

Who is really King?

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[0 : 00] All righty. We're going to have the Bible reading now. Although the passage that David's going to be taking us through is only the second half of chapter 2, we're going to read the whole chapter so that we've got that context.

So please open your Bibles, turn on your devices, and turn to Matthew chapter 2. All right.

Now, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?

For we 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, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah.

[1 : 07] 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 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, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

[2 : 10] Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child to destroy him.

And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, Out of Egypt I called my son.

Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region, who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.

Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah. A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation. Rachel weeping for her children.

She refused to be comforted, because they are no more. But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead.

[3 : 30] And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there.

And being warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

We're going to be looking at the second half of Matthew chapter 2 this afternoon in the series that we've been continuing in Matthew's Gospel. And I just want to introduce by saying this, that there's no doubt at all that the story of the birth of Jesus still has immediate appeal for all kinds of people.

Just as it did when Matthew first wrote down his biography of the life of Jesus. Christmas in Australia is a massive annual celebration.

But you'll have noticed as much as I have that each year, what we celebrate at Christmas and how we celebrate seems to just get more and more removed from that which the Bible says.

[4 : 45] more disconnected from the Bible's record of events. And I think it's because sentimentality rather than truth shapes how we celebrate the birth of Jesus.

And most sad of all, I think, in that is that increasingly it seems to be true of Christians as well. Sentimentality has now shaped the Christmas story to that which is warm and fuzzy convenient acceptable Sentimentality drives marketing and advertising and that in turn has reformatted Christmas into just another classic harmless children's story children's fairy tale where Jesus himself is increasingly written out of the script and you can see that in front yard displays where you get all sorts of fairy tales and lights and stuff like that but often no reference at all to Jesus.

The problem is, you see, that as a society at a whole and even as Christians sometimes we've stopped reading out from the scriptures that which the authors of scripture intended us to hear and we've started reading into scripture that which we want to hear or that which we think we should hear that which is convenient to hear and we just ignore the bits that are inconvenient to us and the story of Christmas is just one of those classic places where that happens.

But to understand properly the birth of Jesus we need to cut through sentiment because the Bible itself pushes us beyond sentiment especially in this situation of the birth of Christ the context of the birth of Christ the Bible pushes us beyond sentiment to supernatural reality.

Now, if you read or when you read Matthew's story of the birth of Christ in the early years of Jesus as we're working through here in these chapters of Matthew one thing is really clear it is not sentimental.

[7 : 06] It is not sentimental. But it's the context of confronting supernatural interventions that really hit us when you read these early chapters.

God's miraculous involvement in and around the birth of Jesus that's what dominates that's what we either have to trip over or come to terms with because it's just so pervasive.

So we start with as Bo took us through a couple of weeks ago there's this supernatural conception of Jesus through the action of God's Holy Spirit. Now, how confronting is that?

This girl gets pregnant without having sex. We're told by the action of the Holy Spirit. Joseph then is given a dream and he's told to marry Mary when naturally he was just going to quietly move her to one side to avoid the scandal.

And not only is he told to go ahead and marry her but he's actually told that this child will be God will be the saviour of the world. Completely God and completely human.

[8 : 19] It gets harder. Then there's the appearance of the mysterious star that Dave took us through that section that Dave took us through last week which the Magi and remember these Magi for the East wise men these guys were not sentimental.

These were hard-headed scholars of the day. They probably came from the royal court of Persia or somewhere over in the Mesopotamian region and these hard-headed intellectual guys they concluded that what was happening before their eyes was supernatural.

Some sort of cosmic event. They couldn't understand but they couldn't avoid. And remember these guys were experts in science and mathematics and history astronomy.

There were no Dunnies. and yet they were convinced that all the signs pointed to an event of cosmic significance.

Indeed the birth of a great king. And so accordingly responding accordingly they set out as Dave said last week a couple of thousand kilometers or more a couple of months worth of travel they set out to give their worship and allegiance to this totally unknown infant.

