

Where Kingdoms Collide

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[0 : 00] Well, this year, lots of us are going to be casting our votes, perhaps a wee bit sooner than we thought, given the events of this past week.

And so, in the coming months, no doubt we'll be getting flyers through our doors. The various parties will publish their manifestos and promise to us what they will do if they are given authority to govern.

And it will be up to us to decide whether what they promise to do is the right thing and whether they can and whether they will do what they have said that they will do if they win.

Needless to point out, there is no politician or party or government that could truly claim you. We've done everything that we said we would do last time, so you can totally trust us with your vote this time.

But Jesus, in Matthew's gospel, is in the process now of showing us that he can and does do what what he has promised to do in his manifesto, which we know better as the Sermon on the Mount, the proclamation, the good news of God's kingdom come.

[1 : 26] In that sermon, Jesus claimed that he was the promised king from God bringing God's good and loving rule into the world. He told us what it would look like as he began to govern and rule over people's lives.

And over the past couple of Sundays, we've seen that he has begun to do what he has said. He's shown he has authority over sickness, authority over demons, authority over storms.

He's taken away the uncleanness that separated people from God. But we've also seen, haven't we, that his kingdom comes into conflict with our little human kingdoms, that the neat and tidiness, the order and the control that people like to have over life.

Because as we've seen, his kingdom is about following him and his words, and not our own agenda or our own perspective on him.

But today we see, in spite of all the opposition to Jesus in our world, and if we're honest, in our hearts, why it is such a good thing that his kingdom is not like our little human kingdoms, because of what he does for us as he rules over and governs our lives as king and savior.

[3 : 05] And so let's see us in Matthew 9 carrying out then more of his manifesto promises so that we might trust him to lead and to govern our own lives as we go from here today.

Like last week, each of our points is centered on a clash or a conflict. They come thick and fast in these chapters. So let's see, first of all, that he has authority to forgive sins.

Verse 1, Jesus gets back home, and some men brought to him a paralyzed man lying on a mat. But when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, take heart, son, your sins are forgiven.

Now Jesus has said some pretty surprising things in the gospel up to this point, but this is way up there. But, hang on, you see, before you go on, where's the rest of the story?

Right? Where's the bit where the guys, they come to the door, and there's a crowd and they can't get through the door? Where's the bit where they go up on the roof? And they dig the hole in the roof.

[4 : 15] And where's the bit, well, the man's coming down through the roof in front of Jesus, and all of that. Where's that? Well, don't worry. It's in the other gospels.

Mark and Luke, they both fill in that record, but Matthew leaves out the details that we know and love. And we don't have to lose sleep over that.

No doubt he knew the saga of the hole in the roof. He doesn't deny that that happened. But by putting that to one side for the sake of his gospel, he's left us, hasn't he, with less to focus on.

And what he's left us with, and therefore I trust what he wants us to focus on, is Jesus. And the shocking and confrontational thing that he says, your sins are forgiven.

It's shocking, because that's probably not the reason that these guys have come to see him, right? These are part of the same crowd who back in chapter 8 came to his door, and Jesus healed all the sick.

[5 : 25] Perhaps they cut it a bit too fine and missed him that time. Maybe they didn't get the memo. They had to come back later. But now they're here and they say, look, Jesus, do you think you could just do our pal?

Just sort him out. Could you do that? No, no, says Jesus, don't worry. Take heart. Your sins are forgiven. I reckon they were pretty surprised to hear that, rather than, you are healed.

And it's confrontational also, because as the teachers of the law are now thinking to themselves, people simply did not go around declaring that other people's sins were forgiven.

The only people who could say that for sure, they thought, were the priests at the temple. So if someone brought the right sacrifice and they offered it in the right way, then the priests could say to that person, your sins are forgiven, because that is how God had said he would forgive sins.

And so say the teachers of the law, well, he's not at the temple, and he's not a priest, and these guys have not brought a sacrifice to him. And therefore, Jesus, they say, is 100% wrong to say that his sins are forgiven.

[6 : 50] This guy's claiming to speak for God, but he has no authority, they say, to do that. And so some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, he is blaspheming.

They do not believe Jesus has the right to forgive sins. But the forgiveness of sins is one of Jesus' manifesto promises.

He did not say, when I'm king, then it'll be the good-ish people, or the people who have really tried, or the people who seem to be really holy, who get to be part of my kingdom.

No, he said, it is the spiritually broke and bankrupt that get to be in my kingdom. Blessed, he said, are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

So if he can't forgive people's sins, well, what is all that blessing worth? If I can't come into his kingdom with my unpayable spiritual debt to God, well, then who is it all for?

