

Seeing The Forest In Matthew

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[0 : 00] Good morning to all of you. For those of you who don't know me, I'm Samir Massouh. I'm one of the professors at Trinity and a member of Christ the King and a former elder.

I was thinking this morning, which is more important, to see the trees or to see the forest? Do you start with the big and go down to the small or do you do the reverse?

And I decided in my case I have no choice. If the elders said to me, Samir, you have two whole years to speak on Matthew.

You can preach on Matthew for the next hundred lectures, next hundred Sundays. We would look at every tree. We would look at every plant.

We would look at every verse. Every paragraph. Every section. And we'll try to see the forest. We'll try to see all the trees.

[1 : 09] But they didn't give me two years. They only gave me today. So, we're going to be like a helicopter hovering over the trees, trying to see what the big picture is.

We are in the Gospel of Matthew. And there are some really important themes in Matthew. One of them you should be noticing by now.

That Matthew often points out that Jesus fulfills the Old Testament scriptures. He uses about 14 passages that have this introduction.

This happened that scriptures may be fulfilled. Or this happens as the prophet Jeremiah said. Or as Isaiah said. I listed several of them here.

Not the whole list. But several of them. Just to remind you that that is indeed a very important theme in Matthew. That God's plan is being fulfilled.

[2 : 12] But there is a second theme. And instead of telling you now what that theme is, I'm just going to wait to the end.

See if you can put one and one together and figure out what's going on. So, we're going to look at a theme and ask ourselves at the end. So, what was that all about?

Okay. That theme can be seen in six places. And if you look at the back of your bulletin, I gave you a fairly specific outline.

And let's begin with Matthew chapter 1, verse 5. Matthew 1, 5. What I want you to do here is to notice two specific names in this passage.

Rahab and Ruth. You may remember Rahab from Jericho, from the book of Joshua.

[3 : 34] And the siege of Jericho. And Ruth, of course, is the Moabite woman who is discussed in the book of Ruth. The important thing to notice is that he is giving us the genealogy of King David.

And everywhere else, he only mentions the father. But at this point, he also decides to mention the mother. So, why does he mention the mother?

Because one mother is Rahab and the other mother is Ruth. Rahab was a Canaanite.

Ruth was a Moabite. In other words, neither one of them was Jewish. They were non-Jews.

So, realizing that David is their descendant, what he is clearly saying is that even King David is not 100% Jewish.

[4 : 44] Even King David has Gentile blood in him. Race issues are very important in all cultures.

And this past year, we have been going through a lot of racial issues in this country. And we need to move on with racial issues.

We need to treat each other as brothers, as family, rather than divide and separate and discriminate and things like that.

But, I am Lebanese. So, I ask my daughter, who is only half Lebanese, what does she think?

Does she think she is an Arab? Or does she see herself as an American? How does she see herself? Or maybe she sees herself as an American Arab?

[5 : 54] Or as an Arab American? For my son, it doesn't seem to matter that much difference. But for her, it seems to matter a lot. So, I ask her, when it comes to ISIS, for example, how do you perceive ISIS?

Do you perceive ISIS just as an American who is angry at a group of people who are martyring Christians? Or do you see ISIS as an Arab?

When I look at ISIS, because I'm an Arab, and because ISIS are Arabs, I look at it differently than she does.

And so, there was, as you know very well, last century, a horrible evil man by the name of Hitler, Hitler, who thought, absolutely wrongly, that some races are better than other races, and that, in his case, if you were blonde hair, blue eyes, Aryan, then you were the supreme race.

And that other people, it's okay to kill and send to Auschwitz and Dachau and concentration camps. And he had three groups of people at the bottom of the list.

[7 : 25] The Jews, the gypsies, and the Arabs. Had he won World War II, I may not even be here. But Hitler was advocating racial superiority, and we're better than everybody else, and we're the superior race, and all of you are inferior.

And I think God, in his own sense of humor, decided to humiliate Hitler in public, in front of the whole world.

And so, in the Berlin Olympics, who was the great American athlete? Jesse Owen. And he was an African American, and he is supposed to be inferior to these Aryans.

