

The King comes – the people are divided (Matt 2:1-12)

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[0 : 00] and now we're going to hear from God's Word. In just a moment, Ailey's going to come up and read, first of all, from Isaiah 49, and then Matthew 2. And as we hear from Isaiah 49, which is one of the servant songs in Isaiah, notice the theme of mission to the nations, Jesus' light to the nations that we find there. So, Ailey, if you want to come up and read, that'd be wonderful.

Amen. And he said to me, You are my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified. Then I said, I have labored in vain. I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain, yet surely my just reward is with the Lord and my work with my God. And now the Lord says, Who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, so that Israel is gathered to him, for I shall be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and my God shall be my strength. Indeed, he says, it is too small a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel. I will also give you as a light to the Gentiles that you should be my salvation to the ends of the earth. Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, their Holy One, to him whom man despises, to him whom the nation abhors, to the servant of rulers. Kings shall see and arise. Princes shall also worship because of the Lord who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, and he has chosen you. And from Matthew, Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?

For we have seen his star in the east and have come to worship him. When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them whether Christ was to be born. So they said to him, In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet, But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah. For out of you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel. Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, Go and search carefully for the young child. And when you have found him, bring back word to me that I may come and worship him also. When they heard the king, they departed. And behold, the star which they had seen in the east went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to him, gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.

[3 : 44] So, we're going to be in Matthew chapter 2 together as we continue to think about the theme of Advent.

And here today we're considering the reality that God's king comes and that when he comes, people are divided. Of course, we recognize that sense that the coming of Jesus is a dividing line. We see it as a line of division in history. Our calendars are marked by B.C., before Christ, and A.D., Anno Domini, the year of our Lord. Our Bibles are divided between the Old Testament, which anticipates the coming of Jesus, and the New Testament, which speaks to us of his coming and the significance of that. But in Matthew's gospel, we see another line of division. We recognize that from the time Jesus was born, there are signs of division and opposition. And that would come to mark the life of Jesus. You read the gospels, and what we see is that Jesus' words ring true when he said, whoever is not for me is against me. And here, in a sense, we have this previewed for us.

Just to remind ourselves, so far in Matthew's gospel, we've been presented as Jesus, God who saves, and Jesus, God who is with us. And now we come to discover Jesus is God's promised king, but that king prompts different responses. We see three different groups. We see the Magi, we see Herod, we see the religious leaders, and they all have different reactions. And so, our time together, I hope, will prompt us towards our own personal reflection to think about what's our response to Jesus, that we'd be careful to be on the right side of history when it comes to Jesus, because we'd be worshipers. So, three ideas about Jesus as king that we can see in our text. First of all, that Jesus is a global king. So, let's go back to verses 1 and 2, just to read that again.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, where is the one who's been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him. Now, we maybe have some what questions that we would like to ask of this passage. What is the job of these men, these Magi, these wise men? And there's lots of discussion about that. We might be interested in what star did they follow? And you'll discover there's lots of things written about that as well. But that's not what Matthew is interested in. Rather, Matthew wants to answer the question, who is in view here? And what's interesting to him is that these Magi, these men from the east, these men from outside of Israel, they come to worship. And Matthew is interested, not in what star, but why is the star there? And what becomes clear is that God has placed this sign in creation in order that these men would recognize and worship God's king as he's come.

[7:13] It's a reminder that in the goodness of God, Jesus has come to be the savior, to be the king, not just for some, but for the world. In a sense, verse 2 is remarkable because you've got these wise men traveling a great distance in order to worship the king of the Jews.

