

Hail to the King: An Overview of the Gospel of Matthew

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The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham (Matt 1:1).

18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt 28:18-20).

Last week we heard the triumphal finish of the book of Matthew as Jesus declared his universal Lordship: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." He called his disciples to a universal mission: "Go...to all nations." And comforted them with a universal promise: "I am with you always." The end of the book left us with the clear impression that this story is "TO BE CONTINUED."

In contrast, the beginning of Matthew is certainly less dramatic, maybe even a bit boring. The book begins with a long list of names, a genealogy: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the Son of Abraham" (1:1). This is not necessarily the most exciting way to start a book about someone's life.

However, when you understand Matthew's overall goal, it makes sense why he would start this way. When you can see the big picture of this gospel, the beginning and the end fit perfectly and beautifully together.

What's Next?

Today marks the conclusion of our two-year study of the book of Matthew, and I want to give you an overview of the message of the book. Many of you have asked where we are headed next. Let me tell you:

- For the next two weeks I'm going to be speak on "**The Kingdom of Me: How and Why God Invites Me To Give.**" We'll be looking at the subject of money and generosity from the Old Testament and the New. Why am I preaching this now? Because we need to continually talk about this subject and, more importantly, because I'm not asking you to give anything. And that is the best time to talk about money.
- At the end of May I'll begin a series that will take us through the Summer called "**A Song of Every Season.**" It will be ten messages on different seasons of life as seen in the book of Psalms.

- August will feature our relationship series, and we'll talk about the tongue with a series called "**Oh Be Careful Little Mouth...**"
- September we'll be celebrating the **final service** in this sanctuary, celebrating the **opening** of the new sanctuary, and talking about who we are as a church.
- October will be **Missions Emphasis Month**, and then in mid-October we'll begin our next whole book study which will be a study of **1 Timothy**

2011 will be another great year of studying God's word, and it will also be a historic time of celebration.

Matthew's Core Message

One of the joys of studying a book verse by verse is that you are able to really dig deep into the meaning as you examine it up close. But the down side of that approach is that you can easily forget that the book was written to be read (probably out loud) in one sitting, and it has one message. Looking at the individual parts of the book is certainly valuable, but one can miss the over-arching portrait that Matthew is painting.

The book not only begins with genealogy; it begins with a message about Jesus's Messiahship because that is **the** message of this book. Matthew starts the book by telling us three important things in the very first verse:

- This book is about Jesus Christ ("Christ" means Messiah)
- He is a descendent of David, fulfilling the promise from God that the eternal king would come from David (2 Sam 7:16)
- He is a descendent of Abraham, the father of the Jewish people in whom all the nations of the world would be blessed (Gen 22:18)

Matthew is unique in this focus. Mark wrote for a Roman audience, Luke for the Greeks, and John's gospel is for everyone. Matthew wrote primarily for a Jewish audience, and that explains why there are fifty quotations from the Hebrew Bible and a strong theme of fulfillment throughout the book. As you read the book you will find that Matthew frequently says, "in order that what was said by _____ might be fulfilled" (see 1:22, 2:15, 2:17, 2:23, 4:14, 8:17, 12:17, 13:35, 21:4, 27:9). But fulfillment in Matthew is more than promises coming true; it is about ethical, historical, and prophetic fulfillment through the ministry and teaching of Jesus.¹ Jesus is the fulfillment; he came to fulfill the Law (Matt 5:17).

The book has a Jewish foundation but a global focus. Matthew presents Jesus as the rightful heir and promised deliverer. The book alternates between narrative and discourse, story and sermon, both having the same point: to present Jesus as Messiah. This Gospel tells us what

¹ David Turner, Matthew – Baker Exegetical Commentary, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Publishing, 2008), 25.

happened (i.e., a story) but for a theological reason. This book is not just a collection of stories about Jesus. Matthew has an agenda; he has a purpose. There is something that he wants his readers to know and that is why he starts with a long list of names. **The theme of the book is to show that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, sent to bring the kingdom of God to the entire world.** He wants us to know that Jesus is the One – the Messiah, the Son of David, the son of Abraham - who has come to bring the kingdom of God to every nation.

An Overview

Over the last two years, we've looked at eight different sections of this book, each with its own unique theme and flavor. Let me give you an overview:

He's the One – Matthew 1-4

The first four chapters present the lineage of Jesus, his miraculous birth, his baptism and his temptation by Satan. This section has some memorable verses in it that give us a good introduction to Jesus and a validation of his ministry. Take two for instance:

21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us) (Matt 1:21-24).

