

Kingdom Come!

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[0 : 0 0] They say seeing is believing. Sometimes someone might tell us something, and it's not necessarily that we don't think that it's true, but it's not until they say, look, let me show you.

Here's the article, here's the test results, and then it finally hits home. That happened to me about seven years ago. I woke up one morning with my arm all swollen and purple.

I thought nothing of it. I went into class, and I was told that I had to go to the hospital. I said, no, it's fine. I was told I had to go right now to the hospital.

I got there, and the doctor took one look at it and told me that it was a blood clot and sent me for a scan. I went for the scan, and on the way, two different nurses, I think, asked what I was there for.

I told them what I was there for, but it wasn't until I was sitting on the edge of the bed and the doctor was running the ultrasound up my arm that it actually hit home.

[1 : 0 6] He turned the screen around and pointed and said, there it is. There's your clot. And the next thing I knew, I woke up lying on the bed in the recovery position.

It wasn't that I didn't believe what I'd been told, but it wasn't until I was shown that it literally knocked me out. And that's part of what this next section of Matthew's Gospel does for us.

He wants to knock us out cold with the good news that Jesus has told us. At the start of the year, we heard Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, his teaching, where he told us things like this, blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

So this is one way, he says, that you know that you have God's favor when you stick with me to the point that you lose your safety and your reputation.

He went on to tell us, I'm the answer to everything that God has ever said before. Do not think I've come to abolish the law, the prophets, he said. I've not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them.

[2 : 2 6] And of course, he finished that sermon by telling us, paraphrasing slightly, therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice will be safe for eternity.

But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice will crash and collapse into eternity. So no one could hear what Jesus has said and think, Jesus is just a kind of life coach offering us some lifestyle tips if we fancy them.

No, he is claiming to be the God who spoke from the mountaintop in the past and the prophet who God promised would come to point the way to him and the king who God promised would come and rule over and govern the nations.

In a word, he has told us that he is the Messiah. The theme of the Sermon on the Mount is that God's kingdom is here because God's king has come.

It's people who bow to King Jesus who are part of his kingdom and it's Jesus' words that teach us how we are to live as part of God's kingdom under his good and loving rule.

[3 : 47] But even after he's told us that, over ten weeks, over three chapters, perhaps it hasn't sunk in yet. Perhaps for you, it's never sunk in.

Or maybe it has, but it hasn't sunk in all the way yet. For all of us, it needs to sink in deeper, doesn't it? And that is why Matthew now wants to show us that it's true by packaging up chapters eight and nine with the Sermon on the Mount.

Back in chapter four, verse 23, we find this headline, Jesus went throughout Galilee teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

In chapter nine, verse 35, we get a nearly identical verse. Jesus went through all the towns and villages teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. That's what he's been doing, chapters five to seven, and healing every disease and sickness.

That's what he's doing, chapters eight and nine. So those verses act as bookends then at the start and end of this big section, and they hold his teaching and his healing together because his healing backs up his teaching.

[5 : 13] Here's the scan, says Matthew, that proves what he's told us is true. So let's see that first of all then, kingdom confirmation.

Kingdom confirmation. Back in five, verse one, Jesus saw the crowds and went up on the mountainside. So now, eight, verse one, when Jesus came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him.

And a man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean. Now, leprosy could refer to different types of skin condition back then, but I think it's safe to assume that this isn't just a patch of dry skin, that it's something much more serious than that because this man has come to Jesus to make him clean.

In God's law, there were certain things that meant you couldn't come near to God to worship him for a time you were unclean. So if you had touched a dead animal, something like that, if you'd eaten the wrong kinds of food, then for a while you had to stay clear of the temple, God's place, until you could ceremonially wash and then come to the temple to the priest with an offering and they would say, okay, now you're clean again.

But some conditions were longer lasting. So if you had a skin problem, a disease like leprosy, well, you could never be clean and come near.

[6 : 56] To bring it into focus, leprosy was unclean in the Old Covenant because its effect on the human body looked so much like death. and decay. His skin discolored, fingers, toes dropping off.