But think about where we are in history at that stage. Israel doesn't have a true king. In fact, they've got a puppet king, Herod, set up by Rome. Israel is incredibly weak nationally and politically ruled by Rome. And yet we have Magi come to worship. And this is something much more than some kind of political gesture. You'll maybe think what happens, you know, in the UK when a prince or a princess is born. Greetings of goodwill will be sent from world leaders all over to the royal family. This is so much more than that. This is worship. While many saw the star that was in the sky, God in his kindness has chosen these Magi to see, to understand, to believe, to enter into God's plan to save people from many nations, just as he had always promised. So we can go back, for example, to Genesis 12, a great promise made to Abraham, all peoples on earth will be blessed through you, through one of your seed. One of your family line, Abraham, will be the source of blessing to the nations. And the Bible is clear that blessing will come through Jesus, who is in Abraham's family line. In 1 Kings 8, Solomon has just finished the temple, and he brings a prayer to God to dedicate the temple. And in verse 43, he says, he prays to God, do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you. So King Solomon understands that God isn't just God for Israel, God is God for the whole world. And his desire was that the nations would honor God. And then Aley read from us, Isaiah 49, verse 6, of the servant of the Lord, that his coming would be, it'd be too small for him just to be savior for Israel. Rather, God says, I will also make you, the servant, that is Jesus, a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth. So here is Jesus being presented as the fulfillment of all these wonderful Old Testament promises. He is God's light, he is God's salvation, he is God's source of blessing for all who will come to believe, for all who will come to worship, regardless of where they, where we are from. Some implications that follow from that.

First of all, we recognize in this that Christianity truly is a global religion. Christianity has always and will always cross cultural barriers because it's not tied to one particular place. It's not tied to a particular building or set of buildings. It's not rooted in one language or culture because God's desire was always that his glory would spread to the ends of the earth. And we see that God's promise through Jesus is coming true, that Jesus has come to build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. And we've been so encouraged as a church to hear time and again that God is building his church in hard places and in surprising places and among hard people and surprising people.

And that's God's way, so he gets glory. There's hope for us in God being global and Jesus being a global king. But another implication is that therefore mission is vital. That as Christians and as a local church, we have a responsibility when it comes to God's global kingdom to support the work of mission in different ways. To pray, certainly. To give, perhaps to go. That we are to steward our

resources for the glory of God, and that will involve us then supporting the spread of the gospel around the world.

[11:46] So here in Book Blue, for the last few months, we've been listening to missionaries talking to us over Zoom, and we hope in 21 to continue that mission focus and to be really careful and deliberate to think, how can we steward our resources so that God will be glorified in more nations and among more people?

But then to bring it even closer to home, as Jesus is presented as global king, that means today, whoever we are, whatever our story, Jesus is our king. By which I mean he has authority, lordship over us.

Whether we bow the knee to him or not does not change the fact that he is king, and he is lord. And we have this responsibility, indeed, we have this command to bow the knee to submit, to obey, to follow. Because Jesus is global king, not just for some, but over all.

The next thing that we see from our text in verses 3 to 8 is that while Jesus has come as global king, Jesus is also rejected king, it's clear from verse 3 itself that all is not well.

So we're told God has sent his king. We're also told when King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

[13:23] That seems an unexpected reaction. Your king has come. But rather than joy and celebration, there's disturbance. It's a sign that Jesus is a dividing line. And again, it's a reminder to us that here are some insiders, but that counts for nothing.

Being on the inside counts for nothing. It's what's on the inside, it's what's in our heart that matters. And the clear difference between the Magi and Herod and the religious leaders shows us that being a churchy person doesn't count for anything. It's what's in our heart.

Are we responding to Jesus as Lord? That's what matters. So God's king has come, but we see in verses 3 to 8 two different negative reactions. First and most obviously, we see hostile Herod.

So we see him gathering intel. So verse 4, he calls together the people's chief priests and teacher of the law, and he asks them where the Messiah is to be born. Now that could be a positive thing.

And then he goes to the Magi, and he wants to find out, where did you see the star?

When did you see the star? So I can go and worship. That sounds positive, but we discover his real intentions. It's not to worship Jesus, but to wipe him out. So we read, we didn't read in verse 13, but when we read verse 13, we discover an angel again coming to Joseph in a dream.

[14:39] Get up, the angel said. Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him. Herod knows he's not the true king, the promised king from Bethlehem.

And he feels that this new child, this Jesus, is a threat. He has pride. He feels that the threat is power, and he will not bow to God's king.