But God showed that that's a lot of nonsense. Racial superiority is a lot of nonsense. It would be easy for somebody to say, we are Jews.

We have the prophets. We have the Torah. We have the temple. We have Moses. We have all of these things. And look at our great King David, the greatest king in Israel's history.

[8 : 44] And you look at this passage, and guess what? Rahab is not Jewish, and Ruth is not Jewish.

God is saying, even the greatest Jewish king is not completely Jewish. Even the greatest Jewish king has Gentile blood in him.

So, don't go around championing racial superiority. The second passage, Matthew 2, verse 1.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judah, 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 we have come to worship him. Wise men, Magi from the east, saw the star and followed it, and come to King Herod, who is an Edomite, and they asked, Where is he born King of the Jews?

[10 : 06] Wise men from the east, non-Jews, Gentile wise men are asking King Herod, Where is he born King of the Jews?

Hold on here just for a minute. I want to show you some contrast to help you appreciate what's going on in Matthew. Turn to the Gospel of Mark, to the incident, chapter 4, where Jesus calms the storm.

So, Jesus was asleep. There is a horrible storm. The boat is about to sink.

The disciples are about to die. So, in Mark 4, 38, Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, Teacher, don't you care if we drown?

He got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the waves, Quiet, be still. Then the wind died down, and it was completely calm.

[11 : 22] He said to his disciples, Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith? That's not a compliment, by the way. They were terrified and asked each other, Who is this?

Even the wind and the waves obey him. Who is asking this question? Not Sanhedrin, not Pharisees, not outsiders, not some tourists from Egypt.

Jesus' own disciples are asking, Who is this man that even the wind and the sea obey him? The irony of it is that they are Jesus' disciples.

They're not some, you know, Rabbi Gamaliel disciples. They are Jesus' disciples, and they still, after this time that they have spent with him, approximately a year, are still wondering, Who is this guy?

Jesus' own disciples don't know who he is. Haven't figured him out yet. And Jesus later on, just for fun, asks them, Who do people say I am?

[12:37] Ah, you're John the Baptist, you're this, you're that. And then he drops the hammer. Who do you say I am? Well, there, the Holy Spirit helped them out.

Here they have no idea. You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Here, they're still asking, Who is this guy? Go back to Matthew.

The disciples have no idea who Jesus is. Who in the Gospel of Matthew is the first group of people to know who Jesus is?

Gentiles. Wise men from the East know Jesus, know the identity of Jesus, the position of Jesus, the rank of Jesus, better than Jesus' own disciples.

It'd be embarrassing if my, you know, if somebody I completely don't know knows more about my family than my own children. That'd be embarrassing. Wise men from the East, Gentiles are the first to recognize who Jesus is.

[13:57] And so, and so, we move to chapter 2, verse 13. After the Magi come and visit Jesus, and give him their gifts, they return, they return, and then in verse 13, chapter 2, 13, when they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream.

Get up, he 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.

Jesus' life is in danger. It is not time for Jesus to die. It's too early. It's not the right time.

He will die, but not now. But Herod, fearing competition, Jesus is the king of the Jews, wants to eliminate competition and secure his position.

So, what he wants to do is to kill Jesus. So, Jesus' life is being threatened by a murderer who wants to kill him. Of course, the issue is, Jesus needs to hide.

[15:19] But where should he hide? Where should he hide? I was thinking of several places in the Bible where people hide. There's a famous passage from Jeremiah, chapter 7.

You may not know that it is from Jeremiah, chapter 7, but you've heard the passage. The prophet Jeremiah asks the evil leaders, has this house which is called by my name become a den of robbers in your sight?

Has this house which is called by my name become a den of robbers? What do robbers do in caves or in dens? They hide so as not to get caught.

so there were all these evil people who were disobeying God and wanted to hide so that God wouldn't catch them and others wouldn't see that they are evil men and be safe.

And of all the places they decided to hide, they decided to hide in the temple. So, Jesus could have hidden in the temple. Earlier, when another king's life was in danger, the high priest Jehoiada takes the young prince and hides him in the temple for seven years where the evil queen Athaliah could not kill him.