That seems to be the seriousness of this man's problem. And generations of people just like him had lived and died and never had a hope of being healed and therefore never had a hope of being clean and being able to come to God and worship him.

but this man comes to Jesus and says that his being clean depends only on his willingness to clean him.

if you are willing you can make me clean. Notice he's not just saying that Jesus has the power to heal incurable diseases though he does he is saying that Jesus has the power to make him fit to come before God again and that is something that no one and nothing had ever had the power to do.

the law said there was a way to be clean again but not if you looked and smelled like death. It would be like going to someone perhaps in the final stages of cancer and giving them a textbook on radiotherapy.

[8 : 31] Now if they read that they might know in theory how they might get better but in practice in reality well it just wouldn't happen would it it wouldn't help but this man says Jesus has the power and authority to do what the law was powerless to do to wash away his uncleanness before God and so we read verse 3 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man I am willing he said be clean immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy one touch from the king healing cleansing ready for God and here's the key for us Jesus says verse 4 see that you don't tell anyone but go show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded as a testimony to them see that show them don't tell them show them don't tell them that's the theme of these chapters in Matthew what does

Jesus want the priests then and us to see in this man's healed whole clean new body well that what he's told us in his sermon is true that he can do what the law could not do he has supreme authority in the things of God that the priests and the teachers of the law did not have the law told the man what he needed for him to be clean before God but only Jesus could actually do it for him so that he could be clean before God and come to him you imagine the look on the priest's faces when this man whose body had been literally falling apart walked up to them with his offering and said call me clean their jaws would have hit the floor who is this how has this happened well because somebody has come onto the seed who stands over and above the law the law giver the one who has the power of life and death of sickness and health and not simply to tell people what is clean and unclean but to make people clean and holy to make broken people whole and bring ruined people to God that is the testimony that this man's healing gives to who Jesus is that he is indeed the king from God and that he has come to restore

God's good and life giving rule and order in his world it tells us it shows us the kingdom of God has come at the healing miracles at the end of our passage back that up even more verses 14 to 16 Peter's mother-in-law is unwell in bed with a fever Jesus touches her just like the leper and the fever left her and she got up and began to wait on him later that evening many who were demon possessed were brought to him and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick the picture that Matthew is painting for us friends is of a person with never before seen authority in God's domain over the spiritual casting out demons over the physical healing the sick and as the man said in verse 2 it's not really a question is it of whether he can but whether he is willing to deal with our uncleanness and our sickness and our demons and our death

Jesus has told us but now he shows us that he is able and he is willing and so these healings set the seal on everything Jesus has been saying in the last three chapters it's confirmation that the kingdom has come and let me say that if you think did this really happen and did these miracles actually occur or is it just a fairy tale is it just a myth ultimately that is because you have already made up your mind that Jesus is not who he says he is and therefore that he cannot have possibly done what it is reported that he has done because if he is the Messiah well then isn't healing exactly what we would expect to see as proof of that it would hardly be more convincing would it if Jesus had come and said some nice things and not done anything to show us the truth of it no these healings are the rubber stamp on his sermon what he said is true if you're interested in Jesus then and you're open to what he says we have to be open to the possibility that he could do the impossible because if he is who he claimed to be well isn't this exactly the proof that we would want to see that he really is the king from God to rule over and restore his world and put the wrong things right beginning with us they are confirmation of his kingdom but one of these healings takes us even deeper if that is maybe the ultrasound well the middle healing is like an x-ray it shows us in even more detail that his kingdom has come and therefore how we should respond to the good news of his kingdom so this is our second point kingdom expectation kingdom expectation the scene in verse five starts very similarly to the one before it a man comes asking for healing he calls

Jesus Lord he doesn't question Jesus power to heal one big difference is this time the person needing help isn't there right it's the servant at home who needs healing and so Jesus says shall I come and heal him now me and you what would we say to that okay someone's sick at home we've come out to Jesus we've said Lord please would you come and help and heal and he says okay well will I come and help and heal well we would bite his hand off wouldn't we come on Lord please come and help us well Jesus says do you want me to come and have a look with me at verses 8 and 9 the centurion replied Lord I do not deserve to have you come under my roof but just say the word and my servant will be healed for I myself am a man under authority with soldiers under me

