

What is Faith? Hearing the Call of the Gracious King

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[0 : 00] Let me give you all a very warm welcome to our church service this morning. I realise this week that it's now four years since we've been here in Buclew.

Rather a strange way to celebrate the anniversary, but it's a pleasure to be able to serve by sharing God's Word with you. A few things before we begin. First of all, we're back again. Our service is on at 5.30 on YouTube.

Looking at Daniel chapter 2, really interesting. We're going to see a King's crisis leading to God's glory being seen. God's power, God's wisdom being revealed. So tune back in if you can.

Monday, as ever, at 8pm, praying together on Zoom for our church, for our community, for our country, for the nations of the world. We need prayer. Please join us for that.

Wednesday, 7.30, our community discipleship groups meet, as ever, using the Word One-to-One material to study through John's Gospel.

[1 : 07] And let me say, if you're tuning in and you've never been in the habit of reading the Bible and you'd like to read the Bible with someone else, then absolutely feel free to get in touch with us. We'd love to put you in touch with a group or indeed to read the Bible one-to-one with a friend.

So if you need any details, the website or a vanto, the place you need to go. Now, our call to worship this morning reminds us that Jesus, the Word, became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

And we look forward to discovering more of Jesus' glory and grace and truth as we study God's Word together. Now, we're going to read in our Bibles together.

So if you've got a Bible, either physically or on device, it will be in Matthew chapter 9 again. We're going to read from verse 9 to verse 26.

[2 : 17] 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?

On hearing this, Jesus said, It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but those who are ill. But go and learn what this means. I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.

Then John's disciples came and asked him, How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast? 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. While he was saying this, a synagogue leader came and knelt before him and said, My daughter has just died.

[3 : 43] But come and put your hand on her and she will live. Jesus got up and went with him and so did his disciples. Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak.

She said to herself, If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed. Jesus turned and saw her. Take heart, daughter. He said, Your faith has healed you. And the woman was healed at that moment.

When Jesus entered the synagogue leader's house and saw the noisy crowd and the people playing pipes, he said, Go away, the girl is not dead but asleep. But they laughed at him.

After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand and she got up. News of this spread through all that region.

Now we've been looking for the last number of weeks, six or seven weeks, I guess, as Jesus has been travelling. And what we've seen is a powerful king who's been on the move, transforming lives.

[4 : 47] I've just picked up the second of Hilary Mantel's trilogy of books on Henry VIII. And it's been interesting to see the details of Henry's summer marches in the summer, if you're a king.

You sort of go hunting. You go to various expensive, fancy houses and you enjoy lots of hospitality and good times. But you're also sort of showing yourself to the massed crowds, to the public.

And Mantel describes crowds who are in awe of Henry's size and his strength. They know his reputation in battle, the way he rides his horses.

But the commoners are very much distant. Still there is poverty. Still there is suffering. As Henry and his court live in a sort of wealthy elite bubble.

You know, that's not true of King Jesus. We've seen that over the last number of weeks. If you've been with us, let's just very quickly recap. To recap, Jesus' march of glory.

[5 : 51] In chapter 8 and verse 1, Jesus comes down from a mountain. And what does he do? He heals a leper. In chapter 8 and verse 5, he enters his hometown of Capernaum. And he meets a centurion, an outsider, a Roman.

And he heals the centurion's servant. Chapter 8 and verse 14, he then travels to Peter's mother-in-law's house. And he heals her and then all the ill in her community.

And then Jesus gets into a boat with his disciples. Chapter 8, verse 23. And out there as a storm whips up, Jesus stops the storm. He arrives on the other side of the lake.

And he's met by a man possessed by demons. And he drives out the demons. And then in chapter 9 and verse 1, he comes back to his hometown of Capernaum. He meets a paralysed man.

He forgives his sin. And then he heals him from his paralysis. In Jesus, we have met time and time again a king with absolute awesome power.

[6 : 54] All those destructive, all those depressing powers that seem to have such a grip on the universe and people's lives, they flee at the presence of King Jesus.

And we've seen a king with compassion, especially to the excluded, to the weak, to the outsider. We've seen a king of wonderful grace who comes to show God's love and favour.

