

The True King of the Kingdom

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[0 : 0 0] Our Father, we are people that you have made to live by every word that proceeds from your mouth. And so, Father, we pray that as we explore the scriptures, we might hear that word. And hearing it, we might live by it.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Please sit down. Now, William Congreve was born on the 24th of January, 1670, in Bardsey, England.

He was an English playwright and poet. Now, my bet is that most of you don't even recognize his name. Probably never read his works. Probably never will read his works.

I don't think I'm going to change your mind today, although you never know. However, we probably know some of the famous lines from his works. Let me try out just a few on you.

Here is one from his work, Love for Love, written in 1695. He says, O famous, you must not kiss and tell. And here is another first line of his work, The Morning Bride.

[1 : 0 3] It is often misquoted. It is the first line of this work, The Morning Bride. As I said, the original goes like this. Music has charms to soothe a savage beast.

The last quotation I want to share with you comes from the same work. Like the previous quotation, it is frequently misquoted. It goes like this.

Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned, nor hell a fury like a woman scorned.

Now, friends, the truth of this last statement is overwhelming. It can not only be the scorn of a woman, let me tell you. It can work both ways.

I don't think there's any weight in either sex at this point. But a quick scan of the internet will turn up enormous amounts of stories about people whose love has been scorned and what they have done as a result, of lovers whose revenge is so potent it is awesome in its brutality.

[2 : 1 3] What is harder to find is stories of scorned lovers who forgive. You've got to search a lot harder. But what is even harder to find are stories of lovers who continue to forgive in the face of betrayal after betrayal after betrayal.

However, friends, in the Bible, that's exactly how God is presented. A lover who forgives after betrayal after betrayal after betrayal. His love is met with overwhelming betrayal, though it is overwhelming in its scope and repeated endlessly, as it were.

He is said to have chosen and rescued his people through the exodus. He woos them in the wilderness. He metaphorically marries them in the covenant. But even while the documents of the covenant are being drawn up, Israel is breaking it.

He is the true lover, the giver of great and good gifts. He gives his people his word, his provision, his delivery from their enemies. And he does it time and time and time and time again.

And time and time again, they throw it back in his face. Israel again and again refuses to live by the relationship it has signed up to. Friends, as we've moved through Matthew's gospel, we've seen this happen, haven't we?

[3 : 24] God has finally sent his son, Emmanuel, God with us. He sent his Messiah into the world. That very Messiah that Israel has waited for and wanted.

And yet Matthew's gospel unfolds what is somewhat predictable. Israel resists. Today we'll see their resistance, their rejection.

We'll see how Jesus responds. And as we do, we will learn something new about Jesus. So let's get down to work and let's look at our passage for today. If you're following in your outline, there are a couple of headings that I'm going to miss, but you'll live.

I don't know how many of you use the outlines anyway, but if you do, there's just one heading that I'll miss. Friends, in order to get a proper perspective on these passages, we need to travel back in time.

So open your Bibles. Very important to do so. Flip back to chapter 10. In chapter 10, Jesus is instructing the 12 disciples about the mission to Israel.

[4 : 22] And I want you to look at verse 7. Verse 7 has Jesus telling them that as they go to their fellow Israelites, they are to preach the kingdom. They are to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those with leprosy, drive out demons.

Now look at verse 16. In verse 16, he tells us that they'll be like sheep among wolves. That is, they will be persecuted. They'll be hated because of him. In other words, the very presence of Jesus in Israel and the message about him will cause division.

Now look at verses 34 and 35 of chapter 10. Jesus says, Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I didn't come to bring peace, but a sword.

For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. Friends, can you hear it? Jesus is saying, my presence in the world will cause division.

My presence among Israel will cause division. It will cause division even amongst the closest of relationships. That's the background. Now let's look at two stories on either side of the parables, which we've been looking at these last few weeks.

[5 : 31] Very important to get all of this context so that we can finally get to our passage for today. Let's look at chapter 12, verses 46 to 50. Jesus is talking to the crowd. His mother and his brothers are outside and Jesus is told that they're outside.

And his response is recorded for us in verses 48 to 50 of chapter 12. He says, Who is my mother and who are my brothers? And then he points to the disciples who are with him and he says, Here are my mother and brothers.

For whoever does the will of my father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother. Now it sounds pretty rough, doesn't it? But Jesus is making a very strong point.

It is particularly strong in his cultural context. The point that he's making is that being involved in the kingdom has nothing to do with kinship. You cannot choose your family.

Family and family connections just happen, don't they? They happen as a result of your birth. You are born and you immediately have kinship relationships.

[6 : 35] However, kingdom relationships are very different. You see, while you cannot choose your family, you must make a choice. If you are to become a member of the kingdom, the kingdom of heaven is open to all who hear and choose.

