

None Like Him

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Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 00] It's Matthew chapter 2, the first 12 verses. It's on page 966. This 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 has been born, King of the Jews?

We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him. When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed. And all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born.

In Bethlehem in Judea, they replied, for this is what the prophet has written. But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah.

For out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel. Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.

He sent them to Bethlehem and said, Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him. After they'd heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they'd seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.

[1 : 15] When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 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 of gold and of incense and of myrrh.

And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. So we'll leave our reading there.

Now we in the UK in 2018, we know it to be a fact that a royal birth gets attention.

This year, on the 23rd of April, 82,970,673 digital media notifications were sent out on that one day, all on one single topic.

The topic was? I had to look that one up. The birth of Prince Louis. The single biggest story in the UK this year.

[2 : 25] Now does that come as a surprise to us or not? It seems like here in Britain and in the wider world, while some people are apathetic, not that interested in what's happening with the royals.

For some, the royal family still evokes really strong feelings. So you'll have one side where it's like, we need to get rid of them, they're an absolute waste of taxpayers' money. And then we've got another side, thinking that the queen in particular, but other members of the family, are like a national treasure that we should celebrate.

But here's the thing. However we felt about that birth, however we feel about the royal family, the truth is, the birth of a new prince, even if that prince grows up to be a future king, it doesn't affect us personally all that much.

No longer do the kings set the laws, and we will most likely not meet said prince or king, unless perhaps we go to St Andrew's University, and maybe our children will enjoy that privilege.

But most of us, maybe we'll get a handshake if we're extremely privileged, but it won't really impact us. But when it comes to Jesus, when it comes to this royal birth, things could not be more different.

[3 : 46] Here is the one royal birth that demands all our attention, regardless of who we are. And Matthew has already, in the first chapter, deliberately shown us some really big truths about who the child in the manger is.

So he's told us, this baby that was born is the source of all God's promised blessing and goodness. He is the one through whom God's grace, God's undeserved love and kindness to the world comes through this child who is born.

That he is God's chosen king. He is the Christ. He is God's chosen savior. Jesus means God saves. He is none less than Emmanuel, God who is with us.

And the outcome of all that is that since the king of all kings has come, since the son of God has been born in the manger, how we react to this king really matters.

Do we care about Louis or not? That's not a big deal, but how we deal with Jesus really matters. And so that's where Matthew goes next. In chapter 2, he presents for us three different, three contrasting reactions to the birth of Jesus to help us make a wise choice in how we think about Jesus.

[5 : 07] The first reaction I want us to notice is that of hostility and resistance. And we see this really clearly in King Herod. So in verse 1, we're introduced to King Herod.

We're told that Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea during the time of King Herod. So who is this king? One very important detail about him, he's not Jewish.

He's ruling over the Jews, but he's actually an Edomite. He's been appointed not by the Jews, but by the Romans, because the Romans are over the Jewish nation at this time.

History books will tell us that Herod was a very powerful ruler. He was able to keep law and order in a difficult, turbulent time. He built the temple for the people.

So those are positives. But negatively, we discover that he is somebody who ruled by fear and force, somebody who had an incredibly violent temper and who was very quick to get rid of people who might threaten his right to rule.

[6 : 13] So he killed off a number of his own family to protect his own right to rule. So it makes sense then that when the Magi come from the east and say, where is the one who's been born King of the Jews?

In verse 3, we discover King Herod is disturbed. Sometimes the Bible goes in for understatement. We discover the extent of King Herod's level of disturbance as we see what he plans to do.

But why is he so disturbed? Because he's concerned that there is a legitimate heir to David's throne. Perhaps a popular champion will arise and the people will want rid of him and put this other king in his place.

So he begins to calculate straight away, how can I get rid of this new king? So his first plan, call in the religious experts. They'll know where the child is to be born.

So that's what happens. Verses 4 to 6, as we read it, he calls in the religious experts and they know Jesus, God's king is to be born in Bethlehem. The next thing he does then is, verse 7, he calls the Magi in secretly, secret meeting.

[7 : 31] This is news that he does not want to spread. He doesn't want word to get out that there is a rival to his throne. There are lies and deception.

He says to them, go and find the child. Be very careful to find him. Come back and tell me so I can worship. We know he doesn't want to worship. He wants to murder Jesus.

And so the warning of verse 12 is entirely justified. So the Magi, as they find Jesus, they're warned in a dream.

God sends them this dream where they're told not to go back to Herod. Next week we'll see that Herod had this plan to execute all the baby boys of that community in order to get rid of a rival to the king.

