

Title: Looking toward the Cross
Text: Review of Matthew 1-25 and prep for 26-27, 28
Theme: Focusing on what matters to God
Series: Matthew #117
Prop Stmtnt: There will never be a King like this King!

Read Text: Matthew 1.1-16

There are many religions that have devoted followers. Like football fans who chant “We’re number 1” with an 0-12 record. They have zeal, but reality does not support their zeal and their zeal and sincerity does not create reality. We can dismiss the claims and beliefs of these followers due to the historical record. Authentic Christianity is not dismissed and rejected because the historical record does not support it. Authentic Christianity is dismissed and rejected because the historical record does support it. The problem is not the lack of evidence. The problem is the evidence itself. The message of Christianity is powerful and personal. It is compelling and convicting. It is gripping and exposing. It is controversial and indisputable. It is hard to argue against it factually, so most of the arguments against Christianity are often smear tactics, intimidation and emotive. But, that is not surprising because that is exactly the same tactics used against Christ. His character was flawless. His power was indisputable and everyone who attempted to argue with him found themselves completely in over their heads.

The evidence for Christ is clear. Matthew wrote a public account of the life of Jesus. It begins very matter of fact as “*the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*” It begins factually because it is factual. Matthew is simply recording it. He writes this as a challenge to his own people to check the record. Go to the courthouse and due the research. The facts do not lie. Jesus was born in the line of David. Jesus Christ was a real person. He actually said these things and did these things. But that opening line says so much more. The story of Jesus did not begin in Bethlehem. The story of Jesus began before creation. The story of Jesus was promised and prophesied throughout the history of Israel. Matthew’s gospel is a study of his continual discovery of how the OT promises were fulfilled in Christ. Over and over Matthew writes, “*this was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet...*” In fact, this story is not only so much bigger than we ever imagined, it is so much bigger than we could imagine because it is the story that ties all other stories together. For more than two years, we have been studying these things he said and he did as we have been studying Matthew’s gospel account. Matthew carefully painted a picture for us of a King who is unlike any King we have ever seen and unlike any King we would ever imagine. He looked so ordinary and yet was exceedingly extraordinary.

What King is born into poverty? What King is raised by obscure, insignificant parents in a loserville place like Nazareth? What King launches his plan for the throne with an inaugural speech that starts by saying, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit?*” Can you imagine the reaction of people to Donald Trump or Hilary Clinton going around the country saying that his or her administration is going to be marked by humility and that the only people who are actually going to be accepted as insiders are those who are truly humble?

Honestly, if they said that, people wouldn't know whether or spit or wind their watch. We do not have a category in our brain for a leader like this, do we? What would happen if in those early days, Peter, James or John would have been interviewed by the media? Are you seriously going to build a kingdom with leaders like this? And yet there is something that is so compelling about him and dangerous, all at the same time.

As we have worked through this gospel account we have seen the perspective of the people. They did not understand what happened at his baptism. They did not know about the temptation in the desert and how Christ, the 2nd Adam did what the 1st Adam failed to do. They heard the words, but saw the deeds. And while they would wonder what he meant, or appreciate his authority and how he would stand up to the elite, they largely ignored the words of Jesus and focused on the deeds. But the miracles of Christ were not designed to be the focal point. They were to fulfill the OT prophecies that proved that he was the Messiah and therefore were to authenticate him as the messenger so that the people would listen to and accept his message. But, Matthew organizes his gospel account around five major teaching blocks (slide) and he shows how Christ used miracles to draw attention to and authenticate what he was saying.

But from the perspective of the leaders, they largely ignored the deeds and focused on the words. The opposition to Christ arose in response to what he said. The words of Christ exposed the truth about them. The truth was, these leaders used their power to live above the rules that applied to everyone else. Anyone who threatened to expose them, they would set out to destroy. This conflict has been brewing for a long time now and keeps building until we come to this final section (chapters 26-28). The hatred of him and the fear of him is growing. The Pharisees and Sadducees have given up on finding a way to argue against Jesus in public or find something sinister about him that they can embarrass him with. They cannot find any inconsistency or flaw. The stakes are getting higher. Something has to give. So, this section begins with these words:

“When Jesus had finished all these sayings (chapters 24-25, fifth and final teaching block), he said to his disciples, ‘You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.’” And with those words, Matthew takes us into the final section of his gospel account. This is where the story lines all start to come together. Christ has been telling his disciples for a long time that he is going to be delivered over to the authorities and they are going to crucify him. Now he says it again with the expectation that they would now know it. They knew the Passover was in two days. Now he expected them to be ready for what else was going to happen. This was it! The Son of Man was going to be crucified!!