And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; 17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt 3:16-17).

Once Jesus is introduced, affirmed, and tested, he launches into his ministry.

Get Real – Matthew 5-7

Matthew has the largest collection of Jesus's sermons than any other gospel writer. This is the first of five, and it is the most important. It is called the Sermon on the Mount, and it is here that Jesus identifies what I called his "Ethics of Grace." Jesus has come not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it (5:17). He does this by elevating the heart or the motive behind righteous living. That is why he says the following:

27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt 5:27-29).

Whether it is anger, lust, divorce, oaths, revenge, giving, prayer, fasting, or worry Jesus is aiming for the heart. He does not lay down a new law; he gets to the heart of what the law was supposed to be about: seeking first the Kingdom of God. Jesus's first sermon is all about getting real.

Follow Him! – Matthew 8-10

Once the Sermon on the Mount is finished, Matthew shows us the first miracles of Jesus which involved two outcasts: a leper and a Centurion's servant. He also calms a storm, casts out demons, heals a paralytic, restores a girl to life, and heals a woman with perpetual bleeding problem. Matthew shows us a Jesus who is full of power, and then he records the charge to the disciples about the nature of their calling:

16 "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves (Matt 10:16).

Portraits of Jesus – Matthew 11-12

Chapters Eleven and Twelve show us how Jesus began to deal with a crowd that is growing hostile. It is loaded with examples of Jesus having conversations and confrontations with people, and the main problem that surfaces is that the Jewish people do not believe in him. Jesus paints a picture for them as to who he is, and, for the most part, they do not like it. This section is characterized far more by unbelief rather than belief, by conflict rather than agreement, and by a growing opposition rather than popular support. Jesus and his teaching see growing strife, especially with the religious crowd. In fact, after healing a demon-possessed man, Matthew records the following:

23 And all the people were amazed, and said, "Can this be the Son of David?" 24 But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons" (Matt 12:23-24).

Enigma – Matthew 13-17

Jesus and his teaching are confusing to unbelievers, and Jesus intends it to be that way. That is the very reason why he spoke in parables – "you will indeed hear but never understand" (13:14). Jesus uses the parable of the sower, the weeds, the leaven, hidden treasure, costly pearl, and the dragnet to communicate important truths about the kingdom of heaven. And through it all, the religious rulers simply do not believe him. He is a mystery, an enigma to them. However, his mysterious nature is revealed when a few disciples are able to see who he really is at the transfiguration:

And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. 3 And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him... 5 He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him" (Matt 17:2-3, 5).

WWJD IHWM? – Matthew 18-23

What would Jesus do if he were me? For the most part, chapters 18-23 record the words that Jesus spoke to his inner circle about what it means to be a follower of his. Matthew seems to use this section in order to show his disciples what real-world Christianity is like; he is laying before them some important and practical concepts of how to live by the right value set in a broken world. Jesus address practical topics like defining greatness, church discipline, forgiveness, divorce, wealth, and humility.

Jesus called his followers to live by a value-set that runs against the grain of culture. So these chapters reminded us that Christianity has always been counter-cultural, and there is no way that we could live this way unless Jesus makes us new creatures with a new heart, new appetites, and new actions.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets" (Matt 22:37-40)

The End is Near – Matthew 24 - 25

This passage, often called the Olivet Discourse, is loaded with powerful, alarming, and confusing content. Jesus warns his disciples about traumatic events, false teachers, and the desertion of some followers. He tells them about a season of great hardship (24:9-14), the horrific defiling of the temple (abomination of desolations, Matt 24:15-28), and about his Second Coming (24:29-31). The section is filled with numerous encouragements to spiritual wisdom, watchfulness, faithfulness, and trustworthiness (see 24:10-14, 24:44, 25:1-13, 25:14-30). And it ends with a warning about the final judgment which includes the famous statement, "as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it unto me" (25:40).

The Olivet Discourse is an important conclusion to Jesus's teaching ministry, and it marks the beginning of the end of his earthly ministry while foreshadowing, predicting, and warning his disciples and us about what is coming in the future. Who could forget this sober warning:

"As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, 39 and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be

the coming of the Son of Man. 40 Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. 41 Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. 42 Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming" (Matt 24:36-42).