There is resistance. There is real hostility from King Herod when he hears of this one who has been born king of the Jews. We hear about a king that is willing to murder small children and we're rightly horrified by that.

[8 : 41] Who wouldn't be? But we also need to take a step back and take a look inside of ourselves to appreciate that Herod's reaction to Jesus in some way is a picture of how we all react to Jesus.

One of the images that we find in the Bible is that the heart, the center of our being, the real us, it's like a throne. And as we discover in our own lives and in the Bible that there are rivals to that throne.

So God created us. God is king over us and God's authority insists that he have that rightful place, that he be central to our being, that he be number one in our hearts, in our affections.

But our human nature also wants to claim that place for ourselves. So by nature, we are deeply resistant to the claims of Jesus.

That we imagine ourselves as the planet that everything else should orbit around. That life should be around me and my needs and my wants. And then we have Jesus come and he says, I'm the true king and you must worship and love and honor me and that presents a real challenge to us.

[10 : 00] So we discover in our Bibles the Lord, born at Christmas, is the true God. Jesus is the son of God who's come to be savior. But by nature, we'll want him out the picture because he challenges our right to rule.

Unless God changes our hearts, we'll want nothing to do with King Jesus. How does this play out practically? It plays out in the sense of rejection.

Rejection of his claim of authority. Jesus has, it means nothing to me, he has no claim on my life, it's my rights, my needs, my life and it's all about me. We perhaps find people who reject the need for personal repentance.

I don't need a savior, I don't need Jesus, I'm good enough for God, I'm a good person, I'm very religious. This rejection happens at a very basic level when people don't take the time to discover the truth of Christianity, just write it off, I know what that's all about.

Never read the Bible, never understand the life and the claims of Jesus. It comes to in mocking or attacking Jesus' church. One of the things that I was reading about in my prayer diary for the global church was a lady in a village in India who became a Christian and she wanted to share the good news of Jesus with people in her community but at the same time the people in her community are trying to find legal ways to expel her so that she can have no place within the community so there is that kind of rejection as well.

[11 : 39] So there's resistance towards Jesus before a person becomes a Christian but even as Christians we discover there is resistance because there is still sin that remains in us.

There is still that sinful nature that battles against Jesus and his place as king which helps to explain why as Christians we can be so quick to forget about God.

God who's given us everything he's given us life he's given us salvation but we can be so quick to forget about him. It explains why we can be so slow to pray to him.

I've got this I can handle this I don't need God. We can forget that he's there for us. It explains why we can be so quick to fall into those repeating patterns of sin.

We do something and we feel horrible about it we swear we're never going to do it again then we find ourselves maybe just in the same day or a few days later going back into the same pattern. It explains why we can be so slow to accept Jesus' lordship over all of life.

[12 : 47] Jesus you can have Sunday or you can have certain segments of life but my leisure or my time or my money or that's my space. so we all struggle in different ways with this notion that Jesus is king who has should have absolute authority over us and we discover there is a little Herod residing within us.

the question for us is do we follow his instinct is that the king that we listen to or will we instead battle with God's help and with God's grace to honour Jesus as the true king.

So King Herod is helpful as a picture of that resistance and hostility that all of us in different measure have towards Jesus. There's a second reaction and that's the reaction of apathy that we see from the religious leaders in some ways it's the most confusing response.

So here are the people that have studied the Bible this is their life to know the Bible to teach the Bible these are the people who should be looking for what God is doing next and should be so excited about God's plan of salvation they're the ones with the access to knowledge and information about God's promised king so we find that so King Herod calls the religious leaders and he doesn't know his Bible he wants to know where God had said his promised king would be born so verse 4 he calls them together and he asks them where the Christ was to be born in Bethlehem in Judea they replied they know this for this is what the prophet has written but you Bethlehem in the land of Judah are by no means least among the rulers of Judah for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people so they can point straight to this Micah prophecy God's special king our hope the hope for the world he's going to be born in Bethlehem David's city he's going to be from David's family line these visitors come with this stunning announcement we've seen the star that points to the fact that your promised king has now arrived your mighty leader has been born that one that God promised he'd be powerful and he'd be a shepherd he'd care for the people he's here and what do they do they do nothing they do absolutely nothing there's no search they don't join with the Magi try and find where the child is born there is no joy so what they've got is information but zero transformation they've got facts but that fact doesn't lead them to worship you know we talk a lot we hear a lot about FOMO nowadays the fear of missing out and that's usually a bad thing it's usually described in a negative way the fear of missing out but here is one of those instances where you desperately want a group of people to have that in such a way that it would lead them positively to see and honour

