

The Faithful King

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[0 : 00] Let's turn to Matthew chapter 2. Matthew chapter 2. We're in Matthew, and we're going to talk about the wise men or the magi, whatever word you want to use.

But we need to be sure that we understand that when you see a nativity and you've got the baby Jesus and you've got the Mary, Joseph, and shepherds and angels, the wise men were not there, right?

It was like two years later or so that the wise men show up. So it's okay that we talk about the wise men because it's a part of that young childhood of Jesus, and there are lessons that we can learn from that, and Scripture records that they came.

And what we want to do is I'm going to read all 12 verses concerning this particular episode, but we're going to focus in on verse 1 and 2 for the remainder of the time.

But here's Matthew chapter 2, beginning in verse 1. 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?

[1 : 14] For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him. When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

They told him, In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet, And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, or by no means least among the rulers of Judah, for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.

Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word that I too may come and worship him.

After listening to the king, they went on their way, and behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.

When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy, and going on into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. Then opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh.

[2 : 26] And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for your word.

We thank you for the glory and the grace that we see in your word. And I pray today, Father, that you would help us to see that glory.

And we would see something of you that it would stir us, it would thrill us, it would satisfy us. And we pray, Father, that you would get all of the praise.

In Christ's name, amen. Oftentimes when we read the Bible, we have a tendency to read the Bible in such a way as to read it in an egocentric way.

And what I mean by that is that we read it and we sort of look at the different characters that are there in that particular story, these historical figures, and we say, well, what do I learn about myself as I'm reading about so-and-so?

[3 : 30] One of the ones that I use a lot as an example is the story of the feeding of the 5,000. You'll remember the story of the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus took five loaves and three fish and fed all of these people, right?

And one of the accounts, it's in all four Gospels, one of the accounts speaks about a little boy who had a lunch and that he gave the lunch and they took that lunch and that's how they fed everybody. And so when a lot of people read such a story, they read it in such a way as to look at the little boy and begin to think about themselves and what does this mean about me and how do I need to live?

And so the moral of the story of the feeding of the 5,000 becomes something about, you know, we need to learn how to share. Well, that is a far cry from the point of the story. You have to remember, God is always the hero of every story. Every account in the Scriptures, old and new, God is the hero.

[4 : 34] Let me give you another example. When we read of David and Goliath, we often read it very egocentrically and we think to ourselves, look what David faced and the giants that he faced and there's me.

It's just like me and giants that I face and I've got to do things the way David did them. But that is to divorce and to neuter the power of the Scriptures because it ignores the hero of the story.

The hero of the story is God. God is God. And when we don't read the Bible that way, we tend to miss the whole point.

The whole point. I think we can do that with the wise men. I know we can do it with the shepherds. But as we read and we think about these wise men, what we don't want to do is say, well, how are the wise men like us?

Or how am I like the wise men? That's the wrong question. The right question is, how do the wise men and what happened with them and who they are, how does that demonstrate God?

[5 : 45] What does it teach us about God? And that's what I want us to look at this morning. And we're going to do that by thinking about their identity, their knowledge, and then finally the lesson that we learn from the Magi.

So my first point then, the identity of the Magi, it tells us there in verse 1 that they were wise men. That they were wise men.

The Greek word behind wise men is very similar to the word Magi, right? It sounds very similar to that. It is the idea of magician.

As a matter of fact, it's used three times in Matthew, two times in Acts chapter 13. And in Acts chapter 13, it speaks of a guy who is a magician.

It's also used in the Old Testament, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, and it's used in the book of Daniel. It's used in the book of Daniel in chapter 2 when Nebuchadnezzar has a dream and he gathers all of the magicians and sorcerers and prefects and governors and he charges them and tells them, tell me what my dream was and tell me the interpretation.

[7 : 00] So what you have then is that with this word Magi, with this word wise men, you have got people who are wise, who are some sort of advisor, vizier, satrap, prefect, governor, counselor to a ruler, to someone who's in charge.

They have knowledge. As a matter of fact, you could say that maybe they might be something like a PhD, somebody with vast amounts of knowledge who are advising rulers and kings who are over them.

