

A King for the World to Bow To

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[0 : 00] Well, we're starting a series today in Matthew that's going to take us from the very beginning to the very end of this gospel. We're not going to do it all in one go. You'll be glad to hear we're going to be in and out of it probably over the next few years as a church family.

But because it's a long book, I wanted to take today to kind of set the scene for this gospel and try to tell us why Matthew rather than one of the other gospels. And I want to do that by beginning by playing two short scenes for us, okay, in our minds. And both come from the king's coronation back in May. I don't know if you saw it, but you're going to see it now, okay, in words.

The service was full, wasn't it? It was a treasure trove of symbolism. But these two scenes, they come from just after the service. The king was on his way out of the church, wearing the crown, holding the scepter in his hand. And standing waiting for him by the door was a line of representatives of different religions. A Jew, a Muslim, a Buddhist, a Sikh, a Hindu who'd been invited. They were all dressed in their rich ceremonial robes with their headgear.

And together in unison, they read a greeting to their new king, and they bowed to him. It was only a few short seconds, but I wonder seeing that, what did you think?

Perhaps you thought it was great. Maybe you thought they're just doing this for the cameras. But in those few seconds, there was a glimpse of something wonderful. People from different upbringings, different races, different families standing before their one new king and submitting to him. So not something in that that made your heart ache. A vision of the peoples of the world bowing together to one rightful king. And then the king went out, and he got in the golden carriage, and a huge procession started. 6,000 odd soldiers all parading together in the pouring rain to celebrate the newly crowned king. And in the procession, there were units from every commonwealth nation. So as they went past, the commentators would point out here, here's Canada, here's India, here's Nigeria, here's Nigeria, in their uniforms, flying their flags, parading in honor of their new king.

[2 : 47] Again, seeing that, what did you think? It was really impressive. But did it not make you long for that sight to come true in a much bigger way? The nations of the world united in praise and service of one true king. Now, those two scenes lasted just one afternoon. It was mostly for show, and it was in honor of a purely human monarch. But they give us the tiniest, tiniest glimpse of something that is more real and more lasting. And I want us to have those scenes playing in our minds as we open Matthew's gospel together, because at the heart of Matthew's gospel, from the very first words to the very last, is this truth, that Jesus is the king for the world to bow to you. Jesus is the king for the world to bow to you. Now, this might be the first time you've ever opened a life of Jesus in the Bible. If that's you, that is a wonderful thing. I'm so glad we get to do this with you as a church here. And if you don't have a Bible at home, okay, please take one of ours. It's our gift to you. Take it home, read it, read this gospel, and keep it. Okay, that's what we want for us to read this together.

But for most of us, it probably won't be the first time opening one of the lives of Jesus in the Bible. We've read Matthew, Mark, Luke, John often. Maybe in our minds, could we tell which bits come from which gospel? Maybe they've become a bit confused. We've read them so often. And maybe you're wondering, so does it really matter which gospel we go for? Aren't they really doing the same thing? They all tell us, don't they, what Jesus did, what he said, what he has done for us, who he is. So does it matter which gospel we go for? Or couldn't we kind of just do a study of all of them and just kind of compare where they overlap and see where they mesh together and do almost like a life of Jesus? Couldn't we just do that? Well, that's not what God has given us in his Word, is it? He did not inspire one mega gospel.

It's a wonderful thing to have four gospels in our Bibles. If any of us were confused about what the Bible is about, here's a clue. We don't just have one or two accounts of the life of Jesus, but four

accounts. If this book is not about Jesus, I don't know what it's about. But we often treat the four gospels as a problem, right, that we have to kind of solve. Matthew has this bit here, but Luke puts it over here. And in Mark, Jesus says this, but in John, he says all of this. And we kind of do gospel maths, don't we? We try and add it all together and work out how it fits, and we tie ourselves in knots as if that's what God wanted for us by giving us four gospels. And we do that, I think, because we fear people pointing to the gospels and telling us they have found inconsistencies, contradictions. We fear, what if there's a flaw? But that is not why the four gospels are different from each other.