[15 : 59] I tell this one go and he goes that one come and he comes I say to my servant do this and he does it he doesn't want Jesus to come don't come he says and the reason that he gives is that he does not deserve for Jesus to come into his home and notice that Jesus doesn't say of course you do don't be silly it's not that bad you're being too hard on yourself he was amazed verse 10 but because he says I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith he is amazed because this is the right response but from the wrong person so to speak this guy recognizes he is not worth the time and effort of this great ruler from heaven in human terms the centurion is a big guy with an important job he's a Roman officer but before Jesus he knows he is nobody and yet here's the faith he comes to Jesus trusting in his power and willingness to heal his servant see he knows how authority works he gives the orders and they're followed I say to my servant do this and he does it so see what he's saying to the Lord Jesus if that's true of me in my kind of rank and position well how much more must it be true of you in your rank and position if I'm a man under authority with people under me and my orders are obeyed how much more true of you Lord who is over all things who speaks with divine authority will it not happen the centurion says he can tell his servant do this and he does it but by now the servant verse six lies at home paralyzed the illness has shown that this man's authority has pretty clear limits there are things in life he is not in control of it doesn't matter does it now what he tells his servant it's not going to happen much less so if he tells the servant get well soon how likely is it that the servant will get well soon just because his master has said so so see what he's saying

Lord I'm not in control and this illness has shown that my rank and position is nothing but you are God's king bringing God's kingdom and you have such authority that if you say the word my servant will be healed and so it is that right recognition then of who Jesus is along with the right response of humble trust and dependence that amazes Jesus in verse 10 he started remember his sermon on the mount saying blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven he said come to me spiritually broke and bankrupt nothing in my hand I bring simply to your cross I cling well here is the living expression of that genuine faith in the least likely of people it doesn't matter how important or big or powerful we feel how much authority or control we think we have in our lives well life shows that our control is much much smaller than we think things happen that we have no authority over at all but

Jesus is God's king bringing God's kingdom and we do not deserve to have him involved in our lives or in our families or our church our nation or our world we are not worthy of his time and interest and yet remarkably when we own up to that and trust him with our lives not because we think we deserve it but because we know and he has shown himself to be able and willing to wash clean and speak into and take command of our lives well he will do it he has shown that he is willing to save those who come to him like that who are in spirit receiving him and his kingdom with empty hands and an open heart and that goes for anyone at all whatever family we grew up in whatever has brought you to this point in your life and being here today you needless to say this guy didn't know his

Bible he didn't grow up going to church he was a Roman centurion he presumably had grown up calling the emperor the son of God and worshipping statues but that does not stop him from trusting in Jesus in exactly the way that Jesus said he should and in a way that Jesus says he hasn't seen even in those who did grow up in church and did grow up knowing their Bible I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith he says see the very people who should have been ready and waiting for him didn't come but people who had never heard of a Messiah before knew him when they saw him and bowed to him and it shouldn't surprise us when that happens today Jesus says in verse 11 I say to you that many will come from east and west and take their places at the feast with Abraham Isaac and

[22 : 08] Jacob in the kingdom of heaven in some ways that's pretty much all of us here who are Christians if we're not ethnically Jewish then we have come from east and west into the kingdom of heaven heaven we thank and we're to their eternal surprise and delight, they will find a seat with their name on it. And not in a separate room or at the kids' table, but with the fathers of the faith, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

And we don't know how many, but Jesus says many, which suggests, doesn't it, more than one or two. Jesus, I think, gives us a very different expectation for what his kingdom will be like than we often have. You know, if you listen to the Sermon on the Mount, is it people like the centurion who you thought would be the ones to bow to Jesus and receive his words? Is this the kind of the kind of kingdom that you thought Jesus would have? But Jesus says when he returns, his kingdom will be flooded with people that, humanly speaking, we would never have expected to be there. I hope this morning that you are amazed that you are there yourself. Some of you have come to that table into his kingdom only in the last year. What an amazing thing.