Perhaps we recognize the story. But there's another negative reaction that we may also see and identify with, and it's that of the apathetic and the unmoved leaders.

So those chief priests and teachers of the law, they can tell the king exactly where the Messiah, the king of the Jews, is going to be born. They know the prophecy. Verse 5, So here's Micah 5.

Micah, the prophet, bringing hope to a people who have walked away from God, that God would send his shepherd king. And these religious leaders don't continue the quotation, but Micah goes on to say, this shepherd king, his origins are from of old, from ancient times.

[16:12] So he's not just a man, he's also the eternal God. In other words, Micah is getting the people ready that a greater king than David is going to come. The shepherd king promised, for example, in Ezekiel 34 is going to come.

Ezekiel 34 is a really interesting passage, because at one and the same time, Ezekiel brings this message from God that the leaders, the kings and the religious leaders, they're doing a really bad job.

They're bad shepherds, because they're not looking after the people. They're not leading the people towards worshipping the one true God. And then God says, I myself will shepherd my people.

I will gather them in. I will feed them. I will tend to them. And I will send a shepherd in the line of David. So this anticipated one is both man and God.

And that's what we see in Matthew, isn't it? Jesus is not just a man, but the God man. He is God who saves. He is God with us. And we've got this remarkable reality that these religious leaders, they know this mind-blowing promise, but they simply carry on with their day.

[17 : 22] And J.C. Ryle put it really well when he said, there may be knowledge of Scripture in the head, while there is no grace in the heart. They knew their Bibles.

They knew their hope. But when the king came, they passed him by. Now, it's really easy when we come to a passage like this to sort of shake our head and point our fingers and say, well, you should have known better.

But maybe instead of that, we should reflect ourselves, ask ourselves some hard questions, whether we're Christians, whether we're not Christians, to ask ourselves some hard questions. For example, where and how in my life do I resist Jesus as king?

Herod had pride. Where am I proud? Now, who sits on the throne of my life really? How are we responding to the call of Jesus?

Jesus says, repent and believe. Do we do that or do we resist? Jesus says, take up your cross and follow me. Is that something that we listen to? Or is it something that we ignore when it becomes uncomfortable?

[18 : 29] Jesus would be king, but do we want to limit his rule? Have we put Jesus in a box so that our religion is safe and comfortable? Saying to Jesus, Jesus, you could be Lord of some, but certainly not Lord of all.

There's some parts of my life that I don't want to give over to you. But our obedience is partial rather than complete. Think about our patterns, our words, our actions, our thought life, the things that we watch, the way we interact.

Are there pockets of resistance in our own life, even as Christians? What about apathy? Ask yourself, is my life really about enjoying the glory of Jesus?

Am I investing myself in knowing and enjoying him more day by day? Is public or private worship a highlight in my day?

A chance to come aside and to enjoy fellowship and friendship with the God who made me and saved me? Am I investing spiritually in others?

[19 : 43] Recognizing how important it is that we bow the knee to Jesus as Lord. Is that something I give my time to? Does Jesus get first and best in my life or does he get whatever scraps are left at the end of the day?

It's important for us to recognize and reflect on our own responses, our daily responses to Jesus as King, that we not find ourselves rejecting him.

We want to remember the gospel. Remember in the gospel, Jesus has come as good shepherd.

Jesus has come as God's King. And his rule, it's not about being served, but it's about serving.

It's about laying down his life as a ransom so that we might be brought into the family of God. Think about his care. He's come as that good shepherd to lay down his life for his flock.

He's the one who calls us by name. He's the one who goes to seek out the lost sheep to bring us in. How do we respond to this shepherd king?

[20 : 45] We don't want to be hostile. We don't want to be apathetic. Rather, that we would be worshipping. So we need to think about what side of the dividing line do I fall on? What needs to change that I am making a right response to King Jesus?

But those aren't the only reactions we see to Jesus. We see in verses 9 to 12 that Jesus is also a worshipped king.