[8 : 07] And so knowing their thoughts, verse 4, Jesus said, why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? Which is easier, to say your sins are forgiven, or get up and walk?

Well, let's put it to the test, says Jesus. Which is easier? Well, one is easier to prove, isn't it? They could argue all night about whether Jesus could forgive people's sins, because, well, humanly speaking, who's to say whether the man's sins had or had not been forgiven?

But it's pretty obvious, isn't it? If someone's lying paralyzed, and a person says, get up and walk, and they don't, that they are having you on. So Jesus is saying, let me show you I can forgive his sins by showing you I can heal his body.

Remember, this whole section of the gospel is all about show me, don't tell me. Jesus has told them, now he shows them. He said to the paralyzed man, get up, take up your mat, and go home.

Then the man got up and went home. Friends, what is he showing us? He is showing us that his words work.

[9 : 23] He has proved that he can say the harder thing and it happens. So then work it back, he says. And how much more reason do we have to believe that the easier thing to say, your sins are forgiven, also really happened when he said it?

His healing backs up his claim to forgive sins. Because look, that's ultimately what he wants us to take away, verse 6.

See this? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.

That is what he wants you and me to know. We've seen his supreme authority over sickness, over nature, over demons. But what about our sins?

Christians? As Christians, we struggle with this, don't we? In our life groups on Wednesdays, we thought about confessing our sins to God.

[10 : 31] And I don't know about you in our group, we thought one of the reasons that it's hard for us to come clean to God is because deep down there is a part of us that doubts whether he really does forgive us when we tell him what we've done wrong.

Jesus wants you to know, brothers and sisters, that he has the right and the prerogative to forgive our sins. And you only have to glance through the Gospels to see that it's not only once we've broken our hearts before him and cried or tried, done some good deeds or come to church a few times or prayed and said sorry enough times to him.

But as soon as we turn to him to be our saviour and our king, this guy just turned up at his door. He didn't even walk there himself. His friends carried them there.

But because they collectively had given up resting their faith in anything that they could fix or change, and instead turned to the king, Jesus Christ, to bring him under his good and loving rule, well, Jesus there and then said to him, your sins are forgiven.

What Jesus wants us to know then is that when we come to him in that same poor in spirit, given up on ourselves way, he can and will forgive us all our wrongs.

[12 : 16] You might feel that your sins are just too big or that your past is too messy or that he won't possibly forgive you because you've tried and tried and you just can't stop sinning or because you can possibly do enough for Jesus or commit your life to him in a full enough way to merit his forgiveness.

But drill down through that self-doubt and when you think about it, that lack of confidence in his forgiveness isn't at root because you doubt yourself, it's because you doubt him.

You are saying to yourself like the teachers of the law did, that he doesn't have any right to say that I'm forgiven, as if he could still a storm and cast out demons and heal paralysis, but he's no match for me and my sins and my rebellion.

At the end of the day, has he not simply shown us that that is not true? He has claimed to forgive sins and he has proved it. And to tell ourselves that he can't or he won't forgive our sins, he says it's not simply wrong, he says those are evil thoughts because in our hearts we are doubting his claim to be who he says he is, the king from God who has the right to forgive the debts of God's enemies and bring them into his kingdom and under his rule.

And so brothers and sisters, so far from doubt or uncertainty or fear, our reaction to this should be like the crowd verse 8, when the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe and they praised God who had given such authority to man.

[14 : 16] Praise God that Jesus Christ forgives sins. Are we not full of awe at that thought, that reality? Because he is the king with supreme authority over us.

even over our resistance and rebellion to forgive our debt to God such that we never have to pay God back for the wrongs that we have done, but simply thank him and praise him in awe of his grace.

And because of his authority to forgive sins, he can and he does secondly then, eat with sinners. Here's the second collision of his kingdom with ours.

Verse 9, as Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. Follow me, he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples.

When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners? There's the collision.

[15 : 34] Now, much like the master of suspense, Alfred Hitchcock, Matthew makes a cameo appearance in his own gospel in verse 9. Do you see that? He's barely in it, but all you need to know about me, he says, is right here in these couple of verses.

It's really interesting, I was thinking about this in the week. If you go into Waterstones or scroll through Amazon, you'll find hundreds of autobiographies written by people who have barely even lived, and yet they're so convinced the world needs to know my story that they write a book all about me, my first 30 years or whatever.

Matthew got towards the end of his life and wrote a book about someone else, and even though Matthew had been there for the three most important years in the life of the most important person who's ever lived, he squeezes himself into two verses, and only to say this, I was an enemy of God's kingdom.