All the four gospels are perfect. They are from God for us. And in fact, they back each other up far more often than they seem to differ. There's actually no historical record from this time or before that is as historically reliable as the gospels that testify to the life of Jesus.

So why four gospels then? Well, the wonderful thing about having four gospels is that each gospel writer is presenting a side of Jesus that is unique to that gospel.

[7 : 02] It's the same person, the same Jesus. That's obvious when you read them. They're all talking about the same guy, but they are each drawing out something special about him that the other gospel writers don't. And the problem with blending them together is that in our rush to kind of check that it all adds up. We don't stop to see what each of them says is special about Jesus.

So it's a little bit like if you didn't separate out your lights from your darks and your colors in the wash, what would happen? Well, all your clothes would end up the same kind of shade of murky gray.

But they all do the same thing. You say, why not just chuck all the clothes in together? They all do the same thing. But then you lose what is special about each of them, right? I wonder if that's what's happened for many of us with the gospels, whether it's all not become a little bit faded and it's all not gone a little bit gray because we haven't stopped to see what is special about each of them. And so as we go through Matthew's gospel, it probably doesn't help us so much to be comparing Matthew constantly with the other gospels. That can be helpful.

But we don't want it to become like our clothes, losing what is unique about this, right? We don't just want to put it all in the wash together and miss what Matthew is saying that no other gospel writer puts in quite the same way. And so this morning, I just want us to catch a glimpse of the unique color of Matthew's gospel so that we know as we go through it what we're looking for and what we're listening for as we go through it. He shows us three sides to Jesus that together show us the big thing that he's saying, which again is that Jesus is the king for the world to bow to you. Okay, to show us that he wants us that he wants us to see firstly that Jesus is a king to keep God's word.

Now, if you've got your Bible there, if you just turn back with me please to Matthew chapter 1.

Matthew chapter 1, it's on page 965 of the church Bibles, Matthew 1.

And then when you get there, turn back a page and you'll see the words there, the New Testament.

[9 : 39] So, to state the obvious, Matthew is the first book in what we call the New Testament. But why is that? Well, when the Bible was being put in order, they put the four gospels first, and of the four gospels, they put Matthew first. Why did they do that? Generally, it's not thought that Matthew was written first.

But, turn over again to chapter 1, verse 1, and we read this. This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham. So, the very first thing that Matthew does is picks up the threads of the Old Testament that had lain untouched for 400 years and begin to weave those threads into the life of Jesus. That is why this gospel is first. Now, last time we were on the island of Lewis. Many of you will know it well. If you've not been, others can recommend it better than I can. But we got to see tweed being woven on a loom. What a great thing. All these hundreds of different colored lines, all kind of going into this one piece of fabric, all stretching across the loom. And the guy put his foot on the pedal, and the thing thundered into life. And in a way that I could not describe to you how it works, all of these threads got woven together into this brilliant piece of fabric.

Well, if the Old Testament is that loom, that machine, God had left it untouched for 400 years. The colors were chosen, the pattern was set, the work was in progress, and he got up and left it with all those loose threads. But now Matthew, under the inspiration of God, comes back and sits down at that same loom and picks up those loose threads where God left off and begins to weave again into that pattern. Because the very first thing he wants us to see is that Jesus comes from the same family that we've been reading about since day one in Genesis, right? From the family of Abraham

and the family of King David. He's not creating something brand new, is he?

He's telling the same story that God has always been telling. It's of one piece. However, while it is the same story, something has changed. Matthew's not just saying, this is the story carrying on. What has changed? Well, just look at chapter 1, verse 22.

22. 22. 22. 22. 22. 23. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet. The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us. And then just glance at chapter 2, verse 15. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet. And verse 17. Then what was said to the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled.

