

Faith follows Jesus as King

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[0 : 0 0] Friends, welcome again to another digital service here at Becloot. I'm James, the minister of the church here. It's great to welcome you if you're part of our church family. It's good to be able to share with you.

If you're tuning in from different parts of the country, different parts of the world, it's really great to be able to share the Bible with you, to sing and to pray together.

And we're going to begin hearing words from King David in the book of Psalms, the 40th Psalm. A Psalm where he cries out in a time of need and he discovers that God delivers.

So he trusts in God. So it's a good place for us to begin. I waited patiently for the Lord. He turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire.

He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord.

[1 : 0 7] Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust. Now, let's read our Bibles. We're going to be in the Gospel of Matthew.

And here is Jesus just about to begin his public ministry. He spent 30 years and we don't know much about his life. But here he begins ministry.

He's first of all going to call some followers. So we're going to read from Matthew chapter 4 and verse 12 to verse 25. When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee.

Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali, to fulfil what was said through the prophet Isaiah.

Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people living in darkness have seen a great light.

[2 : 0 8] On those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned. From that time on, Jesus began to preach, repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.

As Jesus was walking beside the sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. Come, follow me, Jesus said, and I will make you fishers of men.

At once they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James, son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets.

Jesus called them and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

News about him spread all over Syria and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures and the paralysed, and he healed them.

[3 : 1 9] Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and the region across the Jordan followed him. Amen. That's God's word.

So we're going to think about today what is faith and to see that faith follows Jesus as king. It seems like, and maybe in part because of Easter just having been, but there seems to be a recognition that we need faith.

The First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, you maybe heard her in the run-up to Easter, paying tribute to churches, recognising the importance of those faith communities in our country for going above and beyond and sacrificing to love and care.

As the crisis continues, many people are beginning to recognise the benefit of having faith. Others are coming to see the need of faith.

Perhaps that's even why you're tuned in today, not usually in church, but needing to hear some hope and thinking about what does God mean for me in the middle of this.

[4 : 31] Now the question we need to ask is, if we need faith, who or what do we put our faith in? Because faith always needs an object. For some, we've maybe been used to the idea that we put our faith in ourselves.

You know, we can do whatever we put our minds to, we can be whoever we want to be, and perhaps that foundation is beginning to shake. But then others, that faith is being replaced by faith in the science and the statistics, our faith in the government, our faith in the NHS, to continue that good work and to provide solutions.

Faith, as it's described in the Bible, faith of Christianity, is faith that rests entirely in a person.

And that's not ourselves. It's in the person of Jesus. So we're going to spend a few weeks, a few Sundays, thinking about faith. And today, again, we're going to see faith that sees Jesus as the true king, and the true king that our hearts are actually looking for, and to see that faith responds by following him.

So faith rests in a person. Jesus. And so we just read, Jesus begins to assemble disciples.

[5 : 51] And it's interesting, he doesn't go to the temple, he doesn't go to the palace, he goes to the seashore, to the shore of the Lake Galilee. And Jesus, in verse 19, says to some fishermen, come, follow me.

Now, it was common in Jesus' day that there would be rabbis who would travel around, and they would be followed by pupils. But what's different is that those pupils would normally make the decision, there's the teacher I want to listen to and learn from.

Jesus reverses that because he is the rabbi, the teacher who calls students to himself. And notice, Jesus doesn't say, follow my teaching or rules.

Jesus doesn't say, follow these 10 steps to becoming a better you. You know, we have lots of self-help books in libraries and bookshops.

Now, disciples are called to follow Jesus. Christianity isn't about advice. It's not about moral improvement. It's about good news, and good news that centres on a person, the person of the Lord Jesus.

[7 : 02] Our good news is found in the fact that he is perfectly obedient. Whereas you and I break God's law, Jesus never does. And Jesus then, in perfect sacrificing love, goes to the cross as our substitute, paying the ransom price to set us free from our slavery to sin that leads to both physical and spiritual death.

And then in his resurrection, there is the good news that he has won the victory over our enemies to secure for us the promise of eternal life if we are trusting in him.

So Jesus comes announcing that he is, in fact, the only way back to God. And what's unique about the Christian faith is the idea of God's grace.

It's not that we go up to God because we can't. The distance is too great between his perfection and us. Rather, God in Jesus comes down to raise us up.

So in our reading, we had two sets of fishermen brothers, and Jesus comes to them and says, follow me. And instantly, did you notice, they leave everything behind. I wonder what your reaction is to their reaction.

[8 : 25] Maybe especially if you're able to not know the end of the story, you might think, this is risky. This seems really reckless. How do they know how things are going to go?

Matthew, who's writing this gospel account, this life of Jesus for us, he wants to show that it is reasonable for these disciples and for anybody to follow Jesus. Now, how does he do that? We didn't have time, but if you read Matthew chapters 1 to 4, he's building up a profile of Jesus, even before Jesus begins moving around and teaching and healing, to show that faith in Jesus is not a shot in the dark.