Well, it tells us then that these Magi are from the east. Okay. East of what? East of Jerusalem. Right? It's not just the east, but it's east of Jerusalem. That's where Matthew is writing. This is where the story takes place. Herod and all of Jerusalem was troubled by their news.

So it's east of Jerusalem. Well, what's east of Jerusalem? Well, everything if you just go around in a circle. Right? And there's some people who are just always that way and they will always say funny things like that.

[8 : 20] Anyway, what's east of Jerusalem is the land of Ur. The land of Ur. You know what the land of Ur is, right? That's where the kingdoms of Babylon, the Medo-Persian, the Greek empires rose to power.

You remember about the Babylonians, the Medo-Persians, and the Greeks? What book of the Bible is it that tells us about those empires? It's the book of Daniel.

It's the book of Daniel. As a matter of fact, I want you to think about this because here's what's interesting. The book of Daniel often is considered to be strictly prophecy. That is predicting the future and that's all that Daniel is doing.

But that is not all that Daniel is doing. As a matter of fact, in the Jewish order of books in the Bible, the book of Daniel is not with the prophets, but it's with a wisdom literature.

The wisdom literature, things like Psalms and Proverbs and Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon, Job, these books that take the theology of the world, the theology of God, the theology of all things, and brings it right down to practical daily living.

[9 : 32] How do you live in this world? Daniel was written in order to teach us how to live under exile, to teach us how to live in difficult times. It's very similar to the book of 1 Peter, right?

And so Daniel, as wisdom literature, one of the interesting things is that in his book, almost every single word for wisdom that's used throughout the wisdom literature is all over the book of Daniel. And what you have then is you have this connection between Daniel and the exiles, like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and you have the connection with Babylon, Persia, Medo, Greece, empires that came into the land of Ur, and you have these men who were coming from that region. That's where they're coming from. And so what you have then is you have men who seem to be not people who rubbed elbows with Daniel, but men whose ancestors rubbed elbows with Daniel. Now that gets us to our second point, and that is this. So what do these Magi know? Because we see what they know, but really I guess the question is, well, being Magi, first and foremost, we have to understand that they had a knowledge of their own world.

[10 : 55] They understood things because any time that you were a magician, a satrap, a governor, a vizier, an advisor, a counselor, a sorcerer in Babylon or even the Medo-Persian Empire, you were trained to learn all kinds of things.

That's what happened with Daniel and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, right? In Daniel chapter 1, they were brought in, and as they were brought in as young men in exile from Israel, they were taught the things of the king.

They were supposed to eat the king's food. Now they refused the king's food, but they learned the king's knowledge. But they didn't forget their own knowledge. And so when you look at these magi from the east, they're coming from the same area.

They obviously have a lot of knowledge from their own background. Maybe they might have been of Persian descent and they learned the things of Nebuchadnezzar or maybe they might have been of Babylonian descent and their ancestors were taken over by the Medo-Persians and so they learned the things of Darius or they learned about Alexander the Great.

These are men who know the world. They know the things that are there because they are these men who are in this educated strata. But they also know that the Jews are going to have a king.

[12 : 11] Look at what they say in verse 2. Where is he who is born, who has been born, king of the Jews? Where is he who has been born, king of the Jews?

How did these men know that the Jews were going to have a king when they are not of Jewish lineage?

How did they know? Like everybody else, they were taught. What do you mean? You don't know something unless you're taught it.

They were taught that. Okay. By whom? Well, that's a pretty obvious answer. It's got to be, right? By their ancestors.

Their ancestors learned things and passed the stories on. That's how these men knew this. Where did their ancestors learn these things from? From the Jews.

[13 : 18] You see, when the Jews were taken into exile, they were going to be in exile for 70 years. Daniel went all the way through that exile period, right?

That's why when you get to Daniel in the lion's den, he's an old man at that point because he's been there the whole time. And one of the things that happens is that the Jews, when they go into exile in Babylon, they're not told to live in tents and keep your bags packed.

In Jeremiah chapter 29, Jeremiah writes a letter to the exiles and he says to them, settle down. Build houses. Give your sons in marriage.

Give your daughters in marriage. Seek the welfare of the city. In other words, what he's doing is he's telling the Jews who are in exile, you're not coming back to Jerusalem.