[9 : 40] You want to come and join? Yeah. He might do a better job. Can he read you it or not? You can have my script. Sorry I shouldn't embarrass him.

Isn't that lovely? I always think it's lovely when that sort of thing happens. But I'm usually more generous to other people's children than I was when my children did it when they were young.

But anyway that's a different story. Yeah so these guys came all that way to give their worship and allegiance to this totally unknown infant king.

Now it was a big problem for a couple of reasons. One in the violent age of the day you really didn't acknowledge a king until he was well and truly in control of his throne.

So many people didn't even survive childhood years because of diseases let alone coup d'etat when they were still young. But these guys knowledgeable intellectual guys and maybe girls who knows most likely guys came to worship maybe Jesus.

[10 : 47] But there's another aspect of that that these guys were in the employ of the court the royal court of Persia. So essentially what they were doing by coming to worship a foreign king could have been seen as treasonous.

There was a lot at stake for these guys and yet that was their single point of reference from the time the sign. Then there's multiple interventions of divine guidance in chapter 2.

Brought the Magi to Jerusalem warned them not to report back to Herod as agreed and in our passage this morning three more dreams three more supernatural acts of divine guidance all of which are just focused to protect what is now the divine toddler.

and all these events in turn are linked back to Old Testament prophecy so Matthew wants us to see that hey all this stuff well hard enough is to believe now that all this was foretold by prophets you know five, six, seven hundred years ago.

So there's another incredible link that people could have seen this coming seven hundred years earlier. That has to be a supernatural thing. Now why is Matthew doing all this?

[12 : 07] Well a couple of reasons I think. Firstly Matthew's primary target audience is Jewish and Matthew wants his Jewish readers to remember that all of their national history was full of God's supernatural activity.

he wants them to understand therefore that they shouldn't trip over Jesus and the context of his birth because this is just more of the same.

This is God doing what God has been doing for his people for generations and more than that this is God doing what the prophets what the Lord told the prophets he would do at some point in the future when he would send Messiah to deliver his people from their sin.

So Matthew wants his readers to realize that Jesus can only be understood can only be understood in the context of God's supernatural intervention in history and again that the only way to read the Bible correctly is through Christ-centered lenses that is all the stuff in the Old Testament is primarily about preparing us for the arrival of Jesus and then all the stuff in the New Testament is really telling us about the significance of what that arrival means.

So Matthew's appeal to his readers 2,000 years ago and to you and me today 2,000 years later is simply to confront Jesus.

[13 : 46] Not through the sentiment of a cute little baby in a manger with a big cow with big staring eyes fawning at him or a sheep you know bleating at him.

Not like that at all but to confront Jesus by applying your mind to wrestle with supernatural interventions in this world.

Fulfillment of prophecies long term promises coming to reality real history. That is the context the Bible pushes us to well beyond sentimentality supernatural reality.

And so the challenge for us today is the same as we read these verses. And the question then is will you accept the challenge? Will you seek Jesus by asking the question who is this Jesus?

What sort of king is he? What sort of kingdom does he intend to establish? and perhaps most important of all will I bring my life under the authority of this king Jesus as one who is completely human and completely God?

[15 : 08] The Bible also pushes us beyond sentimentality to recognize the desperate need for a better king. Now we're moving into the text here in chapter 2 first 12 verses the story seems to go really well it's really quite exciting every man and his dog wants a piece of Jesus they all want to apparently want to be where Jesus is to worship him it's such a light and airy sort of section of the passage but then when you turn to verse 13 it suddenly becomes very dark and the question I want to ask now to try and make a passage that's very familiar to us fresh again reminds I want to ask you now is what do you think this literature is?