The Son of Man was going to be crucified?! The Messiah was going to be overpowered? The King was going to be found guilty and publicly shamed, humiliated and executed? How could that be? How on earth could that be? And, it was going to happen in two days! Things were coming to a head. Obviously, the disciples' heads are spinning. And yet, the very statement on the part of Christ reflects the fact that none of this was ever out of control. At this point Jesus was not under arrest. He could have left Jerusalem anytime he wanted, but he chose to stay because he this was his plan. Christ surrendered himself

to his own plan. We often struggle with accepting the path that God lays out for us to walk. At times it is difficult. But think of this, Christ surrendered himself to the path that he laid out for himself and his path was infinitely more difficult than ours. He never ran from it. Chapter 26 begins with this transition statement that not only makes us aware that the crucifixion of Christ is eminent, but it also makes us aware that he is embracing it.

The sovereignty, the deliberateness, the grace and love of Christ are all over these chapters. Yet in contrast to that we have the actions of the chief priests and the elders of the people. In verses 3-5 they are secretly meeting. They plotting, scheming, devising ways to arrest Jesus by stealth. They want nothing less than to see him dead. Why do you plot? You plot in order to carry out a plan that fools people, right? What good is it to plot when the person you are plotting against already knows your plan?

This is how this final section is introduced. Man makes plans that appear to be free and independent to him. But in the end, the free and independent plans of man carry out the Sovereign plan of God. Do you see that? The leaders were plotting and scheming. They were throwing out ideas as to how they might pull this thing off. They were coming up with strategies when, as we will look at next week, they were given an unexpected gift. Judas Iscariot offers to betray Christ over to them. So, now we have betrayal in addition to plotting, scheming and stealth. But, everything that they did in secret was openly known to Christ. Everything that they came up on their own carried out the plan of God from the foundation of the earth. Can you see that? I think that this is very, very helpful. We all try to reconcile in our minds how man's free will intersects with God's sovereign plan. That is a good issue to address. That is helpful to your soul to study. But in order to see it rightly, you have to approach it rightly. God is the Creator and we are the creation. God is Infinite and we are finite. Man's freedom of will is limited by the very nature of man himself. He is creation. He is not infinite. God's freedom of will is different because God is on a completely different level than we are. I believe that if you remember that since we are not on equal ground with God, that this will help you come to grips with this wonderful truth. Think of it like this: God is all-powerful, all-knowing, all-wise, infinite and never changing. We know that and accept that. He is different. Therefore, the way his will functions and our wills function are qualitatively different as well. He is God. He is truly free. We are bound by our creatureliness. Man exercises his will in a way that appears to be free to him and he is held responsible for it. God's freedom is an infinite freedom. Therefore God's Sovereign plan established from the foundation of the earth is carried out through the "free and independent" choices of his creation. You can only reconcile that when you see God for who he is and man for who he is.

But, here is why I bring this up. That issue takes time to think through and you do not work through it without humility and meekness. And if, after all of this time, and study, and truth, we are still working through it, I think that we can cut the disciples some slack, don't you? We are tempted to read these opening words of chapter 26 and think critically of the disciples, aren't we? *"How can you guys miss this? Jesus just told you that he was going to be crucified and you act like he is just making this stuff up, what is wrong with you?"* But, how were they supposed to reconcile the plan of God for Christ to die with the plan of man to kill him? If you knew that someone planned to kill you, wouldn't you run

away? The statement by Christ didn't seem to fit together and truthfully, there were a lot of statements that Christ made that in the moment did not fit together but did later on.

As we work through this final section I want to urge us not to be harsh or critical of the disciples. They are going to react in ways that are going to be disappointing and honestly, shameful. And yet, Christ, who has every right to be harsh with them, is not. These chapters need to be read with tenderness. They need to be preached and heard with humility. This brings us to the final chapters. What should you expect from Matthew 26, 27 and 28?

1) See yourself in this story.

This is not a story with a moral that you can apply to your life. This is THE story of your life. It is the story of the world. You are the critic who is reading the book or watching the movie, looking for plot lines, sub-plots and character development. You are not observing this; you are in it. You are either part of the majority who reject him or you part of the minority who embrace him. If you are part of the minority who embrace Christ, do not expect applause nor respect from the majority. This world is not a friend to grace. Expect to be treated in a similar way that Christ was. You do not need to be intimidated. In the end, they cannot harm you. They can kill your body, but they can't touch your soul. But do not be haughty. You have the truth. You know the truth. The truth has set you free, but the truth has set you free to love those who do not understand the truth yet. (ABF emphasis) Go through these chapters with me for what they are. We are reading the account of the greatest act of love and mercy that the lover of our souls, our King, our Priest, our brother, our Savior and our God did for us because he loves us. See yourself in this story. You are here.