Stay there and build a new life. As a matter of fact, this becomes then the passage. How many of you ever heard the passage that says, I know the plans that I have for you, plans to prosper you and give you a hope?

[14 : 27] That is stated to the exiles in Babylon after he tells them to settle down in a foreign land in exile and make a new life. So what happens?

They give their children in marriage and so you begin to see an intermarrying of the Jews with the Babylonians, the Medes, and the Persians and so you've got the stories of the Jews and the theology of the Jews being passed on in this environment.

And so when you come and you think to yourself, how is it that these men from the east know these things? It's because they were taught these things because God in punishing his people and sending them into exile sent them as missionaries to go explain and proclaim there is coming a king one day.

What a beautiful thing. And when you think about it, I think there are a few things that they probably heard. Like for example, in Genesis chapter 3 verse 15, after Adam and Eve have rebelled against God and he brings in the curse, the first curse that God speaks is on the serpent, right?

The serpent who led Eve astray. And here's what he says to the serpent in verse 15, I will put enmity between you, serpent, and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring and he, the woman's offspring, will bruise your head.

[15:58] It is the proto-evangelicum. All of a sudden, I can't remember the end of that word. It's the proto-evangelism, right? It's the proto-gospel. It's the first promise of the gospel in all of scripture.

God himself is going to bring a hostility between Satan and the woman because in eating of the fruit, she's joined alliances with him.

And the promise is that the offspring of the woman is going to deal with sin. That's the promise.

Well, that promise gets rolled over into Genesis chapter 12 with Abram, right?

As God calls Abram to go from his country, he says to him in verse 1, go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you and I will make of you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you, I will curse. And here you go. And in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

[17:05] All the nations of the earth shall be blessed. So, the seed of the woman it's promised would deal with sin. The seed of Abraham is promised to be someone through whom all the families, all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

Well, what kind of blessing could possibly come from the seed of Abraham? Well, Abraham has Isaac. Isaac has Jacob. Jacob has the 12 sons and at the end of his life he gives a blessing to his sons and to his son Judah in chapter 49.

It says this, Judah, your brothers shall praise you. Your hands shall be on the neck of your enemies. Your father's son shall bow down before you.

Judah is a lion's cub. From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down. He crouches a lion and has a lioness who dares rouse him. Then verse 10 is where I'm getting to.

The scepter shall not depart from Judah nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until tribute comes to him and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

[18:13] So, the offspring of the woman is going to deal with the sin. The offspring of Abraham is going to bless the nations. The offspring of Judah is going to be a king who's going to rule over all and all the nations will come and give him praise.

So that when we get to 2 Samuel chapter 7, David is now the king and you see David is an offspring of Judah and David is an offspring of Abram and Jacob.

David is an offspring of the woman and so you can see that this lineage and this line and this promise is being kept from generation to generation. David is told by God, when your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you who shall come from your body and I will establish his kingdom and he shall build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

This is that thing in scripture that is that sort of shadow and substance, right? Primarily, this is looking at Solomon who's going to be the one who builds the house, who builds the temple for the Lord but there's something of a shadow in that that looks to something of a greater reality and that greater reality is Christ who was of the lineage and house of David.

That's Matthew's whole point in his genealogy in chapter 1 that he's the son of David, he's the son of Abraham. So what we have then is that all through the Old Testament is this promise that the offspring of the woman, the offspring of Abraham, the offspring of Judah, the offspring of David would be a king and Israel is just waiting for their king to come who is going to rule forever.

[20:00] Now that is something that the exiles took with them into Babylon. They know these things. They're looking for that king and not just the king but the star is somehow a part of this.

The passage that was playing up on the screen, this is from the final discourse or the final oracle of Balaam. You know who Balaam is, right? Israel.

They've been in Egypt. Now they've been set free and they are wandering around in the wilderness because they refuse to go into the promised land and as they are wandering in the wilderness they get larger and larger and the king of Moab, Balak, gets scared.

And so he calls on Balaam, a prophet of God and says, listen, I'll pay you money. I want you to go curse Israel. So he says, okay. And that's when his donkey talks to him and that's when the angel says, if it hadn't been for your donkey I'd have killed you.