I worked for a hostile power, but the king came and found me and brought me into his family, and the rest was history.

The taxes that Matthew collected went to the occupying Roman government, and so as far as ordinary folk were concerned, the tax collectors were a cog in a machine that was there to oppress them.

[17 : 05] But people clung on for the day when God would send his king to overthrow the empire and lead God's people once again under his law, and so Matthew would have been seen as betraying God's kingdom and working against his people.

people, and so they're thinking when the Messiah came, surely Matthew is the kind of scumbag that he's going to wipe the floor with. Well, that was me, said Matthew.

I was a traitor, but when Jesus went past, he saw me collecting taxes in the very act of betraying him, and he said, follow me, follow me, and I did.

And I wasn't the only one, he says, I asked him to stay for dinner, and verse 10, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. Friends, do you see, if Jesus has the authority to forgive sins, do you see what that means?

He does not have to punish his enemies. He can find a guy like Matthew first in line for the firing squad and call him to come to the feast instead, and it doesn't matter how many tax collectors and sinners come and follow him, his forgiveness doesn't run out.

[18 : 28] More and more, many, says Matthew, came and ate with him. Now, understand, despite the fact that this was in Jesus' manifesto, this was the opposite of what people thought God's kingdom would look like on earth, a bunch of reprobates.

Around a table with the king? And so, the Pharisees come, verse 11, and ask his disciples, why does your teacher eat with these people?

Now, I hope the answer is obvious to us by now, but hear it again from Jesus' own mouth. Jesus said, it is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.

I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners. Why do I eat with sinners?

Let me help you understand, says Jesus. When does a doctor get cross? When might we expect a doctor to fly off the handle?

[19 : 38] It's not when sick people come to see them, is it? Doctors get cross when perfectly well people insist on taking up their time. How ridiculous would it be to go to the doctor and say, there's nothing wrong with me?

Well, why are you here? The doctor wants to see sick people. That is why the doctor got up and went to work. Or so with Jesus.

Jesus wants to see sinners, because that is who he came for. Brothers and sisters, isn't that a brilliant thing to hear.

Where then is the table spread and the feast held for sinners and reprobates? Jesus says it is not out there in the world, it is in here.

Jesus, understand this, Jesus hangs a sign on the door of the church that does not say no sinners, and it doesn't even say sinners welcome.

[20 : 43] it says sinners only, because his kingdom is not for the spiritually well to do, but the spiritually dead.

It's a kingdom of called and gathered and saved traitors and rebels. Wouldn't it be a great thing if decent and respectable people were to speak to us and get to know us, and they said, why would you think that Jesus would want anything to do with you lot?

Wouldn't it be even better if we came to church wondering that ourselves? And wouldn't it be best of all if we came to church and when somebody asks you, how are you, and how was your week, instead of saying fine, we said to each other, my heart is desperately sick beyond understanding and I need to see the doctor.

If we come to church trying to convince each other that we don't have a problem, we've got Jesus and his kingdom completely the wrong way up, I think if we're honest, we are more embarrassed to let each other know how sick our hearts really are than we would be to bump into someone we knew in the doctor's waiting room.

Isn't that true? But that should not be true in this room and at this table because Jesus didn't come for people who are good at pretending.

[22 : 16] That's why he quotes from Hosea 6 there, go and learn what this means, I desire mercy not sacrifice. God wants your heart, not your religion. God wants your weak and helpless and empty hands in his, not another gift, not another effort, not another Sunday at church.

We come to church to be with other spent sinners and meet with a savior who forgives sins and prays and to thank him for it. And so if you're here but you have not received Jesus forgiveness, know this, that is the only difference between you and others here.

You are not worse, you are not less welcome. You just haven't been forgiven of your wrongs yet.

Why are you waiting? The doctor will see you. The doctor is here. If you're here and you have been forgiven by Jesus, well, we need to remember, don't we, with Jesus, it is never ever private dining.

We eat around the table with other sinners saved by his grace. In his kingdom, it is family dinner time, not date night.

[23 : 42] And that means it is more messy and less comfortable than we would like. But there is also so much more joy and freedom in that than eating by ourselves.

ourselves, we love being part of Jesus' family and sitting at his table because of who we get to eat with, Jesus and his people.

So, brothers and sisters, lean into the family feast. Be honest with each other. Let people be honest with you. If he has the right to forgive sins, then what do we have to be ashamed of?

If he has the right to forgive sins, then he has the right, doesn't he, to gather a whole family of sinners together to enjoy him and enjoy his kingdom and enjoy each other.

And so, tax collectors and sinners, let us enjoy him. Let us enjoy each other. Let us enjoy the feast by sharing together in him.