Not as something that people have to earn, but as a free and loving gift from the King of Grace. And so we're going to see these again in Matthew's life.

And I hope as we do so that we'll see hope for our own lives, whoever we are, wherever we're at today. But before we get into that, I think it's important for us to introduce Matthew, the tax collector.

Now we don't know a lot about him, in a sense, from our text. But we know a lot about him from the job that he has. My first job after leaving university was working in an inland revenue office in Glasgow.

[8 : 03] Now, I don't mention that to be popular because you know as well as I do that taxes, people who collect taxes by extension are not always the most popular.

What about for a tax collector in Israel in the first century? Well, we know about them that they are working for the occupying Roman Empire.

So they're regarded by their fellow countrymen as traitors. We know that they are cheating their countrymen by extortion.

They are taking money under the table that's going into their own pocket. So they are regarded as outcasts. Because they're siding with Roman, because they are breaking God's law, they are religiously unclean.

But perhaps the biggest and most significant fact is this one. Matthew chose this life. And maybe, like me, you're thinking, why in the world would anyone choose that to face so much hostility and exclusion?

[9 : 17] And the simple answer is money. He was willing to sacrifice family, friends, religion for money.

Jesus said, watch out for greed. Greed is a subtle thing. Money can very easily but very subtly become the place we look to for our sense of identity.

I am because I have. I am because I can spend. We can look to our money to give us security. That's one way why our current crisis is such a challenge to so many of us.

Jesus said money can function as a counterfeit God, as a false God. In that it grabs our heart. It controls us both by our desires and by our anxieties.

It becomes something that would seek to control us. So Jesus is going to meet Matthew and this is the situation that he's in.

[10 : 16] So let's see what happens. The first thing we need to recognise is the king's authority. And we see that in Jesus' call. Now Matthew's gospel, as we've already said a little, is building up a profile of Jesus.

Helping us to see Jesus is God's promised king with God's authority establishing God's kingdom. In chapters 5 to 7 we see the authority of Jesus in the way that he teaches.

In chapters 8 to 9 we see the authority of Jesus in his miracles. They are sort of a badge of authenticity. Proof of his identity and his mission. Well it's this king, King Jesus.

We read in verse 9, who saw Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. And he told him, follow me. He issues a command. And this isn't a one-off thing.

This isn't a one-time. This is, Matthew come and follow me for the day. Or come and follow me down the street to where I'm going. This is an all-of-life call. This is a call to put his faith and his trust in Jesus.

[11 : 19] This is a call to become a disciple of Jesus. And what's amazing when we think about all we've learned about Matthew is that in verse 9 he immediately leaves it behind.

He leaves his job. He leaves his money behind. In verse 10, what do we see? We see him having a feast. He gladly is now using his money to throw a feast for some of his tax collector friends and others.

Gone is the stockpiling, the hoarding, the exploiting. Now he's sharing and having joy as he does so. So how in the world has this happened?

We might ask. And the answer is the gift of faith. This isn't the same thing that happened to Elon Musk, the owner of Tesla, who's become tired of all the abuse that he's getting for being a billionaire.

So he's made it his plan to try and give his money away. Nor is it the case that Matthew woke up with a sudden impulse for social and economic reform.

[12 : 25] He hadn't been listening to Nicola Sturgeon talking about recreating the kaleidoscope of society to make it more just and fair. No, he's quite happily taking more money into his back pocket until he encounters Jesus.

The only explanation is that he's received the gift of faith and that by faith he sees Jesus as the one true God. All of a sudden his eyes are opened to the greater value of knowing God than getting gold.

His former God had been money and he'd been obeying the call of money. Get more. You need me. You're worth something because you have some.

He'd been trusting it. You don't need family. You don't need friends. You've got finance. Money had been his identity. He has said to himself, I'm going to get rich or I'm going to die trying.

But now, in this encounter, it's as if he's placing Jesus and money in the balance and he realises that there's no context.

[13 : 35] There's a greater weight of glory in who Jesus is and what Jesus offers. Jesus offers the end of exclusion and God's embrace. Jesus offers a joy that can't be lost.

A joy that can't be used up. Jesus is offering life with God and his love. He's offering him an invitation to become a citizen in the kingdom of God. With hope for now and for eternity.