2) Expect more irony.

The trusted one, Judas Iscariot, betrays. The bold one, Peter, denies. The Sons of Thunder can't stay awake in the garden. The Son of God is sorrowful and longs to be comforted by the presence and prayers of his disciples. The rule-keeping religious leaders break every rule of process in order to condemn Christ. The ones who think they are doing the judging and sentencing are judging and sentencing themselves. "He saved others; he cannot save himself." They said. More irony. The only way for him to save others was if he did not save himself.

3) Expect more humility from Christ in the face of betrayal, conspiracy, personal vendettas, and raw politics.

I am so tempted to stand up for myself when I am falsely accused, (or when I think I am falsely accused) of trivial matters. Do these kinds of conversations ever happen to you? "Wow, it sure is cloudy today. I thought you said that it was supposed to be sunny." "No, I never said that." "No, I'm pretty sure you did. You said that it would be sunny today." "Listen, I never said that. Stop making this stuff up." Now, are we talking about life or death matters here? No! And is it possible that I said that? Or is, it possible that I was

misunderstood? Does it even matter? No! How much easier would it be to simply say, “I don’t remember saying that, but perhaps I did.” But in the moment I want to defend myself. That is why I am continually amazed at the humility of Christ who is accused of things that really do matter. And in the face of betrayal and conspiracy, he is not screaming about the injustice, he is not threatening to get revenge, he is not spitting on the guards or raging against the system.

- 4) **Expect to be frustrated at the refusal by the leaders to deal with truth, and their cowardly use of hysteria and lies to bring about their evil scheme.**

When people are trying to cover their sin, there is no limit to how far they will attempt to go in order to make themselves look good. We can see it in these chapters in the lives of these men. It will be an act of God’s grace to help us see the things in our lives that we fight to keep from being exposed.

- 5) **Expect to feel the weight of the cross.**

The greatest sorrow that Christ felt was not in his body, but was in his soul. The physical torment was great, but it was overmatched by the agony that he experienced as the full weight of the wrath of the Father was unleashed upon him. The blackness of the sky told of the deep night of soul that Christ had entered in. We need to see this. We need to feel this. We need to know the cost of our forgiveness. Feeling the weight of the cross will give depth to our gratitude. Feeling the weight of the cross will give dimension to our humility. Feeling the weight of the cross will give intensity and focus to our worship and prayer and burden to our witnessing.

- 6) **Expect more amazement at the importance and the power of the cross.**

The death of Christ for our sins helps realize the seriousness of our sin and therefore helps us grasp the scope of our forgiveness. We are saved from sin’s penalty once and for all. We are being saved from sin’s power as we keep growing in our understanding of the cross and we will be saved from sin’s presence when we are with our resurrected Lord.

- 7) **Expect greater joy at the news of his resurrection.**

Knowing that the depth of cross is so very deep and dark, causes the news of his resurrection to be incredibly good. We will rejoice at the goodness of this news even greater because we will be freshly reminded of the darkness of his death.

- 8) **Expect greater appreciation for the people he calls his followers.**

Their stories are why we are here. Their lives of faith are the shoulders we stand on. Their hope is our hope. Their joy is our joy. Their future is our future. Their family is our family. Their Savior is our Savior. Their church is our church. Their gospel is our gospel.

- 9) **Expect greater desire to reach others with the gospel.**

We have an amazing message to announce. And while there are many who don't care and don't want to know, there are others whom the Lord has put in your life who are empty and need this. They may not know it yet. They may be afraid to admit it. But they are in your circle of influence.

10) Expect to grow in your understanding of Christ's design for the church and in your commitment to her and your joy in her.

Why did Christ endure all of this? Ephesians 5.25 tells us that "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her... (not only to save her but) so that he might present the church to himself in splendor..."

Jesus knows that he is worth a beautiful bride. The cost of making us beautiful was nothing less than his infinitely perfect life and sacrificial death on the cross. What makes us beautiful is when we reflect him because he is true beauty! I long for us to grow in beauty this year. I long for us to look like and feel more like Jesus.

Congregation Prayer of Consecration

Elders sign doctrinal statement

Elders sign church covenant

Congregation repeat church covenant

Closing Song