[24 : 46] Because finally, he shows us, doesn't he, that he is at the center of real spiritual life. Here's the last kingdom collision, verse 14. Then John's disciples came and asked him, how is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?

You're all having a feast, they say, but shouldn't you be fasting? The disciples were worried about who was there. That's not who gets into God's kingdom, they said.

The disciples of John were worried about what they're doing. That's not what real repentance looks like, they say. Real repentance, it means going without. Going empty, crying, weeping, not celebrating.

Fasting, not feasting. But Jesus has turned all that on his head and his answer could not be more self-centered, could it? Look at this. Jesus answered, how can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them?

The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, then they will fast. So he's speaking about himself and he's saying, this is my wedding day and no one is fasting on my wedding day.

[26 : 04] For a couple of short days when I'm dead and buried, well then the wedding guests will fast, but not before then and not after, not while I'm with them.

So there goes another wrecking ball through everyone's expectations of what God's king and kingdom would be like when he came. Sinners feasting with the Messiah was not on people's radar.

But how can you tell them to stop, says Jesus, when I am here? He said in his manifesto that he was the one that the law and the prophets had been waiting for.

He would bring all the rules and regulations to go ahead and fulfill them. So now the wait is over, he says, and the celebration has begun. That's what Jesus means when he's talking about the new and old things there not going together.

As one writer puts it, the structures of the old covenant couldn't withstand the pressure of being filled full with the knee. You're like an old jacket or a wineskin.

[27 : 11] He said the old ceremonial laws just tear. They burst open when they are filled full with Jesus. And so he says it was good and right for people to fast while you were waiting for me to get here, but now I'm here, he says.

It's time for the feast. Understand, friends, turning to Jesus, it brings fullness and joy, not emptiness and waiting.

John's disciples, they've missed the memo because again, they don't recognize that Jesus really is who he says he is and therefore that he really is the center of all genuine spiritual life.

We say sometimes, don't we, it's all about Jesus. Well, guess what? Jesus said that. According to Jesus, it's all about Jesus. Jesus. And that's a reminder, isn't it, if we need it, that Christianity isn't something else than following Jesus.

We can turn our faith really easily, can't we, into something that's wooden and cold and kind of rule-based and ticking the boxes. But even if there is structure and discipline in our faith, well, we should have Jesus at the center.

[28 : 32] Nothing that we do as Christians should ever be anything less than a response to who he is and what he has done for us. There is a person at the center of Christianity, and it is Christ.

Christ and everything else is relationship with him, or it is nothing. You look at a wedding, the guests ask each other, don't they?

They don't ask, what are you doing here? They ask, how do you know the bride and groom? And so in the church, we are interested, aren't we, in whether and how we know the bridegroom.

And the rest comes later. It's a reminder, too, isn't it, that Jesus compared our shared life as Christians to a wedding party. What surprised people at the time was not how serious Jesus' followers were, but how free and celebratory they were when they were around him.

They were shocked not by how much they went without, but how much they ate. Not their outward kind of personal signs of holiness, forgiveness, but the sheer joy that they found in being with Jesus and his people.

[29 : 53] And so let's not ever forget, brothers and sisters, that we have someone and something to celebrate, even in the very difficult times in our lives and in our church family.

When Jesus is here, when he is with us, there is forgiveness and fulfillment and freedom. freedom that the circumstances of our lives cannot take away.

The feast goes on. And let us remind one another of that. Draw one another back to him, the fullness of joy that we find in him.

And so if you have not yet put Jesus at the center of your life, if you've not yet joined the feast, well, this life of freedom and fulfillment is open to ye.

Jesus says, only sinners welcome. Well, whoever you are, that is ye. And I'm not sorry for saying that, because that's your ticket in.

[30 : 55] That's all you need to bring. Nothing else. Yes. And so there is a seat open at the table for you today. And please would you take it.

Come to him. Put your hands in his. Join the wedding banquet. Have a seat. Be forgiven. Share your life with the people sitting around you.

There is nothing better. And brothers and sisters, let us never ever forget that or lose that. But keep, keep sharing life.

Keep sharing Jesus. Share your heart. Because that is what he does as he gathers us around his family dinner table to eat together and enjoy him.

Let's do that as we pray together now. Let's do that as well. Don't just take the time. Until then. Let's do that as we pray together. I want to pray together here in the side of the c  t   and enjoy all the arms and arms.

[32 : 04] Schulen. Wintermode. Let's keep paying attention. Let's go to theographing numbers. Let's if the hand■■■■ shut down. Letsienne. Let's at the venue. Let's go here.