So in chapter 1, the angels come to Mary, the mother of Jesus, to announce that Jesus will be conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and he'll be given the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sin, from God as saviour.

Chapter 2, he is announced as the one who will be born as God's king, and he will shepherd his people. He will lead and guide and feed and protect. Chapter 3, John the Baptist helps to announce Jesus as the Lord who is coming, and he will give the gift of the Holy Spirit.

God himself will come to live in his followers. And at Jesus' baptism, we hear the voice from heaven, the Father saying, this is my son and I love him.

[9 : 50] And we see the Holy Spirit come down and rest on Jesus. And then in chapter 4, Jesus goes out into the wilderness and he faces temptation from the devil.

But unlike Adam in the Garden of Eden, unlike the nation of Israel, Jesus passes the test. He remains fully obedient to God's word and trusts in the word of God.

And so it's this king, this promised king, this great king, who says to the people who listen, repent for the kingdom of heaven is near.

Turn from what Jesus hates to love what Jesus loves. Because he is the king who's come bringing in his kingdom. So this is no time to sit back. This is no time for complacency.

Rather, it's a time for action. Because here is this promised king. The one who would defeat all our great enemies, including death. The one who would rescue us from distress.

[10 : 50] The one who will fix what is broken, who will restore everything that was lost. They will give the hope and the promise of everything sad one day coming untrue. So when this king comes calling, you don't want to miss out.

Perhaps you remember playing follow my leader as children. Remember that way you were sort of linked together. You held hands in a large chain and you were sort of pulled through various obstacles.

And if you were following the leader, what did you have to do? You had to keep pace. You had to sort of be looking ahead to see where the leader might go next. What obstacle was coming next. Because you didn't want to break the chain.

You wanted to be connected to the leader. Well, Christian faith follows Jesus as leader and king. And we are united to him.

And the good news is it's not our ability to hold on to him. It's God's grace that has a firm grip on us that gives us hope. He is the one who doesn't just walk ahead of us as our leader.

[11 : 51] He also walks beside us and with us all the days of our life. And we are called to follow his way of life. Again, not in our strength, but in the strength that he provides as he gives us the Holy Spirit.

So we're called to faith in a person. That person is not ourselves. It's not in rules and our ability to keep a set of rules.

We're not called to place our faith in the fact that we have faith. Rather, we're called to have faith in Jesus as the Son of God and the promised King and Saviour.

And then following on from that, faith makes Jesus our top priority. So I remember when I was in high school and university, I had a job in the holidays working.

So I'm from Sky. So working in the local supermarket in Port Tree. And now when the big bosses came, as they tended to come every 12 to 18 months, everybody had to get ready.

[12 : 52] Big bosses came from Manchester. One of those secret, unannounced visits that we would hear about weeks ahead of time. You know the kind. And so everyone would have to do overtime.

You'd have to make sure that the shelves were well stacked and well presented. The store had to be painted. Everything had to be just right. All kinds of disruption to get ready for these important visitors.

Well, Matthew's message is that God's promised King is here. When we listen to Jesus, say, repent, the kingdom of heaven is near, or say, come follow me, he is speaking with the authority of God.

He is calling followers with the authority of God. And when the King comes, everything changes. Maybe that's one of the challenges, if you're not a Christian, you're thinking about the Christian faith.

The challenge for you is the cost involved in following Jesus. Because Jesus will disrupt your usual priorities. We see that in the story of the four brothers. First of all, in verse 19, you know, after saying, come follow me.

[13 : 54] It gives a promise. But it's also a change of priority. It's also a new mission. A new way of serving. I will make you fishers of men. So he's speaking to fishermen.

So before, they had to use their courage while they were on a voyage on sometimes stormy waters to catch some fish. Now they will use that same courage to represent Jesus in a world that is often hostile to him.

Whereas before, they had to use patience and persevere to wait for the shoals of fish to come into their net. Now they will have to patiently persevere in speaking the word of God to people.

Showing from the Old Testament that Jesus is the promised King. Telling people about who Jesus is and what he had done so that they might become followers. And just as life as a fisherman brought many challenges and many storms.

So their own life of following Jesus would bring suffering and would bring cost as it always does. They are learners of Jesus themselves. But they're given this mission of bringing others into contact with God's King.

[15 : 01] Helping others move as they have from darkness to light. From the shadow of death into the life shared with God and the promise of eternal life.

So that disrupted all their usual priorities. Priorities. And we see it in a second way. There's a new balance of priorities. They understand that when Jesus comes calling, Jesus must be number one.

So in verse 20, when Peter and Andrew here come follow me, they at once left their nets and followed him. Jesus is saying, your work and your career must come second to me.

