way. Down-to-earth. Relatable. Someone who is looking out for the weak—like a shepherd takes care of his sheep. Struggles against this sinful world? Yeah, he does too. Temptations knocking on his door? Check that box as well. But where you and I fail, Jesus prevails. Where we have a gaping hole of sin, Jesus is holy. He is born what God had first made mankind to

be: perfect. He's your big brother who fights your fight. Chosen by God, Jesus comes to break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil. With his perfect life and innocent death, Jesus crushes the head of Satan so he cannot control you. With that innocent blood flowing from his flesh and blood veins, he pays the price to set you free from the oppression and slavery of sin. That fear of death for our loved ones, for ourselves no longer enslaves you. Your flesh and blood, true God brother Jesus lives. Where, O death your victory? Where is your sting? Not here. Death has been swallowed up in victory. And he gives us the victory through his Chosen One, our Lord, Jesus Christ. No guilt in life, no fear in death, Jesus lives. Whether you believe it or not, whether you want it to be yours or not, it does not change the fact that Jesus is the Christ, God's Chosen One.

And by God's grace, we believe this to be true. Not because we are smarter than other people. Not because we were more susceptible to this teaching. But because God chose you. And as he promised, so he works through his Word spoken into your flesh and blood ears. He welcomes you into his family through the water and the Word. He made you a new creation free from sin and its curse. You are part of God's family with Jesus as your brother. He's not ashamed of being with you. He invites to supper with him to receive his body and blood in the Lord's Supper to help you who are being tempted. And he continues to send that Spirit to work through Word and Sacrament to keep you in that faith to life everlasting. Jesus is more than a friend, good-speaker, or historical figure to learn facts about. He's God's Son, your brother, who sets you free and saves.

Now, since the Son has set us free and calls you His brother, his sister, live in that freedom. Do that flesh-and-blood business of loving your spouse, your children, your parents, your neighbor, that stranger, your brothers and sisters in Christ. Sin will keep tempting. The devil will continue lying and accusing. But your hero Jesus has set you free from the lies and accusations, from sin and death. Encourage one another: God's Chosen One has chosen you to be his own. Amen.