That is the first bracketing story. It occurs before Jesus even begins to tell the parables. Now, look at the end. Look at chapter 13, verses 53 to 58. This is the end of the parables, as it were.

First thing to notice is the us and them language in this passage. Jesus returns to his home turf, his own hometown.

Notice verse 54. As some distance is created between him and his own people. We're told that it is their synagogue, not our synagogue. It is their synagogue.

And they are amazed. Then we're told of their reaction to him. They can only think of him as a local boy. They cannot see him as a person of greatness.

[7 : 38] He's simply the carpenter's son. They take offense. And we're told of this in verse 57. And he, for his part, creates distance between himself and them, just as he did in telling them parables and explaining them.

He turns to his new family. That is, he turns to those who have received him. Those who are unbelieving, even close to him, will not get anything more from him than parables and riddles.

They won't even get miracles because of their lack of faith. Friends, very important that you understand this, you see. A decisive break is occurring here. Distance is being created between him and his disciples and everyone else.

That's the context for what is following in the passage we are looking at today. What is Jesus going to do in the face of this blindness and rejection? There is no beauty or majesty to attract people to him.

Isaiah 53, 1-3. He is largely despised and rejected by his own people. So where to now for this despised one?

[8 : 50] This one held in low esteem by his own country people. Well, like God, he will continue to love. He will continue to do good, to provide and to save.

And we are going to see that as we look at this passage that follows. Now, so we are seeing what happens to hometown local lads. And it is somewhat typical, isn't it? But notice the barb in the tail, the lead-in to this next section.

Look back at verse 57. He says to his own people, A prophet is not without honour except in his own hometown and in his own home.

We are about to see what happens when a prophet comes to his own people. Take a look at the story of the greatest of the prophets. Chapter 14, verses 1-12.

John the Baptist. First thing that happens is we are introduced to Herod the Tetrarch. Now, I don't know about you, but when I read the Gospels, I wonder now, there look to be more than, is this just one Herod or we've got multiple Herods here?

[9 : 52] And we have multiple Herods. This Herod is a man called Herod Antipas. He is the third Herod to appear so far in Matthew's Gospel. The first one was King Herod.

Do you remember King Herod, the one that the Magi visited? That's chapter 2. Tried to kill off Jesus as a newborn. The second Herod was the brother of this one.

His name is Herod Archelaus. He appears at the end of chapter 2 as the one who's reigning when Joseph seeks to bring his family back from Egypt. Okay, different Herod from the one that had been there in the first place.

Anyway, the family tray is fairly noticeable with the Herods. That is, they tend to be opposed to anyone who's going to undermine their rule. Okay?

And they deal harshly with them. Now look at verse 1. He hears what Jesus is doing. And he thinks that he's a resurrected John the Baptist. And that causes Matthew to do a retrospective on John.

[10 : 54] Okay? But before we look at the retrospective, I want to tell you a little bit about prophets and kings. As you might be aware, prophets were around before kings were in Israel.

Prophets have had a long, long pedigree. Anyway, when God finally gave Israel kings, prophets were the sorts of checks and balances on kingship.

You see, the risk for kings is that they do what is expedient for their rule. I guess like all rulers, do what works for me and keeps me in power. Okay?

And let me tell you, that means you'll do just what works for you. That means you won't like a prophet. Because what a prophet will do is come and tell you what works for God.

And that won't always be what works for you. And so in the Old Testament, you know, often when a king saw a prophet, he turned tail and ran or tried to get rid of him in some way.

[11 : 52] They were thorns in the sides of Israel's prophets. And you see, prophets often did not want to have a genuine prophet around. They often had their lackeys around, paid prophets, who would say what they wanted them to say.

But when you had an unpaid prophet who came and just said what God wanted to say, you knew you were in trouble. And John was a genuine prophet. And so he told Herod the Great that he had a, sorry, Herod, this Herod, that he had a perspective, God had a perspective on the woman in his life.

Now this woman, Herodias, was the wife of another man. Bad enough in its own right, but there's something else about her. Herodias was also his half-brother's wife. That contravened the laws of Leviticus 18 and 20.

And so John told him, look, it's not appropriate for a king over God's people to have this woman as his wife. Anyway, you can imagine that John did not endear himself to Herod or Herodias.

And now most of you know this story, don't you? In verse 6, the daughter of Herodias dances for Herod. You can be sure it's a fairly sensual dance. And it's his birthday.

[13 : 02] He's got lots of guests around and he promises her whatever she wants. So under instructions from mum, she asked for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Her promise is granted.

So the man who didn't keep God's word from God's prophet keeps his word to this woman. And John is beheaded.