[12:59] And verse 23, so was fulfilled what was said through the prophets. Are we getting the picture? Matthew uses this phrase, or one like it, 12 times in his gospel.

This happens to fulfill what was written. So Jesus is not just carrying on the story from where God left off. He is fulfilling the promises and the prophecies God had given before.

He's not only part of God's word, he is keeping God's word, even from before he was born. Before he was walking or talking all the way through to his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead.

He is the king to keep God's word. Because as we find out in only the fourth word in this gospel, he is the Messiah. That is God's chosen, promised king.

So Matthew's claim is that Jesus is where the whole Bible has been heading since page one. He is the climax of God's work in history.

[14:05] In the way that the snow-topped peak is the climax of the mountain, it is a part of the mountain beneath it. But it is its high point, its fulfillment.

That helps us begin to glimpse the unique color of Matthew's gospel. Why? Because it gives us a clue who Matthew's writing to.

Matthew is writing to people who were already part of that story. So the consensus, past and present, is that Matthew wrote his gospel to Jewish people who'd come to believe in Jesus as the Messiah.

Matthew assumes that these people know the story of the Old Testament. It's as if they've got the box sets at home of all the previous series and they've watched them on repeat. This is their history.

So take the Sermon on the Mount. It's Jesus' most famous sermon, isn't it? Have you ever wondered why it's only Matthew who records it? Because Jesus says again and again, You have heard it said.

[15:14] You have heard it said. But I say to you. The shock and the power of what Jesus has to say in the Sermon on the Mount doesn't make much sense unless you have heard it said, what God said to his people before.

And so if you have grown up with the Bible, but you don't feel you've got a grasp on it, or you know your Bible back to front, but you get lost in the Old Testament, if the Bible is a mystery to you, then Matthew is written with you in mind.

He says, this is the key. We can only understand the Old Testament in our Bibles when we see that Jesus is the climax and conclusion to it.

But it is a brilliant starting place too, of course, if you've never picked up a Bible before, because Matthew says his gospel can give us a handle on the whole thing. He says, here's the handle, here's the pivot that the whole Bible turns on.

God's promised chosen King Jesus. So friends, be ready to see again and again and again in this gospel how Jesus keeps promises and fulfills prophecies and answers the problem that we find in the Old Testament, which is this, how can sinful people come into the presence of a holy God?

[16:41] How does Jesus answer that problem? He is the king who keeps God's word. But we also see he is the king who saves the nations.

So when I said Matthew wrote his gospel to people who knew the Bible, perhaps you thought straight away, well, what about me? I didn't grow up in church, and I didn't grow up reading the Bible.

Is this gospel not for me then? Well, Matthew is at pains to tell you it is for you because of his message to his readers.

You come from God's ancient family, he says, but you need to know that Jesus came not only for you, but for every family of the world.

This week in Bible handling training, one of the things we saw was the way different books of the Bible tell us what their big point is. And some books of the Bible do that by giving us a really clear starting point and a really clear end point.

[17 : 43] So that even if we get lost in the middle, we know that what the book is doing is taking us from A to B. And Matthew is just like that. So we've seen how he starts.

This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Now, of all of Jesus' ancestors, why pick those two guys, David and Abraham?

Well, it's because God had made great, big, earth-shattering promises to both of them. He promised David that one of his children would sit on the throne of God's kingdom forever.

So this is 2 Samuel 7. So if Jesus is the son of David, he is the heir to that promise.

He is the rightful king to sit on the throne of God's kingdom. And what about Abraham? Do I ever even need to ask you?

[18 : 46] What promise did God make to Abraham? The mother of all God's promises. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse, and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

If Jesus is the son of Abraham, he is the heir of that promise to you, that God's grace, his blessing would come to every family of the earth through him.

Put those promises together, and what do you get? An everlasting king from God, who has come to bring God's blessing to the world. Now, that's a stretch, you say, from verse 1 of this gospel.