And even if you're not there yet, but you are here, well, praise God for that. It's amazing, isn't it? Incredible that we have people almost every Sunday who come. We've had people this year who've come into church for the first time ever, who have never sat in a church, who have come and heard of Jesus. What a wonderful thing that that is. And we should be thrilled. Jesus was amazed that when someone he didn't expect recognized and responded rightly to him, but in another sense, he said that is business as usual in his kingdom. Many will come from east and west and bow to him as king and take their places at the feast. For as Matthew wrote his gospel to remind us, Jesus is a king for the world to bow to you.

So if you haven't yet knelt before Jesus in your hearts and told him honestly that I do not deserve to have you as the king and savior of my life. But since all authority in heaven and on earth belongs to you, and since you have shown that you will gladly and willingly use your power to save undeserving people and bring us to God. Please would you do that for me and be my king and my savior. If you haven't yet said that to Jesus, well know that whoever you are, whatever has brought you here, that today you can, and he is willing to save you. That's what he shows us.

But he also gives us an expectation of the opposite to verse 12. The subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

[26 : 00] And we're going to see as we go on in chapters 8 and 9 that people who should have trusted Jesus instinctively, in fact, didn't. They were raised, so to speak, in the church. He was their God, but instead of being poor in spirit, they were proud in spirit. And they did not bow to him, and they did not take his words to heart. And there might be some of us here who are in that position too. I hope not many, because Jesus warns clearly that despite our privileged position, we will be thrown outside into a place of weeping and darkness if we do not respond rightly to him.

Whatever is the opposite of that eternal feast in heaven, that is what Jesus says is stored up in the eternal punishment of hell. And so, until then, there will be, won't there, heartbreak, confusion, conflict. As much as we're thrilled to see some come into the kingdom, there will be some who we are crushed to see walk away. Because in the end, King Jesus himself stands at the gates.

He says it is what we do with his words that is the difference between eternal life and eternal punishment. And so, we should expect to see, then, surprising conversions and people coming into the kingdom. We should expect, also, to see surprising people walk away.

And in the middle, we should expect to see conflict and opposition in surprising places. We'll see that in the gospel. We see it also in our church, in our families, in our nation. We should expect to be surprised, because it doesn't matter who we are. It is Jesus that we need to know truly and trust him with humble and dependent faith. And that genuine faith in whoever it is found is always, always met with his power and compassion and grace and love, as it was then for the centurion whose servant was healed.

So, it is with us when we come to him and trust him to save us, so he will meet us and save us. Whoever you are, that should be your expectation when you come to Jesus and bow to him.

[28 : 44] Because, finally, Matthew tells us these healings are not the last word in Jesus' word. Finally, Luke, he hints at the king's consummation. The king's consummation.

He rounds off in verse 17, telling us that what we've seen in these verses was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah. He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases.

Those words come from that song in Isaiah 53, which we read at the beginning of our service. It's a song all about a servant who suffers in the place of others to spare them suffering and punishment and death. And so, it seems like a strange place, doesn't it, for Matthew to quote from, at this point, it is gospel. Well, Jesus has taken away people's diseases, but it's not as if he's become ill in order to make other people well. So, what is Matthew getting at?

Well, he's giving us a hint as to where this is all heading. Watch this space, he says, and we will see how through the rest of this gospel, Jesus will suffer for taking away the effects of the curse in people's lives. It will only take to the end of chapter 9, before people are saying it is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons. Because he saves people from demons, he must be the devil himself. But by the end of chapter 26, it's a much tougher verdict. People say this of him, he is worthy of death. And so, Matthew is hinting that that is where the king is going, where his kingdom will come most fully, is when he will suffer for taking up the suffering and sickness of people and bearing our pain. It is all pressing on to the cross. When he would be broken to make us all. When he would be cast out into the darkness to bring us to the feast. When he would be made sin to make us holy and righteous before God. Isaiah's song goes on, but he was pierced for our transgressions.

He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds, we are healed. It is that same suffering servant king that the leper and the centurion trusted in and bowed to, who speaks to us today, and calls us to come to him empty-handed and open-hearted, to take hold of him by faith, to receive that healing and wholeness that he promises to give, and to bow before him and come under his life-giving rule. So let's come to him together. Let's bow before him now as we pray.