He says, so now go on with Balak but you only say what God tells you to say. So he takes him to these different locations. Balak takes Balaam to these different locations around Israel and wants him to call out a curse upon Israel.

[21 : 16] And every time he gets to a new location he blesses them. He doesn't curse them. He blesses them. He doesn't curse them. He blesses them. And in his final oracle he says in verse 17 as he speaks about Yahweh he says, I see him but not now.

I behold him but not near. A star shall come out of Jacob and a scepter shall rise out of Israel. Now those are couplets. They're to be kept together. In other words I don't understand exactly the connection but the connection is there. What kind of connection I don't know but the connection is that there's a star and a king come together coming out of Israel coming out of Jacob and these are things that the Israelites knew and understood and they pass it on to the Magi because their parents and their parents and their parents passed on these stories.

So what do you have here then? We see their identity. We see what possible knowledge that they had. The question is what's the lesson of all of this? What does this teach us about the baby in the manger?

What does this teach us about the little two year old boy running around? What does this teach us about Christ? And it's very simple. It's one little thought. That God is faithful.

[22 : 40] That God's faithful. He's faithful to do exactly what He said He's going to do. He's faithful to Himself. He's faithful to us.

And I want you to just think about this for a few minutes before we close because when we begin to think about the faithfulness of God and we want to look at these promises and we see promises made, promises fulfilled, that is built upon the fact that God is a faithful God and that faithfulness begins with His faithfulness to Himself.

He is faithful to Himself. He does not deny Himself. He does not change. I am the Lord. I do not change. As He always has been so He always will be.

He was holy in the time of Isaiah so He's holy today. He was powerful in the time of Moses so He is powerful today. He does not change. He cannot deny Himself. Even when we are faithless to Him He remains faithful.

because He cannot deny Himself. And this is the basis of reality. 2 plus 2 equals 4 because God never changes.

[23 : 58] If God changes then we don't have 2, we don't have plus, we don't have 2, we don't have equal, we don't have 4. If God changes we have nothing.

But He never changes. He is faithful to Himself and we see this in the story of the Magi because they are living their lives on the faithfulness of God.

They were created in such a way that a rock is a rock and it's always a rock and it doesn't turn into an elephant and all of a sudden squash you. And the atmosphere is breathable and it's always breathable and it doesn't change into water just all of a sudden and drown us as we're going by because why?

Because God is faithful to Himself. And these men come looking for the King. and the hope that we have in this world that constantly is changing is that God never changes.

We're drowning in the sea of change and the moral degradation of our world, the sorrow and the death and the terrible things that happen in this world.

[25 : 13] We need someone who's immovable and that's who God is. And built upon that fact is this idea that He's faithful to His word.

That what He says He does. That what He has spoken He will do. If He's ever said anything if He's ever promised anything He will fulfill that promise.

As a matter of fact His promise to fulfill His word is more sure than the rising of the sun. Or let me say it this way the sun being placed in our galaxy where it is is more precarious than it is that God doesn't fulfill His word.

What He says He means. When He says something He's not speaking in these strange ways that we have to cross deserts and dig up sands and find some trinket to try to figure out what it is that He said He has spoken in human language.

And maybe not everything is equally clear to all people but the vast majority of the scripture is laid out plain right there for us. Everybody can read it. There's no secret.

[26 : 27] And if He says that He wants us to love people then we ought to love people. If He tells us He wants us to hate sin then we should hate sin because He means what He says. And so because of that He does fulfill His promises.

I mean the promise that the offspring of the woman would destroy the sin bringer. The promise that in Abraham all the nations would be blessed. The promise that one from the line of Judah would be the king.

The promise that there was going to be one like Moses who would be a prophet like him. The promise that David would have an offspring that would sit on the throne forever. that has been fulfilled in Christ. He is faithful to His word.

He is faithful to His promises. And what promise has He given you? In the new covenant He's given us a promise.

And that being faithful to Himself being faithful to His word and because of this new covenant promise He is faithful to us. He's faithful to us.