And Jesus is told. And verse 13 tells us that Jesus withdraws when he hears the news. And friends, I wonder why you think this story might be here and why Jesus withdraws. I'm sure he's grieving the death of John the Baptist.

Is it just here? Are we just told the story of John the Baptist because it's here? Or is it here for another reason? Well, I think it's here for another reason. I think it's here because it binds Jesus and John together.

Okay? Both the messenger, John the Baptist, and the one he introduces are of the same stuff. Both of them speak God's word boldly.

[14 : 10] And John's death, and both will be rejected by, are rejected by the ones to whom they speak. And John's death foreshadows what will happen to Jesus.

It's as sure as eggs as it were. And as we read on, we can see this. Just as Herod is reluctant to execute John, so Pilate will be reluctant to execute Jesus. Both have wives who try and intervene into the process to form a rescue or to form a condemnation.

But both have wives who intervene. Both die. Both are buried by their disciples. And that's where the opposition of Israel to Jesus is going to end.

That's why I think the John the Baptist story is here. It says, if you want to speak the truth, if you want to speak of God, then this is the inevitable trajectory for you.

And this is the inevitable trajectory for Jesus. Israel will do to Jesus what it does to all the prophets. Kill him. Now there's more to notice, though.

[15 : 19] You see, I think Matthew wants us to notice something else as well. You see, Jesus is not only like John. He's not only a prophet who speaks God's word and who reap the consequences just as John did.

No, Jesus is also like God himself. And you can see that in the verses at the beginning and the end. Have a look at it. Look at verses 13 and 14 in this chapter.

In verses 13 and 14, we're told that when Jesus heard what had happened to John, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. And hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns.

And when Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. So it's the beginning. Look at the end. Verses 34 to 36. When they crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret.

And when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country. And people brought all their sick to him. And they begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak.

[16 : 19] And all who touched it were healed. Do you remember the context? Israel's rejection of Jesus. They will eventually do to him what had been done to John the Baptist.

And yet what does Jesus do? He has compassion. These very people that will kill him. He hears them begging for help.

And he heals them. Friends, is this not what God himself does? Is this not what he does with Israel time and time again? They come begging him for good things.

In the midst of sin. And God grants it. Time and time again, they reject him. Time and time again, they kill his prophets. Time and time again, they come begging to him for help.

And he does. And Jesus is the same. He is like God. Compassionate. He cares for his people. A provider. A provider. An overcomer of sickness. A healer of illness.

[17 : 16] He cares for his people despite their sin and rejection. Jesus is like God. And that is a constant refrain through the passage we're looking at today. This theme is further picked up in verses 15 to 21.

Let's look at them. Stories are well-known one. Evenings approaching. The place where they are is remote. There's no easily available or accessible food. There's lots of people.

And so the disciples urge Jesus to send the people away to buy food for themselves. And basically they say, our resources are far too limited for this.

And Jesus orders that what they have is brought to him. Verse 18. And he gives thanks. And he breaks the loaves and distributes them. And 5,000 eat.

And all are satisfied. Now on the surface, this miracle looks exactly like that. And we think, wow, that's great. This is a wonderful intervention to meet the needs of these needy people.

[18 : 18] But if you know your Bible, you'll hear all sorts of echoes of the Old Testament in this passage. We had one of them in the Exodus reading. For example, you see, the disciples don't even think that Jesus can supply the needs of these people in this remote place.

Isn't that true? It doesn't even cross their mind that he might be able to do something here. Well, I want you to listen to his great predecessor as he faces a horde of hungry people in a remote place.

It is Moses. And Moses says to God, here I am among 600,000 men on foot. And you say, I will give them meat to eat for a whole month. Would they have enough if flocks and herds were slaughtered for them?

Would they have enough if all the fish in the sea were caught for them? Doubting Moses. Doubting Israel.

Doubting Israel. The 12 tribes. Just as he did back in the wilderness. And he gives them what they thought impossible. Friends, let me just remind you that in this last chapter, we have seen divisions among Israel.

[19 : 43] There are insiders who believe in Jesus. And there are those who are not insiders. There are the crowds. There are simply people in need. People craving the goodness of Jesus. And they get it. Here.

They get compassion, food and healing. But the focus changes in the next story. We turn from outsiders to insiders. The crowds are left behind. Verse 22 tells us that Jesus makes the disciples go ahead of him while he dismisses the crowd.

And then he retreats up a mountain by himself to pray. And clearly some time has now passed. And the disciples are struggling out on the middle of the lake. Their progress has been limited by weather.

They are now apparently there in the middle of the lake in the midst of deep, dark, threatening waters. And it's the fourth watch. That is, it's somewhere between 3 and 6 a.m. in the morning.