Do you think it's tragedy or is it farce comedy? Well at first reading the story seems to be appears to be throbbing with uncertainty threat defeat things are so bad that Egypt is now the place of safety and you remember Egypt had such bad associations in the history of God's people it was a place of bondage a place of death and destruction it was a place that God told us people do not go back to Egypt do not have any association with Egypt and here things are so bad that God sends his people Joseph and Mary and Jesus back to Egypt wow that bad fleeing by night hiding then we have the absolute brutality of

Herod's murderous rage taken out on these innocents and then at the end of the story the Lord tells him to come back but even then it seems like Herod's now dead but his son Archelaus takes over the throne and there's another layer of uncertainty another layer of threat more secretive moving around more uncertainty more danger more hiding but then at the same time when you read these verses it soon becomes clear that the story is running perfectly according to God's plan and in line with all the ancient prophecies even the murder of these innocent children is put in the context of hope through the reference to Jeremiah in verse 18 so let's have a look at that a voice was heard in Ramah weeping and loud lamentation

Rachel's weeping for her children she refused to be consoled because there are no more children what's it all about well Rachel was the wife of the patriarch Jacob who of all the patriarchs was the one who was most closely associated with God's covenant promise Jacob's name was actually changed to Israel so in a sense this is the defining point of Israel's history and Rachel was buried at Ramah which just happens to be up the road a bit from Bethlehem and in this prophecy by Jeremiah she's pictured as weeping because God's covenant people were going to disappear into exile and likely death and the backstory of that is that when the Babylonian overlords were mastering the Israelite exiles to take them away into captivity captivity they did it here at this particular place this is where they were mastered this is where they were shackled together and this is where they're finally marched off into potential oblivion and almost certain death and so

Rachel's pictured as crying for the loss of God's covenant promise crying in the context of death how can anything good come out of this God's promises have fallen over perhaps even God's promises have been thwarted by the evil of other people when you go back and read the context in Jeremiah the Lord speaks to Jeremiah and says to him there is hope I will bring my people back from exile this is not the end of the story this is a story happening as I planned it to happen and so here in spite of the brutality of Herod and the very real tears of multiple mothers and fathers in this region I think we've been told here there is hope because

[20 : 33] Messiah is safe from Herod Herod's sin is incredibly iniquitous and this prophecy doesn't answer all the questions we might like answered but it's cast in the context of hope in the fulfillment and the outworking of God's plan it's happening as God intended it to happen in spite of the awful sinfulness of Herod Messiah is safe from Herod and ultimately will fulfill God's salvation promise now when I put all that together what I want to suggest to you is that in the end this story that looks so dark is actually farcical notwithstanding the awful brutality that's built into it it's farcical because here we have a picture of Herod huffing and puffing against God and his anointed one very much in the line of Psalm 2 but as he huffs and puffs and the story develops he just looks increasingly pathetic for all his efforts for all his resources being deployed to get rid of this child that's a big threat to

Herod the story's just happening all about him it's farcical and as the story goes out of the blue Herod ends up dead so much for Herod and his son Archelaus comes into the story but again he's of no great consequence to the way the story's going to unfold and he just gets a passing mention that's all he's worth as it were but woven into this particle story is a huge contrast between the two kings which I think Matthew wants to highlight for us on the one hand you've got Herod the so-called great that sort of diminishes the title a little bit when you find out in history that he actually took that title and made it up for himself not too many other people thought he was great unless he thought he was a great idiot but there he was

Herod the Great now what do we know of this Herod the Great from these verses here well first thing is in sharp contrast to the receiving accepting attitude of the Magi Herod shows himself to have a rejecting rebellious attitude towards God's plan and purpose and the God child and when you think about that the contrast just opens up the Magi had very little detail and almost no understanding of what was behind this side and no backstory to give them detail and yet they set out from their place some thousands of kilometres away already in the frame of mind to come as vassals as subject people to bow down and worship this infant king as a great cosmic king for these