So Matthew, instantly, he's all in. He's leaving his own life behind. He's not living for money anymore. He gladly uses it to share his joy, to extend hope to others. Here is a transformed life and he is all in.

Perhaps appropriately, C.S. Lewis compares faith and paying taxes.

He says, when it comes to faith, we are in fact very like honest but reluctant taxpayers. You know, we can approach God in the way we approach taxes.

[14 : 42] We want to give. But we want to give in moderation. We want to hold some parts of our life back. But Matthew understands that when Jesus calls us, he calls us to all of life discipleship.

He wants to have all of our life. Not just on Sundays, not just sort of the religious segment. He wants our work to be for him, our family to be for him, our leisure and pleasure to be for him.

He wants us to count the cost. As Matthew had to count the cost. But he was glad because he realised the greater worth of treasure in heaven. Now what do we get?

What do we get in hearing and responding to Jesus' call? We get God himself. The greatest treasure in the whole world.

Peace with God. Getting to know and enjoy him through his son, by his spirit, to have him as our father for now and for eternity.

[15 : 48] So Jesus comes with the authority of the king and he issues his call. I also want to see with you the king's compassion in his welcome.

Now in the first century in the Middle East, a meal at the time of Jesus was a sign of acceptance. It was a sign of friendship.

It was an invitation to sharing life. Now let's have a look at the guest list for the feast we have in verse 10.

While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. So Matthew invites his fellow outsiders, the unclean, the unwanted, the notorious, and they all come and they're all glad to spend time with Jesus.

Why? Because Jesus shows them hospitality. Jesus welcomes them in. Jesus eats with joy with them because he wants to extend the mercy and the compassion of God to them.

[16 : 56] You get a telling picture in verses 10 and 11. You see there's a meal going on at the inside in the house with Matthew and with the disciples and with Jesus. There's joy. There's laughter.

There's celebration. There's a meal going on at the outside. But on the outside there's the religious leaders. They're angry and they're judgmental. And they're starved of joy.

They're shocked by Jesus. Jesus has single-handedly torn down dividing walls that they have set up.

They saw themselves as the gatekeepers to God. And by their reckoning, how did you get to God? You had to be pure and good like them. You had to meet their standard.

You had to avoid others who were less than them. Jesus gives his verdict on that kind of thinking. He said to them in verse 13, Go and learn what this means.

[17 : 55] I desire mercy, not sacrifice. You don't understand God's heart. You don't have God's heart. God loves mercy. Not a religious performance. In actual fact, Jesus said to them, You're failing to love God because you don't love him in your heart.

And you're failing to love your neighbour because you're not showing any mercy. But this is not true of King Jesus. He is the King of glory.

But unlike, let's say, the court of Henry VIII, or any other king for that matter, where typically it's the great and the good, the brilliant and the best are included in that sort of inner circle, who does Jesus welcome?

Jesus welcomes the lost, the lonely. He welcomes the hurting and the hopeless. He welcomes the rejected, the ones who feel shame and those who are denied welcome.

And he brings them into a feast. And feasting in the Old Testament and in the New Testament then becomes a really powerful symbol, a picture of God's kingdom.

[19 : 05] Picturing eternal life of joy in the presence of God, in the presence of Jesus. This would be a Sunday where, as a church, we would usually share the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper is a meal that we share where Jesus is the host. And that meal, when we take the bread and the wine, they symbolise Jesus' body and blood.

They show the cost to us of this invitation. For us to enjoy this feast, to be in the presence of God requires Jesus to lay down his life for us.

But that feast that we share, the Lord's Supper that we share, also helps us as Christians to anticipate that great feast that's still to come. But here in this meal that Matthew shares with his friends, there's a little window into heaven.

Here is Jesus, gladly welcoming and sharing friendship with those who do not deserve it. How can this be? And how can we come to enjoy this?

[20 : 16] One last thing that we need to see is the King's grace. To think about his mission. Perhaps in these closing words, we can see two pictures of Jesus and his mission.

In verse 12, Jesus responding to the tax collectors, to the religious leaders who are so judgmental. He said, it's not the healthy who need a doctor, but those who are ill.

Jesus as surgeon. Now we have seen in our media, and some have seen it up close and personal in their own lives or in their family lives, devastating pictures of medical teams battling to save lives against this deadly virus.