[27 : 32] That new covenant promise that I'm thinking about is spoken very clearly in Hebrews chapter 13 verse 1 that says I will never leave you nor forsake you. Now just think about that for a second.

I will never leave you nor forsake you. That is not God being nice and kind of going like listen I'm just a really benevolent God and I just want you to know I'm here with you.

And it's not just something to say. He's not a Texan right? He doesn't just say nice things and expect everybody to not impose upon Him. Okay. You understand what I'm saying.

Like this is not Him being nice. This is Him making covenant promises that are paid for by the blood of Christ. I will never leave you nor forsake you.

How do we know because He sent His Son to die for that promise? It's a part of the promise that was there in the beginning with Abraham when He says I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you.

[28 : 35] He's saying listen I'm not going to let anything happen to you. I'm here with you. He tells Jacob in Genesis 28 He says I'm going to be with you and keep you wherever you go.

He tells Moses I'll be with you in Exodus chapter 3. He tells the second generation of Israelites before they go into the promised land in Deuteronomy 31 I will be with you. He tells Joshua when he takes over for Moses I will be with you and this covenant promise in Jeremiah 31 31 He says I will be their God.

That's why He's called Emmanuel. Not just because it's a nice Christmas song but because Jesus bled and died to bring that promise to fruition.

I will be with you. He's faithful to Himself. He's faithful to His promises. He's faithful to His people.

And our Emmanuel is with us even when the money runs out when the job comes to an end when it's time to move when you can't find a spouse when now you're not sure how to care for your elderly parents when you aren't sure how to parent adult children when you feel all alone because it seems like nobody's going to come see you for this holiday season and you feel that all aloneness you need to remember I will never leave you He says.

[30 : 05] He's faithful to that. As a matter of fact I want you to I want you to just imagine for a second that there you are with whatever problem it is that you're facing in your life and you feel alone.

You hear some other news you get some piece of data that comes in and you know there's nobody else in the world who's going to understand this and you feel all alone.

I just want you to understand that what you're feeling is a fiction. What you're feeling is a fiction because He bled and died to say I will never leave you nor forsake you.

Think about Joseph which Joseph Joseph with the coat of many colors right? Although it probably wasn't many colors that's a anyway it doesn't matter Joseph was the beloved son of his father and he was hated by his brothers but God had promised him that his family would bow down to him so what must he be thinking when his brothers grab him roughly and they jerk off this coat and they

throw him down into a pit and they slaughter some animal and spread the blood on the coat and take it to the father what must he be thinking God didn't you promise that you were gonna make me somebody he could have easily doubted in that moment we're not told what he does or what about when he goes on into Egypt he gets sold off to Potiphar things are going well for a while till he's falsely accused thrown into prison he could have been like but Lord you promised he is able to help a couple of guys in prison they forget him he could have easily said but but Lord you promised we don't get anything like that in the text we don't see anything about how he's feeling do you know why we're not getting anything about how he's feeling because what he's feeling doesn't matter what matters is what God has said it's not because

Joseph was a smart spiritual guy who knew more than us that it seems as though he's this stalwart of trust in God no it's because God is faithful so Christians if you today as a Christian I guess the charge and the challenge that I would leave you with is this is that as you're celebrating Christmas that as you think about handing gifts to one another this is what I've always been thinking and been taught and that is that we give gifts to one another because the wise men gave gifts to Christ and so as we give gifts to one another and you do those things where you're having these traditions remember that what you feel about the difficulties of life is not nearly as important as what God has promised and so I want to encourage you to pray that God would help you to stop listening to your feelings and start believing his word now I can say that here but I know in many of your lives this is a reality already there are many of you that already fight with yourself and you pray say Lord please don't let me succumb to my feelings and I know that you fight that

[34 : 06] I'm just here to tell you God's faithful just keep it up just keep it up the victory is not yours because of the fight but the victory is yours because God is faithful and you are not alone and he will not leave you and he will not forsake you if you're not a Christian then you need to understand God's faithfulness to you as well because here's what he says to you he says unless you repent you will likewise perish he's faithful to himself he's faithful to his word and so if you're not a Christian then I pray that this Christmas season the kindness of God to send his son into this world would call you would call you to trust in him let's pray together takeNING to to take!