The Passion of the Christ – Matthew 26-28

Everything that Matthew has written in the previous twenty-five chapters came into focus in the last three. This is the ultimate story that Matthew wanted to tell because what happens in Matthew 26-28 is the center of the Gospel, the heart of the Christian faith, and the basis of all hope. The passion of Jesus is the heart of the heart of the heart of the Gospel.

Matthew showed us something that most Jews would have missed: a suffering Messiah. We saw Jesus betrayed, falsely accused, beaten, condemned and crucified. We watched the sky darken, Jesus cry out in abandonment, the earth shake, and the temple curtain tear as the judgment of God upon sin comes. We heard two words come together that should have never been even close to each other: **Jesus died**. And then he was buried – but not for long.

Three days later we hear the glorious news announced to the women by the angel who sat upon the stone in front of an empty tomb: "I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. 6 He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay" (Matt 28:5-6).

But then the passion of Jesus led to victory. From this position as the conquering Messiah, Jesus gave his disciples and us the final mission:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt 28:18-20).

And with that statement, the entire book of Matthew comes full circle. God had fulfilled his promise to David and to Abraham in one person: Jesus the Christ. He is the eternal King, and he will be a blessing to all the nations. **Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, sent to bring the kingdom of God to the entire world.**

What a book Matthew has been in our lives! I chose to study this book because I wanted to not just learn about Jesus; I wanted to hear from Jesus personally. This gospel has made Jesus very personal. I love this book; I love Jesus; I'm sad to see this book end.

Making Matthew Personal

Let me give you some concluding thoughts on this book, some things for us to consider as we see the final page turn. What should be our personal take-aways?

1. Respond to the “Good News”

Matthew’s purpose is my purpose today: To show you that Jesus is the Christ, the one – the only one – who could provide a sufficient atonement for our sins. The Good News of the Bible is that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom 5:8). Matthew was a tax collector who left everything and followed Jesus. The message of Good News has not change, and the invitation is still open today. The call is to turn from your sins and put your faith in Christ.

2. Reflect on the providence of God

Over 50 times Matthew links what is happening in Jesus’s life to something that was talked about in the Old Testament. The theme of fulfillment runs through Matthew like no other Gospel. Matthew wants you to see that God is working out his plan; there are no coincidences. In other words, nothing that happens in your life (yes, even the bad stuff) is by accident. God is orchestrating everything – even the death of his own Son. And over these two years, there have been particular Sundays when you’ve shown up to church, and God has met you in Matthew. While it was true that I was the one who was speaking, you knew that there was something more going on here. Take that as a gift from God. He spoke to you...from His word...about His Son. Some of you may have even been converted during this series. Some of you will forever mark your life by a particular message because God in his providence ordained a particular Sunday and a particular text to land on your prepared heart.

3. Return to the heart of obedience

It never ceases to amaze me that the people who completely missed Jesus’s message and even became his abusers were supposedly the most religious. Over and over the religious crowd missed it. They traveled hundreds of miles to quarrel with Jesus about ceremonial cleanliness (Matt 15:1). It makes me really nervous to consider the fact that we are probably the most religious people in our culture. It makes me shudder to think how easy it is to become like the Pharisees – straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel. And it is a good reminder that Jesus aims for the heart. In July of 2009 I said this: “Pious people need to work hard not only on **what** they do, but **why** they do it.”²

4. Resolve to passionately pursue a global mission

Finally, I made this a major point last week, but it bears repeating again. It seems fairly obvious to me that every single follower of Jesus has a disciple-making, gospel-spreading duty.

It means that our orientation in life has to be very different, especially for life in the United States and particularly in Northern Indianapolis. We have to be careful to remember that

² July 19, 2009 – “Watch Your Motives When You Pray and Fast” – Matthew 6:5-18

mission from Jesus is not just to assimilate into the culture, blend in, act like, be like, spend like, and look like everyone else. Our mission is to go anywhere the gospel is not and especially where it's never been heard.

And it also means that when "getting" the message of Jesus means that we do risky things, we have the assurance that he will be with us. We are never alone. So go!

My prayer for us is that through Matthew we would fulfill our mission of igniting a passion to follow Jesus in new and significant ways at College Park. My earnest desire is for you to have lived in the book for this long so that you really know Jesus. What's more, that there would just be this sense that what was said about the apostles could be said about you:

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13).

Thanks be to God that through the Gospel of Matthew, we've been able to be with Jesus.

Matthew ends with a spiritual "to be continued."

And so we say to this gospel: "Farewell, good friend. We've got some work to do!"

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