Jesus as king you don't want anybody to miss out on God's rich promises you know in light of what Matthew has already taught us about Jesus in light of what we discover in the Bible about the life of Jesus this reaction seems so difficult to comprehend in anybody especially these religious guys you know there is a logic from King Herod well I'm going to hate Jesus for his claim because I want to be king and there's a logic in the Magi because they want to worship Jesus for his claim to be king but surely as we understand anything about the life of Jesus surely he's too much to simply ignore and pass by without responding to actually as we read the Gospels we discover that they don't remain apathetic to Jesus we see the apathy of the religious leaders harden into resistance turning into hatred and ultimately leading them to desire the death of Jesus it was Jesus who said you can't sit on the fence you're either for me or you are against me there are some lessons some really practical lessons from these religious leaders that we need for ourselves first is this there's a whole world of difference between knowing about someone and knowing them personally they have all the facts but they don't know

[17 : 36] God an example from my own life one of my musical heroes is a man called Stuart Murdoch lead singer of Bell and Sebastian I feel like I've talked about him once or twice in here I have bought Bell and Sebastian albums since well since I was 17 read loads of interviews studied lyrics one of the highlights bizarre highlights of my chaplaincy career at Glasgow University was when I was leading morning prayers hardly anybody ever showed up for morning prayers but Stuart Murdoch walked in and I got to share the gospel for two or three minutes with one of my musical heroes now I'd love this story continue that this was the start of a beautiful friendship that we just got on so well and we went round and we had coffee and we still talk to this day but truth is a few weeks later I saw him on Byers Road and he walked past me as if I was a nobody which I am so it makes sense you can know about somebody but you doesn't mean that you know them personally you see this in these religious leaders they knew lots of facts about God and about his promises but they did not know

God all of their Bible reading was to no effect in their lives that either is or has been I'm sure some of our stories that was certainly my story being brought up around the church going to church going to Sunday school going to Bible club reading the Bible at home having family worship singing Psalms growing up but it did not mean anything to me really it didn't lead me to to consider Jesus as anything other than somebody that I read about and somebody that I would feel guilty over if I sinned really badly it is possible to know lots of facts but if not to change our hearts without the spirit opening our eyes there is no personal knowing that leads to transformation and worship and so related to that the goal of Bible reading why do we read our

Bibles the goal of Bible reading is so that we would worship that we would enjoy God that our hearts and our lives would be transformed and shaped by what we read sometimes we approach our Bible reading as if it's a duty we need to perform here's the thing that we need to take so we can feel good about our day or we read it and we are so quick in reading it that we never process it so we never turn it into prayer we never let it shape our hearts the goal of Bible reading is that we would be transformed by it our Bibles are not textbooks God is revealing himself revealing his salvation revealing his glory to us and our sin and our need of a saviour in the Bible these are stories and truths to make our hearts sing do we come to our

Bibles with a sense of expectation I'm going to meet God by the Spirit when I read the words of the Bible so that's our goal when we read the Bible worship and transformation and so part of that is recognizing that seeing and enjoying the glory of God in the Bible requires God's work and God's help there's a verse in 2nd Corinthians 4 that says Satan has blinded the minds of unbelievers so they cannot see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ we need the miracle of sight if the word of God is going to come alive to us if we're going to encounter God in a way that we worship him and are changed by him we need the lesson of Bartimaeus so Bartimaeus was one of the blind men that

Jesus healed there was a time when Jesus was walking through Bartimaeus town and as usual a crowd gathered some people came to hear teaching some people came to be healed Bartimaeus was a beggar and as Jesus was passing by he shouted Jesus son of David have mercy on me and the crowd were telling him to be quiet Jesus is not for your type Bartimaeus but he shouted again Jesus son of David have mercy on me and Jesus stopped and he called Bartimaeus over and he healed him and Bartimaeus followed Jesus because he had faith in Jesus we need to pray for help whenever we come to read the Bible to recognize without God's spirit opening our eyes we're not going to be transformed we need to pray that God would work that God would speak to us that God would reveal himself to us every time we open the word of God that's how to change it from duty to delight to recognize that