We have seen them acting with courage and compassion in confronting disease for the sake of their patients. And it's right that we are thankful for our NHS and we pray for them and for other medical professionals around the world.

But what's Jesus' message in verse 12 to 13 as he comes to us as a surgeon, as a heart surgeon? He's saying this deadly virus of sin is in all of us.

[21 : 42] The germ of sin is within us, this deadly destructive force that separates us from God, that causes pain to others, that leads to the suffering that we see in our world, that leads ultimately to eternal judgment and separation from God and all that is good if we don't turn from sin and trust in Jesus.

That virus is in all of us, but not everyone sees it. Some, like the religious leaders say, well, I'm healthy, I'm good, I'm religious.

I don't need Jesus to save me, I don't need him to die for me. We need humility and we need honesty to judge ourselves and not comparing to our neighbours or to family, friends or colleagues, to compare ourselves with God's standard, to see that in God's eyes, no one is righteous, no one can claim goodness, no one can claim that we deserve a place in God's kingdom.

Rather, we all stand in need of grace. As we thought about last week, we all need the sin-forgiving power of Jesus. We need to trust that when Jesus died on the cross for sin, he died for my sin in my place, taking the punishment that I deserve, he took it on himself as the only way to bring anyone back to God.

But there's also another image that we can perhaps think of, Jesus the surgeon, but also Jesus the shepherd king.

[23 : 32] Because he closes in verse 13, saying, For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners. Jesus in his teaching described in different ways that he comes searching for lost and straying ones.

So in John chapter 10, he talks about himself as the good shepherd. He says, I know my sheep and my sheep know me. There's relationship, there's love, there's trust. And he says, I have other sheep and I must go and I must bring them in and they will listen to my voice.

Which is just what we see with Matthew. He heard the call of Jesus, his shepherd, and he came to follow. Or you can think about, in Luke's gospel, the parable of the lost sheep. Remember that the shepherd who had a hundred sheep and one goes wandering and he leaves the 99 and he goes off and he goes searching and searching and when he finds it, puts it on his shoulders and he has joy and he invites his neighbours to come and share in that joy because he's brought his sheep home.

And Jesus says, that's just like the joy God in heaven has when a sinner repents and trusts in Jesus. Jesus has joy in calling sinners home to life with God.

Jesus came to save, to welcome, to restore, to bring back and all of that's a gift of God's grace. Because Jesus, when he talked about himself as the good shepherd, he said, the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

[25 : 06] That's how it happens. You and I can know grace and welcome. We can enter into God's feast only because Jesus in sheer love and grace came to lay down his life for the sheep.

I have not come to call the righteous my but sinners. As we come to the end of our studies in this little section of Matthew, have you been hearing the call of Jesus to faith?

Have you come to realise Jesus is God's son, God's promised king, and that he is the saviour for sinners, and that he is the saviour that you need?

Perhaps it's been this crisis crisis that's been making you rethink your life to the extent that you want to know God personally. You want a relationship with Jesus.

Well, if Jesus is calling you today, how should you respond? Maybe you have that question, I believe, I want this, what do I do now?

[26 : 26] Can I suggest that you pray to God? What you need is to pray and talk to God. Maybe three words to help you.

Say sorry to God. Sorry for ignoring him, for rejecting him up until this point, for sinning, for breaking God's law, as we all do.

So we need to say sorry to God. Say thank you to him for sending Jesus to be the saviour that you need. To have him live as your perfect substitute.

To have him die as your perfect sacrifice. To have him rise as your perfect saviour so that you might be forgiven and have eternal life. And then say please, please will you forgive me?

Please will you send me your spirit? Please will you be my Lord and King? Please will you make me a child of God? And you know, God promises that he will save those who call on him.

[27 : 42] That those who believe in Jesus will have eternal life. He will receive you. God bless you. If that's where you're at, you can of course also get in touch with me through the website, through Facebook, or get in touch with a Christian friend or family member that you know to talk about this further.

Begin reading your Bible and praying and connecting regularly to church teaching. because the great desire for us as a church, for me as a minister, is that we would all hear the King's call, so that we would all enjoy the King's welcome, that we would all share in God's great feast.