The darkest time of the night. Perhaps that's why they don't recognize him. They think that he's a ghost when he comes walking toward them. Verse 26. I need to tell you something about Israelites.

[20 : 44] They are generally landlubbers. They don't like water. They think it represents fearful, threatening, awful powers out of control. Only God who stretched out the heavens can walk on the surface of the deep.

Job chapter 9 and chapter 38. And here comes Jesus doing the things only God can do. Walking on water despite its lurking powers.

And in verse 27 he speaks to his word to them. He says, Take courage. It's I. It is me. Perhaps echoes off. I am. Do not be afraid.

And again, echoes here of Exodus. Do you remember? In Exodus 3 God describes his name to Moses and tells him to tell the people, I am has sent me to you. Well listen to Isaiah 43 verses 1 and 2.

Where God says to his people these things. Do not fear. For I have redeemed you. I have summoned you by name. You are mine. Do you hear the echoes to the disciples?

[21 : 50] When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. And when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned.

The flames will not set you ablaze. Then Isaiah 43 verses 10 and 11. Tell us why Israel should expect God to act on their behalf. He says, You are my witnesses, declares the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you might know and believe me.

And understand that I am he. Before me no God was formed, nor will there be any after me. I, even I, am the Lord.

And apart from me, there is no saviour. Now look at the response of Peter. He urges Jesus to call him to him.

And Jesus says, yeah, come. And Peter ventures out. And then he sees the wind. And he does what you and I would do. Fears. And he begins to sink.

[22 : 54] And he cries out to him who can save. Lord, save me. Remember what God has said? What Isaiah said? Apart from me, there is no saviour. He says, save me. And the Lord does save him.

Even if he saves all who call upon him. Through Jesus. But Jesus points out the lack of faith and rebukes him for it. Now friends, it's important for us to look at this.

We transpose this text and put ourselves into it. Don't we? And that's natural and understandable. Is it really, though, about our doubt and discipleship? Or is it about something else?

See, I think the main point is not Peter in this passage. The main point is Jesus. And that is what Peter and the others recognize. That's what they confess, verse 33, which tells us what this is all about.

They worship and they say, truly, you are the son of God. In the last story of the storm, back in chapter 8, the disciples asked, what kind of man is this who can still a storm?

[23 : 55] Back in chapter 8, John the Baptist asked, are you the one to come? Or should we expect someone else? Chapter 12, the crowd asked, could this be the son of David? And at the end of the previous chapter, we heard people in his own hometown say, where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?

Isn't this the carpenter's son? Where then did this man get these things? Can you hear all the questions? Who is this? Who is this? Who is this? Who is this? And now the disciples answer the question. This is the son of God.

That is, he is the Messiah. The proclaimed Christ. God's promised king. But even that, I think, is not enough. The rest of the passage tells us he's more even than that.

He is God himself. And verses 34 and 36 will confirm that because he will again do what God does. Have compassion on the needy and heal the sick.

Friends, let's see if we can summarize the thrust of the whole passage. You see, I think the thrust is clear. It is set against the background of the mission to Israel. It shows up the large scale rejection of Israel, by Israel, of Jesus.

[25 : 05] In chapter 14, we see him acting like God. That is, despite rejection, he continues to show compassion for the needy, even as God has done all the history of Israel.

He heals them. He provides for them food. He saves his people, as indicated by saving people. He provides for their needs.

He will do it by dying eventually. For he will surely die, as all of God's prophets have. At least, lots of them have.

Friends, this passage is clear, isn't it? You see, Jesus is the Christ. The Son of God. The ultimate prophet. He is God's ultimate prophet. Heralding the greatest, heralded by the greatest of prophets.

He is God in the flesh. Friends, there is only one thing that I can say by way of application, I think, of this passage. And that is to ask if you do believe it.

[26 : 08] You see, if you have a lesser view of Jesus than the one in this passage, you do not yet know Jesus as you ought to. Jesus is the Christ. He is the Son of God.

The Messiah. God's ultimate prophet. God in the flesh. God visiting us. Emmanuel. God with us.

God acting for us through his Son. God's only means of saving us. Do you believe it? Friends, I plead with you that if you have not done so, do.

Respond to this God and do not be like Israel. Do not reject him. Acknowledge him and embrace him. Receive his love for you. Play it out in his death on the cross where he healed your greatest illness.

Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you today for sending your Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to redeem us.

[27 : 16] Thank you that through Jesus we can be saved. And today, we put our faith in him. We acknowledge that Jesus is your Son.

We trust in him to be saved. And we ask you to be at work in us by your Spirit that we might live as disciples of Christ. And we pray this in his name.

Amen.