Magi moving towards Jesus to worship was their single priority once they saw a sign in great contrast to Herod who in verses 3, 4, 5 and 6 there had enough personal knowledge or personal awareness of what Jewish history was because Herod himself wasn't a Jew he was a Syrian but he had enough personal knowledge of the Jewish tradition and culture to be able to call this baby in verse 4 the Christ the Messiah then he had the affirmation and the reinforcement of the scribes and the Pharisees these were the Jewish religious professors these were the guys who knew their history inside out and they said yeah you got it right this is this is this is this is the Messiah and then they had the affirmation of these Magi these intellectual guys coming from the Far East all coming to the same conclusion and what does Herod do he goes a totally different direction he sets himself to destroy this child why well Dave talked about it a bit last week

I'm just going to repeat what he said well his political sovereignty is threatened in this baby because Herod's not even in the line of David Messiah would be so this the arrival of this child highlights that in the end Herod was a usurper of the throne of Israel so his political sovereignty was being threatened but his personal sovereignty was being threatened as well Herod was the top of the pile and he had accumulated a lavish lifestyle by being number one and he was not about to hand that over to anybody else he was not about to bow the knee to any other king and certainly not an infant king he wasn't going to give it all up his personal sovereignty was being threatened and so for Herod in contrast to the Magi moving away from Jesus and getting rid of Jesus was Herod's single priority once he saw the sign and so there you got a comparison and a contrast everybody both groups were seeking

[26 : 20] Jesus but one was seeking to worship the other was seeking to destroy and the picture gets worse when we consider that we measure Herod as a representative of God's special people Israel now throughout the history of Israel God's king the king of Israel was to reflect God's character and lead God's people as God himself would but Herod he was hated by many in Israel why because of his violent repression his ruthlessness and his corruption this man had blood all over him he had already killed his wife and all her known relatives he had already killed at least two of his sons why because he considered them a threat to his position as king he exploited his people mercilessly see he was appointed by the Romans and as long as he kept peace in Palestine the Romans didn't really care what he did so he could butcher his own people exploit them to the nth degree as long as he kept the peace the Romans were happy with him and Herod went to town on that little window of opportunity so this man no doubt murdering twenty thirty forty infants

Bethlehem Bethlehem wasn't a large town the region we don't know how big the region are but possibly no more than fifty infants now that seems a lot to us and I don't want to minimize that but for Herod who's already killed his own family that's probably only the price of staying in business as the king it's a nasty business but you know it's worth the cost and in that we see how far Herod had moved Herod the so called great had moved from God's ideal for kings Herod was the king of greed the king of self interest murder exploitation the king of repression the king of misery the king of death God's people desperately needed a better king and enter King Jesus the truly great king who runs the whole world as the forever king in his forever kingdom

Matthew doesn't give us any details as to how the magi came to their conclusion just that they were convinced that the birth of Jesus was an event of cosmic significance the birth of a king to whom they owed a greater allegiance than they did even to their Persian overlord in whose employ they were and look at verse six it's just one of those countless countless prophecies that speak of the nature of Jesus the great king from you shall come a ruler a king who will shepherd my people Israel you can feel the contrast already with Herod can't you a butcher and a shepherd Messiah or

King Jesus would fulfill the ideal of kingship which God had set before David King David in 2 Samuel 7 a king who would shepherd God's people into truth and righteousness and safety a king who would care for them as a shepherd and lead them into the good life of security a good life lived under obedience to the Lord rather than be a wolf that would attack and destroy them King Jesus would be a king whose rule would never end in contrast to Herod who huffed and puffed and did his darndest and then was dead and gone forever for all his efforts was only a blip on the history of God's dealings with his people and this new king

Jesus the truly great king comes with God's total backing as already stated this story is running perfectly according to God's plan Jesus has God's backing and protection at every stage and again Jesus is the king who would rule by right of character and by God's approval and he would rule for God's glory rather than the usurper king like Herod ruling by violent suppression and ruling by the authority derived authority from other men such as the Roman authorities and that was Herod he only ruled by Roman authority by Roman permission click the fingers and Herod would be gone and Jesus would be the great king perfectly suited to ruling and subduing unruly hearts this might be the key difference really because

