

Behold, the King!

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Each January both houses of Congress gather at the Capitol building in Washington, D.C. for the state of the Union address. As the event begins, a loud voice booms forth this announcement, "Mr. Speaker, the President of the United States." The announcement pierces through all the commotion in the chambers of the House and calls forth a response. *The Gospel According to Matthew*, the first book of the New Testament¹, in a similar way makes a dramatic announcement when in effect it proclaims, "Ladies and Gentlemen, behold, the King!" And this announcement is intended to cut through all the commotion in our hearts and call forth a response.

The book of Matthew is the bridge between the Old and the New Testaments. It connects the two testaments together. The books of the Old Testament recorded God's law and His dealings with the people of Israel, but they were also a library of expectation and hope. The prophets saw a coming time when God would rule over the world through a king who would bring salvation, justice and peace to all. For example, Isaiah predicted this coming King when he said,

For unto us a Child is born,

Unto us a Son is given;

And the government will be upon His shoulder.

And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor,

Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

¹ Though not the first New Testament book written, it always comes first in the Greek manuscripts.

Of the increase of His government and peace

There will be no end, upon the throne of David

And over His kingdom...(9:6, 7)² [NKJV throughout]

Inspired by promises like this the ancient people of Israel had been waiting for a promised King. He would be the son of Abraham and the son of David³. He would rule in righteousness and his kingdom would have no end. Matthew's goal was to prove to the Jews⁴ that Jesus is the promised King, the fulfillment of their hopes and dreams. He does this by demonstrating that all the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah are fulfilled in Jesus.

One phrase that runs through the book, like a melody line in a symphony is, "...this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophets."⁵ And as we read through the gospel, Matthew shows us Jesus fulfilling prophecy in his birth, his flight into Egypt, his childhood in Nazareth, his use of parables in teaching, where he taught, his miracles of healings, his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, and his betrayal for 30 pieces of silver. The people of Israel needed to know for sure that Jesus was indeed their promised King.

But Jesus is not just the King for Israel and the Jewish people. In God's plan of salvation, the Hebrew people existed not for themselves but for the benefit of the whole

² See also for example: Isaiah 16:5; Jeremiah 23:5, 6; Daniel 2:44; 7:13, 14; Micah 4:2, 3

³ Jesus is called the Son of David more often in Matthew than in any other gospel (Matthew 1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30, 31; 21:9, 15)

⁴ Matthew also wrote to strengthen the faith of Jewish Christians. "Antioch in Syria is the most likely location for the writing of the gospel and for the church for which it was originally composed" which was "of mixed Jewish and Gentile origin (Acts15)" New Geneva Study Bible, (Nelson Pub. Nashville), p.1503.

⁵ Matthew 1:22 See also: 2:14, 15, 16-18, 23; 8:17; 12:17; 13:34, 35; 21:3-5; 26:54, 56; 27:9, 35

world. God promised Abraham that, "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed (Genesis 22:18)." That seed we now know to be Jesus Christ. When Jesus began his ministry he did so as the Jewish Messiah, "to confirm the promises *made* to the fathers" but his ministry and his message was also for the whole world "that the Gentiles might glorify God for *His* mercy (Romans 15:8, 9)." The gospel or good news of the King is for all of humanity. This is made abundantly clear in Christ's command at the end of the Matthew when he said,

*"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations (Matthew 28:19)."*¹

Now that we know that Jesus is the promised King, what was the gospel or good news that he brought? What was his essential message? It was this:

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Mathew 4:17)

This command marks the beginning of Christ's public ministry. What does this mean? To repent is to make a decisive change in our thinking, attitudes and actions. It is a turning away from one thing to another. Biblically, it is a renouncing of worldly hopes and fears and an acceptance of godly hopes and fears. It is a radical departure from a life of sin to a life of obedience to God. Repentance means a changing of our minds so that our values, goals and ideals line up with the standards of the Word of God. It involves a movement away from an old life style to a new and better one. This call to repent was the fundamental call of Christ's forerunner, John the Baptist,² and for Christ's apostles after him.³

But why should we repent? The answer is this: "the kingdom of heaven is at hand."⁴ This Kingdom is God's sovereign rule. The

¹ See also Matthew 24:14 and John 3:16

² Matthew 3:2

³ Mark 6:12; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30; 26:20

⁴ The phrase "kingdom of heaven" is equivalent to "the kingdom of God (Mark 1:15).

message and hope of this kingdom is stamped all across the pages of Matthew from first to last.⁵ But before this kingdom is fully established on the earth in the age to come, it must come to each and everyone of us as a present spiritual reality by way of God's Spirit. The kingdom must come in saving power, rescuing us from the grip and penalty of sin. The cross must precede the crown. In Matthew 16:21, Jesus began a new aspect of his ministry telling his disciples that he must,

*...suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and raised the third day.*⁶

But why must he die? A clue is given to us right at the start of the gospel in Matthew 1:21. An angel speaks to Joseph telling him that Mary will bring forth a son and he says,

...you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.

Isaiah 53 predicted this⁷ and Psalm 22 described it. Now, all who submit themselves to the rule of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ are saved from the power and penalty of sin, and will one day gain eternal life in the future kingdom of God.⁸

Now we must bear witness to the gospel: the good news of the kingdom of God and the victorious death and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. This same Lord Jesus Christ says to us "Go...and make disciples of all the nations."⁹ and we must say to our world,

"Behold, the King!"

⁵ In Matthew there are five blocks of teaching, all of which concern the kingdom of heaven. They are in chapters 5-7; 10; 13, 18, 24, 25

⁶ From this point on Jesus tries to prepare the disciples for his death (16:21; 17:22, 23; 20:18, 19).

⁷ Vss. 1-11

⁸ John 3:16, 17

⁹ Matthew 28:20