[16:44] so he is hidden in the temple for seven years and not found and was safe. So, if I were Joseph, I would have gone to a godly high priest and say, look, this is Messiah.

He wants to kill him. Can you hide him? But he doesn't. Where else could you hide? Well, David was part of the court of Saul until Saul became very jealous of David and people would say Saul killed his thousand but David killed his ten thousand and David was young and Saul was getting older and David was popular and Saul was less popular and so jealousy set in and Saul decided to kill David.

So, where does David hide? in the Judean wilderness and you can read several fugitive psalms in which David wrote while he was a fugitive hiding from Saul trying not to be captured.

Then we have a repetition of this with Absalom, David's son who becomes king and wants to kill his father and David hides in the Judean wilderness and you know what was so well hid in the Judean wilderness that for two thousand years nobody found it.

Two thousand years and nobody found it. The Dead Sea Scrolls in the caves just above the Dead Sea.

[18:29] So, Jesus could have been hid in the Judean wilderness for two thousand years and he wouldn't have been caught. But where does he hide?

In Egypt. Think about that. Of all the places in this world, where does Jesus find refuge?

In a Gentile country. country. Gentiles provide David safety. Safety.

Moving on. Chapter 8. Chapter 8, verse 5.

When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion, that's a Roman soldier, a captain of a company, a centurion came to him asking for help.

[19 : 34] Lord, he said, my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering. Jesus said to him, I'll go and heal him. The centurion replied, Lord, I don't deserve to have you under my roof, but just say the word and my servant will be healed.

For I myself am a man under authority with soldiers under me. I tell this one go and he goes and this one come and he comes. I say to my servant, do this and he does it.

Look at verse 10. When Jesus heard this, he was astonished. Only two places in the Gospel of Matthew where it says Jesus was astonished. When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and he said to those following him, I tell you the truth.

I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. Who is the person who in all of Israel had the greatest faith that Jesus ever saw?

A Roman centurion. A Roman centurion. I would have thought that the disciples would have the greatest amount of faith.

[21 : 05] They don't. Maybe Nicodemus. No. Of all the people who had the greatest faith, of all the people, the one who had the greatest faith was a Roman centurion.

I understand what he's talking about because I served in the army for two years during the Vietnam era. I was working on my PhD at the time and so I was drafted into the army.

They made us take exams and I was the only one with close to a PhD and all the other students were just graduating from high school so they would score and then suddenly it would curve and shoot up and my score would be here and their score would be here which it should since I had about four years, five years more education than they did and the people said but you know you should become a captain in the army not a private and if you're a private you have to salute everybody you have to do push-ups if the drill sergeant is mad at you you have to do all of these things and then they put this idea in my mind become a helicopter pilot you will start as a captain wow and then he said you know what you can do as a captain you can go back to basic training camp and make the drill sergeant who harassed you so much salute you all day long and I thought to myself sweet revenge

I'd make him do as many push-ups as he made me do push-ups in the army if a captain gives you an order you don't do this you do not do what I'm going to do next I'll say oh sir you give me an order did you go to West Point no you didn't go to West Point oh so you went to an inferior military school what was your GPA what was your grade point average did you graduate in the top third middle third or lower third lower third so you're an inferior student you know are you in good physical condition no you're not I'm in better good physical condition than you ah well based on this data I'm not going to do anything you know go back to school get in shape improve your IQ and then I'll think about obeying you you think it works like that in the army you think so what matters is the rank not the person and so the Roman centurion says

I give orders and they obey I don't have to be there I give orders they obey Jesus guess what you give orders the sickness will obey you've got power you can do it you don't have to be there when Eisenhower launched D-Day did he have to be on the beach no he didn't he could launch it from his headquarters you don't have to be there but you have the power you order it and nature will obey and Jesus says I've never seen anybody in Israel with so much faith the person with the most faith in Israel is a Roman soldier a Gentile and then a couple more take a look at Matthew 28 Matthew 28 this is the famous great commission passage in verse 18