[32 : 20] Herod you see wasn't the least bit interested in the real needs of his people he was filled with his own interests and as a result of that filled the hearts of his people with fear and despair and grief as he chased his own desires contrast that with what we know to come for Jesus not only focused on his people's needs the need for light and life joy and satisfaction but a king who actually has the authority to see their hearts to see their needs and the power to deliver on those needs Jesus actually deserves the title great and friends we need a strong capable king because our hearts are unruly we're inclined to sin king me as Steve

Farrar used the terminology king me makes an absolute mess of our lives we like to think as Dave said last week we like to think we're pretty good at running our lives pretty good at being king in our own little demand but I think most of us deep down would know that we've stuffed it up majorly when we tried to be king in our own lives we need a strong capable king who will deliver us into the truly godly life who will shepherd us into obedience and righteousness and safety Herod therefore was part of the problem he killed his little ones to protect his own interests he destroyed without exception or mercy but Jesus allowed himself to be killed to protect his little ones he gave up everything so that he could treat his undeserving little ones with mercy and without distinction and the final thing about this great king

Jesus that comes out of these verses here is that initially he doesn't even look like a king at all he's despised and rejected to pick up the language from Isaiah 53 here we have the defenseless baby on the run this so called king God himself hidden by his parents going from here to there doesn't look like a great king and in verses 22 and 23 the anti-climax not the climax but the anti-climax of this story is that Jesus by circumstance is forced to grow up in Nazareth he doesn't have the association of Bethlehem or Jerusalem which would associate him with the great king David which would give him some sort of status and standing and connectivity into history no he's in Nazareth in Galilee and upright Jews despised the area of Galilee and anything that came out of Galilee you might say no place for a king and as with every other part of the story of Jesus thus far nothing is as expected nothing is normal but everything is perfectly according to God's plan and purpose and in line with prophecy

Jesus had no religious credentials to commend them he had no political power base or army to impress or frighten he had no society status to draw people to him yet go back to these magi these wise men they were convinced in spite of all of that in spite of the scandal in the context of Jesus birth they were convinced they should find this baby this king and bow in worship as king of the world and so I finish up with just moving that challenge 2000 years down the track right into our auditorium here today wise men still seek Jesus is the cliché that we hear around today and so the question then is Jesus your king and again think about it in terms of contrast we have two kings so the question then becomes what type of king will you have ruling in your life will it be king me using your own resources to build the good life as you see it as you desire it as you think it should be it's possible even as

Christians still to do that or will it be king Jesus gladly surrendering my own sovereignty and seeking the good life of God through obedience and serving Jesus now here's the rub for us whatever decision you make you need to understand that it's an all in decision receiving Jesus is not about sharing sovereignty this is I think where we get caught particularly as Christians I don't think non-Christians would consider this they just want to reject Jesus but I think for us as Christians we're in a bit of a bind because sometimes we think it's about sharing sovereignty so I'll have sovereignty here in my life I'll run my affairs here but I really want Jesus to have sovereignty in my life as well so I'll Jesus can have this area of sovereignty I'll have this area of sovereignty but it doesn't work like that to bow and worship the king is to give up total personal sovereignty not just to raise

[38 : 36] Jesus on your agenda your own personal agenda but to allow Jesus to set a whole new agenda for you in every aspect of your life life it's about giving up all claim to personal sovereignty in order to gain real life and security under the truly great king just pray with me and we're done Lord we thank you for your word for the confrontation that it brings to us for the way that immediately challenges our understanding of how the world works and asks us to believe and live in the light of the fact there's much more to this world than what we can see and Lord you know that's the message we're taught in Australia that what we see is what there is and no more Lord help us to have a truly honest supernatural reality and help us Lord to place in the center of that the

Lord Jesus Christ and help us Lord then to want to live under King Jesus exposed to us Lord where we would share our sovereignty as though somehow that was possible and I pray in Jesus name Amen more and I think some more d over