[23 : 31] God works through his word so that we wouldn't be apathetic even as Christians that we wouldn't have this attitude of apathy that we'd have a real sense of joy and anticipation whether it's coming to church or whether it's reading the Bible at home third reaction onto the good stuff the magi so Matthew already we're only in Matthew chapter 2 but Matthew at this early stage in his gospel has already been teaching us King Jesus will be opposed just as there was no room for him in the inn so it is the case that there will be no room for him in the hearts of many but Matthew has also been really careful to teach us that Jesus has come as saviour and he's come as saviour for all kinds of people not just for the Jews but for anyone and these magi are another example of that so who are they we're told that 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 a star in the east and have come to worship him magi were students of the stars so they're obviously looking up and they saw some astronomical event that led them to the conclusion that God's royal leader had been born and then you get this remarkable fact that with very little knowledge compared to the Jewish leaders they know next to nothing about God and his purposes for the world and his character and his promises but despite that lack of knowledge they endure a very long journey a treacherous journey perhaps a journey where they're uncertain even where they're going they don't know the destination they go to Jerusalem first they didn't know they had to go to Bethlehem all they know is if God has sent his king then I need to show him honour and worship if that's all I know then that's enough I need to honour and worship him and so they come they come for the one who has been born king of the Jews now if you read the gospel accounts of Jesus you'll know that that's not a very familiar title it's not used very often of

Jesus but it is used it is a title that returns at the end of Matthew's gospel because in Matthew chapter 27 and verse 37 as Jesus is crucified we discover this above his head they place the written charge against him this is Jesus the king of the Jews Matthew is reminding us in the birth announcement Jesus has come to be the king of the Jews the one who will die on the cross to save his people from their sins and not just the Jews for people like the Magi who come from the east for anyone who will put their faith in Jesus as Lord turning from sin to trust in him so we said the Magi's reaction is worship how do we see them worship and what do they have to teach us about worship first of all look at verses 9 and 10

I want us to notice that they are on a journey of joy after they heard the king they went on their way and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was when they saw the star they were overjoyed there is excitement there is anticipation as they journey there's gladness when they see the assurance that the star that God sent is still guiding them to the place where Jesus was born we know that they are worshipers because they have joy would that describe our journey to church this morning did we come with joy because we too were coming to meet the king to be in the presence of God himself really interesting thing to think about isn't it every time we come together we're coming into the presence of

God so joy should be a feature of our worship and our shared life together there should be a sense of anticipation as we come to church not only is there a journey of joy we see too there is a posture of praise verse 11 on coming to the house they saw the child with his mother Mary and they bowed down and worshipped him now this is really interesting to me because where did they go first they're expecting a king is going to be born in the palace place of wealth and opulence but here they are very ordinary surroundings they're just in a regular house they're not in the stable anymore it's taken a few months at very least Joseph and Mary very ordinary fairly poor family and yet these magi with the eyes of faith can see beyond that to recognize here is God's king so they bow to worship the infant

[28 : 57] Jesus we see too the glory of their gifts continuing verse 11 they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh they have treasure and they're holding nothing back they want to give gifts that are fitting for this king that there is a response to Jesus in worship since God has given me Jesus since because of Jesus I have eternal life and I have forgiveness and I have peace internally and peace with God since I've got this new community to belong to therefore I should hold nothing back therefore glad obedience joyful obedience should be my response it's part of worship the last way we see the worship is in the honour that they give to the true king so notice verse 12 having been warned in a dream not to go back to

Herod they return to their country by another route so on the one hand you've got Herod really powerful guy violent guy they know their lives are on the line by ignoring him but they want to listen to God and they want to honour and help protect God's chosen king and so they go back by another route it's their way of saying I'm choosing to honour Jesus more than Herod takes us back to that question which king occupies the throne of our hearts who do we delight to honour what lessons can we draw about worship we're reminded from the magi that worship engages our head and our heart and our hands it's a whole of life thing so we need information we need to hear and process who is Jesus and what did he do we need to know that Jesus is God's son that he is God's king that he's God's promised savior we need to know that he came to live for us a perfect life that we couldn't live for ourselves we need to know that he died in our place for our sins on the cross and that he rose again for our salvation but lots of people in churches know those facts it doesn't lead to change we need our head to be engaged and we need our hearts to be engaged

God must work that truth into our hearts to bring new life so that we would also be transformed constantly be transformed by the good news of God's love and grace and then our hands and our feet get into action we give thanks for God's grace by joyful obedience by living for his glory by giving our all for him and we need these three our head and our heart and our hands to be active in our worship otherwise we're going to be imbalanced but when it comes to worship worship begins with the magi with seeing and delighting in the glory of King Jesus what we discover from them is it doesn't matter how much information we have yes we should read the Bible we should study the Bible so we know more but it doesn't matter how much information we have and it doesn't matter what our moral or spiritual record is the question is do I see Jesus as God's King and

God's Saviour and what am I personally doing with that knowledge here is the one royal birth we all need to react to because here is the one king we will all meet one day we will all stand before Jesus the judge one day to give an account of how we have responded to him to him so my invitation to us all is to follow the example of the magi to worship him as lord now to greet him to receive him with joy now so he will welcome us then got to you