[25 : 49] Jesus says then Jesus came to them and said all authority in heaven and on earth have been given to me therefore go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you and surely I am with you always to the very end of the age look what the great commission is it is not go to every Jewish village and make a disciple it is not go to every Jewish town and make disciples it is not go to every Jewish city and make disciples it is what go to the whole world the gospel of Matthew begins with the world the wise men coming to Jesus it ends with Jesus going to the whole world they come to him he goes to them what does

Jesus want he wants disciples from the whole world to put it in different words he wants Gentile disciples he wants not just from a small circle just from one family or just from one tribe or just from one nationality or just one ethnic group he wants disciples from the whole world and then Matthew 21 which is a famous parable of Jesus in which Jesus is describing God's frustrations with Israel he sends them his words prophets with prophets so they beat one they curse the other one they kill the third one so he sends them more prophets and they mistreat them as well just the same and then

he says

I'm going to send them my son they will respect my son my son is not just another prophet my son is my son prophets are here and he is here this is the last ultimatum and what do they do they take him and crucify him and then Jesus says what do you think is going to happen with this kind of situation turn to Matthew 21 33 Matthew 21 starting with verse 42 Jesus said to them have you never read in the scriptures the stone the builders rejected has become the capstone the Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes so if Israel keeps determined to reject God therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to people who will produce its food you don't want it I'll give it to somebody else and the somebody else are the Gentiles if you have been listening there is a word that I used several times actually every time we looked at this passage I used that word it's the word Gentile I want you to remember we have four gospels one of them is written by Luke another one is written by Matthew when we think of the gospel of Luke it is the gospel to the Gentiles it is written to a Greek person by the name of Theophilus and it is designed to help Gentiles convert so in our own minds we have this dichotomy Luke is for the Gentiles and Matthew is for the Jews well that is true in many cases but not in every case even in this gospel which is written for Jews the concern is with the Gentiles

I can understand it if Luke is concerned for Gentiles I mean that would be natural but a Jew like Matthew records that God is concerned with the Gentiles Matthew is concerned with the other group which now brings me to the application who in our case is the other group who in our case is the other group who in our case are those who are not in our small group inner circle this congregation whom does God want us to go to when he says go to the ends of the world where should we go first

[31 : 29] I am sure because when I was an elder we talked about this often I am sure that we were going to have a family night and we affirm our commitment as a church our mission our goals our values we do not want to be a private club an inclusive society a closed door that unless you're in it you can't join it we want the door to be open we want to go out we want God to do his will in Kenosha whether it is tutoring little children or witnessing

I don't know we'd have to ask ourselves where where do we go who are the other group other than us and so what can you do you can think about that ask yourself whom do I have burden for other than my immediate family of course I have a burden for my son of course I have a burden for my daughter of course I have a burden for my grandchildren that just seems natural I mean it doesn't take extra special measure to have burden for one's family but anybody else do I have any students in my case that I have a special burden for yes and some of them I know very well and some of them I hardly know at all but I have a burden for them and I I try to befriend them and talk to them and reach out to them and in my case

I have 15 weeks to do it and I see them three times every week and I am an authority figure you don't accept the Lord you don't pass this class not really not really I have students God wants me to reach I have relatives God wants me to reach there may be people in Kenosha that God wants me to reach and the same to Christ the King so ask yourself for whom do I have burdens who are the others outside of my inner small inner circle and the second thing is you know stop the elders or some leaders in the church and say what can we do with this fit in terms of the larger ministry of our church what do we want to focus on knowing that we cannot do everything let's at least do something and let's arrive at a consensus that that's where we want to head so what's the second tree tree in Matthew the first tree

God is fulfilling his promises to the prophets the second tree God is concerned about taking the gospel to the Gentiles to the whole world not just us but the whole world let's have a word of prayer Lord Father thank you for these dear brothers and sisters who are here thank you for placing us in a family that is really special with many with maybe even so many godly people who love you and care about you thank you for our desire to reach out give strength and wisdom to our desire give an obedient heart and a caring heart and may you guide us the elders the congregation as a whole as we reflect about our mission and what you would want us to be and do

I ask you these things Lord Father in Jesus precious name Amen I.

[36 : 36] Amen Amen