How do you get all of that out of that one verse? Well, just turn back with me to chapter 28. I said we'd be flicking around a little bit this morning. Page 1001. Now, do we see those same promises come around again at the end of the gospel?

Listen to this. Then Jesus came and said to them, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations. All authority, son of David.

[20 : 01] All nations, son of Abraham. You see, if that's where Matthew starts and ends his gospel, then what's in the middle must be getting us from point A to point B, from those great promises of the Old Testament to their fulfillment in the Messiah Jesus.

Understand, it's all here to show us, as God's people, that Jesus is God's king to bless the world.

Who are the very first people who worship Jesus in Matthew's gospel?

Pagan astrologers. Wise men from the east. They were coming to the house. They saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. And again, that's not just Matthew's idea.

Here's Jesus speaking about his kingdom in chapter 25. When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.

All the nations will be gathered before him. How many people on earth will see King Jesus one day? Every single one.

[21 : 12] How many people could know and love and worship him right now? Matthew needs us to know every single one.

Why does Matthew tell us that? So that we in church here would know that Jesus is a king and savior, not only for us, but for the other 7,999,999,999,800 people outside of these doors.

If you want one more piece of that puzzle, I'm convinced this is why Matthew chooses the phrase kingdom of heaven over kingdom of God.

It's a really deliberate choice. We find kingdom of heaven 32 times in this gospel and nowhere else in the New Testament. So why does he do that? So that his church-going readers would not confuse God's kingdom with the borders of their own ethnic or tribal or historic territory.

They both ultimately mean the same thing, but for Jewish people, the kingdom of God was the kingdom of Israel. The kingdom of heaven is Matthew's way of saying, God's kingdom has no borders.

[22 : 25] So for his readers, the phrase kingdom of God would bring to mind a map of Israel. The phrase kingdom of heaven would bring to mind a much bigger picture.

And one that we heard earlier in our service from Daniel chapter 7. A son of man coming with the clouds of heaven into the presence of God.

He was given authority, glory, and sovereign power. All nations and peoples of every language worshipped him. That is the picture Matthew paints.

Friends, Matthew wants us to know that Jesus is the king that everyone needs to know. So if we've slipped into thinking that Jesus' kingdom only extends to the borders of Israel, whatever that is for us, the borders of our family, the borders of our church, the borders of people who are like us, Matthew is here to give us a new map of God's kingdom, and it is a map of the world.

Understand, there is not one person on earth who should not worship King Jesus. Matthew looks forward to a day when people who grew up, Muslims and Sikhs and Hindus and Buddhists, as well as Jews and spiritualists and atheists and agnostics, people of all faith and none, would turn and bow to Jesus and worship and serve him together.

[23 : 53] Okay, I'm not, understand, talking about multi-faith services. I'm talking about people becoming Christians from every starting point that is possible. Does that shock us?

It should shock us. Because there is no kingdom on earth that is like that. But Jesus' kingdom is like that. It is for every kind of person that there is.

The only condition is that we recognize Jesus rightly, turn to him fully, and trust in him completely. If you wouldn't call yourself a Christian here today, you need to know that wherever you are starting from, wherever you're starting from, Jesus is a king for you.

Only he can bring God's grace and blessing to you, and he will do that when you turn to him and put your trust in him. He's the king to save the nations.

And perhaps more to the point, if we would call ourselves Christians here today, we need to know that wherever the people in our lives are starting from, whoever they are, whatever their background, whatever their life story, wherever the people we love are starting from, they need to know and respond to King Jesus.

[25 : 14] Because he is the king to save not only us and our family from our sins, but every family of the world from their sins. But how lastly, Matthew wants to see that Jesus is a king to teach his people.

Now, you might be thinking, I know Jesus is for all people, but I personally don't know where to start with that. Well, here is Matthew to help us again, both to be followers of Jesus and to make followers of Jesus.

Because he, in his gospel, has put into our hands the training manual for discipleship and disciple making. Okay, so you remember Jesus' instruction at the end of his gospel, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you.