Let's read again at verse 9. This is back to the Magi. After the Magi had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.

When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. So God's star appears again. And that's teaching us God wants them to be worshippers. God wants these men to see the glory of Jesus.

God wants us to see the glory of Jesus, that we too would be worshippers. And notice their response when they see the star that's leading them to the king. It's joy.

[21 : 54] They appreciate God's kindness, God's grace to them. By nature, they're outsiders. They don't have the Bible. They don't have all these prophets and prophecies.

God's love, God's kindness is drawing them in to meet Jesus. And they've got the gift. They've got these eyes of faith. Verse 11 is remarkable in its own way.

On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts.

What's happening here? They've come to this backwater town. They're meeting with this poor family. They're seeing this little baby, perhaps a toddler, and they're worshipping. They see with the eyes of faith that this little vulnerable baby is the divine saviour of the world. And they worship. Because God has given them the gift of salvation.

[22 : 59] He's opened their eyes. They've got faith. That's what God would want for us, that we would see with the eyes of faith. We won't see Jesus physically, but we'd see with the eyes of faith, Jesus as Lord and saviour and God's gift to us.

But what's wonderful about this story is that here are some men, some outsiders, and they know God's revelation. And it's only because of God's work that they become worshippers. Left to themselves, they would have no hope.

But God has entered in. God sent the star. And God has sent his son. And they become worshippers because of God's kindness. I think, too, there's a star shining. That's quite a noticeable thing.

Others saw the star. Others heard the news. And we know that they did nothing. But for these men, salvation is a gift from God. Salvation is always a gift from God.

And whenever we receive a gift, we should thank God, shouldn't we? We should thank the one who gives us this wonderful gift. Our lives should be a thanksgiving to God for his indescribable gift.

[24 : 06] If we're not Christians, we should ask God for this wonderful gift. And we should pray and ask on behalf of others. That's part of the work of mission, to pray that men and women and boys and girls would be moved from darkness to light, that they would have their eyes open to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus.

So they know God's revelation, and they respond with worship. They can come to Jesus and see, here's the promised king.

Here's the Savior. Here's the good shepherd. Here's the Son of God. And so they give these gifts to reflect what's in their hearts. God has been so kind to them. He's given them salvation.

And so they respond with gratitude as they give their treasures. In the story of the Magi, we have a story of what God would want for each one of us.

This is God's desire, God's call on our lives, today and every day, that we would see his glory, and that we would worship.

[25 : 12] We were made to see, to know, to enjoy the glory of God and to be worshipers. So Matthew 2 really encourages us to consider what side of the line we find ourselves on, that we would be on the right side of the dividing lines.

Over the last few weekends, we've been doing something different in our family worship. We've been reading a book on mission called A Taste of Asia. It's an excellent little book giving an introduction to some of the different religions and some of the different countries of Asia.

And last week, we were learning about perhaps the place in the world where the starkest of all dividing lines, that border established in 1953 between South Korea and North Korea.

And that dividing line is really stark. We know in the South, there is great wealth. In the North, there is great poverty. One is a country that's open to the world.

The other is very much closed to the world. And when it comes to Christianity, there's freedom in the South and the church has blossomed and exploded in the last few generations, whereas it's fiercely persecuted in the North.

[26 : 28] And it's a reminder to us, we need to pray for the persecuted church. You think of life in the Korea as being born on the right side of the divide makes all the difference in the world in one sense.

But the Bible would say there's an even greater dividing line whether we are for or against Jesus. Because that matters for our day-to-day life now.

Because knowing Jesus means we have a joy that's deeper than circumstances. It gives us hope for today, tomorrow, and for all eternity. It gives us a peace with God and peace in our conscience because our sin has been dealt with.

It gives us a purpose. We're called to be people on mission. But it also matters for eternity. Because when it comes to Jesus, we're thinking about realities that have to do with life and death and heaven and hell.

And God's desire for each one of us is that our response would be like that of the Magi. To borrow from one of our many famous Christmas carols that we would come, oh come let us adore Him,

Christ the Lord.