And that's a challenge, isn't it? I must be your goal. I must be who you look to for value and significance and purpose. Even above your work.

And remember, work is a gift. And then James and John, verse 22. When they hear the call of Jesus, immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

[16 : 06] They're leaving the comfort of their work, but also their family. And Jesus says, your family comes second to me. I must be your greatest love.

Remember, Jesus told us to love everyone. But above all, we are to love Jesus. But doesn't this sound radical? Doesn't it sound shocking, even offensive perhaps?

Unless he is our creator God and our saviour King. If anyone else has to do this, no way. But if Jesus is who he says he is, then it makes sense to listen.

When we think about the situation that we find ourselves in just now. When we think about the pain of COVID-19 and the many layers of suffering and trouble it brings.

One of those is the separation and the loss that we face, isn't it? From work and family. And those are hard things to be separated from.

[17 : 18] And hard to lose. To lose your livelihood. To lose a family member that you love is so hard.

But perhaps this time might be reminding us not to pin all our hope on those things and those people that ultimately we can and we will lose.

But rather to find an unshakable hope. And that's how Jesus is presented.

He is our rock. He is the love that we cannot lose. He is the one hope that will never disappoint.

So Jesus is saying to us, I am the King. Trust me. Follow me. Make me top priority. But still you might be thinking, but why?

[18 : 23] Why let Jesus disrupt my life and my rhythm? Even more than it's disrupted already. Why make sacrifices to put him first? Or to think about it another way.

As COVID-19 hits you and your family and the country. This disruption that we are now facing. Might have you anxiously looking around for something.

That you can hold on to. Why respond in faith when Jesus says, come, follow me.

Why continue to respond in faith to Jesus the King when everything seems to be going wrong? Here's the last thing for us to think about.

And it's that faith in Jesus brings wonderful promises. At this point, I want to bring out a couple of things to help us.

[19 : 25] Surprisingly heavy. A couple of draft bookends. Now, we know how bookends work, don't they? They manage to keep our shelves tidy.

They manage to stop everything falling down and becoming a mess. Now, our story, the call of these disciples has two bookends on either end.

Two connected truths. Two wonderful promises that will stop our lives from falling apart. That help to show why faith in Jesus is good news.

The first of those, we already thought about in verse 17. Jesus is the King establishing His kingdom. Remember he said, repent for the kingdom of heaven is near.

Jesus sent by God to save us from sin. That sin that separates us from the God that we were made to know and enjoy. That sin that causes separation between people because of the way we treat one another.

[20 : 30] Jesus has come to end spiritual darkness. To be the answer to the spiritual death that we face. He is the one who will come to defeat the power of the devil and death itself.

He is God's own son who comes on God's loving rescue mission. And so to trust in this King, to have faith in this King is to bring wonderful promises to your life.

It's the promise of forgiveness. It's the promise of peace with God. Of knowing that you will not be condemned but you'll be lovingly accepted when you stand before God as judge one day.

It's the promise of eternal life that cannot be taken from you. It's the promise that you have a King who is with you and for you in the highs and lows of life.

Ensuring that everything that comes to you ultimately will work for your good and for the glory of God in your life.

[21 : 36] So that's one bookend. The other one we haven't read yet. But it's this, that Jesus' miracles serve as a signpost of the world we all want.

They are a signpost to Christ's coming kingdom. And the world we all desperately want. So we read in verse 23 that Jesus went throughout Galilee teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

Let me put it this way, that the healings of Jesus, they are like trailers promising and previewing the great story to come.

They are the appetiser that whets the appetite for the great feast that we have been promised. When we see Jesus in the gospel, using his power and authority to heal sickness and disease, to calm storms, to reverse death and bring life.

This is Jesus' kingdom. And this is the world we all want, isn't it? When we think about this in our current context, we want a world that's free of social distancing.

[23 : 10] We don't want to be isolated in fear of a virus. And we don't want to think about and have to use PPE. We want a world where there are no doctors and nurses and there's no ventilators and there's no virus and there's no trouble breathing and there's no death.

And we are being shown a king in Jesus who has authority to end all suffering, who has a power that we don't have.

And these miracles are a signpost pointing us forward to the day when Jesus will come and make everything new and bring an end to all darkness and suffering.

That's the message of the Bible. It's the hope of the Bible. Our king, he has defeated the powers of darkness and death at the cross. He will come back to defeat them completely and entirely, to make the world new, to take his people to be with him so that we can enjoy a wonderful world of perfect peace and love with one another and with God himself.

He will return to establish a perfect kingdom forever. So to trust him is to have this as your great promise and future. Jesus offers certain hope.

[24 : 30] He provides those bookends that can stop your life from falling apart.

Trust him. Put your faith in Jesus to forgive your sin, to be your God and your saviour, to be your hope in life and death.

Make him your top priority and receive all those wonderful promises for your life today.