Well, Matthew has structured his gospel around five blocks of Jesus' teaching. They're all bracketed really clearly by verses that say things like, when he began teaching and when he finished teaching. I've put them in the service sheet so you can look at them later if you want to. So, we sit under Jesus' teaching in the gospel of Matthew, which is just what Jesus wanted us to do in Matthew's gospel, teaching them to obey all I've commanded you.

[26 : 45] Not only that, but it's thought that Matthew has five blocks of teaching to mirror the five books of the Torah. That is the first five books in our Bibles, books that taught God's people how to come to him and how to live for him before Jesus came.

So, what's Matthew done? He's given us a new book that teaches us how to come to God and how to live for him. Now, Jesus has come. So, that just as God's people lived by the Torah in the old covenant, so God's people today live by Jesus' teaching in the new covenant.

He is the king not only to save the world, but a king for the world to bow to. In this gospel, we learn how to follow him, and we learn how to help others to follow him too.

It is Jesus' own handbook for being his follower. He teaches us how to live in his kingdom, chapters 5 to 7. He teaches us how to face opposition in his kingdom, chapter 10.

He teaches us how his kingdom grows, chapter 13. He teaches us how we navigate relationships and sin in his kingdom, chapter 18. He teaches us how his kingdom culminates, chapters 24 and 25.

[28 : 11] And in between, he shows us what he is like as our king and what his kingdom is like to live in. So that what Matthew has done is provide a handbook for fulfilling the great commission, teaching them to obey all I have commanded you.

Here it is. This is what we need to hear. This is what we need to see, he says. This is what you need to take with you when you go to make disciples of all nations.

That helps us to see two things as we close. Firstly, we're going to see in Matthew's gospel that we are only really living in God's kingdom if we are learning to live as Jesus teaches us to live.

Brothers and sisters, he is our savior. There is nothing that we can ever do that could take away or could add to what he has done for us by his death on the cross and his resurrection.

He has done it. But that does not make him any less than our king. If we trust him, we follow him. If we turn to him, we submit to him.

[29 : 23] He calls the weary and the burden to himself to give us rest. Yes, by taking away the crushing burden of our sin, praise God, and laying his teaching on us instead.

You understand the difference with Jesus is not that he doesn't teach us. It's that in his own words, his yoke is easy and his burden is light. See, it is in learning from him that we find rest for our souls. Matthew's going to teach us to walk in Jesus' way, not as an optional extra in the Christian life, but as the way that Christians learn to walk from now on.

Secondly, though, he helps us to see how we lead people to Jesus. And really, he says, it's as simple as Jesus leading people to himself.

If someone wants to know Jesus, give them Jesus. In all his love and his power, his compassion, his authority, his grace, his justice, his teaching, his rescue.

[30 : 29] Brothers and sisters, here it is. Here is Jesus. Here he is for the world, says Matthew. Here he is for everyone. How do we go out from here and fulfill the Great Commission and make disciples of all nations?

We're always looking for something new, aren't we? A new strategy, a new method, a new technique, a new idea. Well, here's the manual, says Matthew. It's as old as Jesus himself. Learn it. Live it. Take it. Share it. Teach it. That is what we want for our Bonacord Church family here over the next few years.

We want to follow Jesus in Jesus' way. And we want to help others to follow Jesus in Jesus' way too. I hope during our time in Matthew's Gospel together that lots of us will find the confidence to say to someone who we know who isn't a Christian, look, we're studying this book about Jesus at church, and I would love to look at it with you.

Do you think you'd like to read some of it and talk about it with me? Do you think you'd like to come to church and hear about Jesus for yourself? This is an in for us.

[31 : 47] It is an in for others. I hope that we find the confidence to take it together. Come to Jesus, friends, and learn from him. Let's bow before him now as we pray.

Let's bow. Let's bow before him now as we pray. Thank you.