

Who will be King?

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[0 : 00] Will you read with me Matthew 2 verses 1 to 12? That's Matthew 2 verses 1 to 12.

After Jesus 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 when it rose 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 Messiah 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 shepherd 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 search carefully for the child.

[1 : 14] As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him. After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.

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, frankincense and myrrh.

And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route. Well, good morning, everyone.

Will you pray with me as we come to God's word? Let's pray together. Father, we need you to give us ears to hear you.

Give us hearts that are ready to listen to what you have to say in your word in Matthew. So we pray that you would be speaking to us through Matthew, and that you would give us these hearts that are ready to listen to you.

[2 : 51] The world wants us to believe all sorts of things. Help us to be discerning and to listen to your truth instead.

We pray for your help. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, the famous comedian, Ricky Gervais, is pretty outspoken that believing in God is just ridiculous.

He once tweeted, If you want to deny something, don't choose evolution or the Holocaust. You'll look silly. Way too much evidence. Choose a God or homeopathy.

Another tweet. Everyone has the right to believe anything they want. And everyone else has the right to find it ridiculous.

Or in an interview, I don't believe in God because there is absolutely no scientific evidence for his existence. Have you ever thought, If only God made himself clearer, it would be easier to believe in him?

[4 : 08] What we're going to hear today in Matthew's history of Jesus' life is going to show us that there's an even deeper reason why we struggle to trust and believe in God. So let's have a look at this story.

So yeah, this story of the wise men, it's a famous one at Christmastime. It's a very pleasant children's story. In our scientific age, we might find the idea of a star appearing in the sky quite unusual, to say the least.

But in Mesopotamia, which was kind of our modern-day Iraq, just to the east of Israel, which is probably where these magi were from.

And in other parts of the world, there was quite a sophisticated development of the study of the stars, thinking that you get divine information through observing the stars.

So these magi, these astrologers, would have been advising their kings and their rulers. They would have been court officials. So when Nero became emperor of Rome, historians record a visit from Magi to pay their respects.

[5 : 25] So this kind of visit wasn't entirely unusual, but what happened with the story of Jesus is unique. From their home, perhaps in Babylon, they see a star rising.

And some have attempted to work out what this star was. So some think it was Halley's Comet. But that was recorded in 12 BC. And Jesus was born about 4 BC. I know that before Christ, that doesn't quite make sense, but there's this discrepancy that got worked out later on.

So Halley's Comet, not quite lining up, but Saturn and Jupiter aligning. But that was in 7 BC. Some think it might have been a star coming into being, a nova or supernova exploding star.

So Chinese records, talk about in 5 BC. We don't really know is the short answer. And it's not really the point. What's most surprising is that the Bible is pretty clear in telling us not to seek out special information through like omens and mediums and psychics and astrology.

But without criticism here, there is no criticism. Here are these foreigners to God's people, potentially from Babylon, the enemy of God's people, probably ignorant of God's promises in the Old Testament, seeing this rising star.

[6 : 53] And what do they do with this information? Well, the emphasis on the star rising is Matthew wanting us to think of the prophecy in Numbers 24, 17, during the days of Moses, like 1,400 years earlier.

So the prophecy was, a star shall come out of Jacob and a scepter shall rise out of Israel. A ruler will come, in other words. These foreign astrologers, seeing this divine sign, come to Jerusalem, the city of the king of Israel.

Now, they would have had to walk or ride animals for over 1,000 kilometres. Imagine putting that in Jerusalem into Google Maps and it says, two months to get there.

You might think twice about the journey and that's just one way. But they come. Naturally, they go to King Herod, but he doesn't have a son that young to fit the bill.

And so word apparently spread throughout all Jerusalem with the hope of God's promises in Jewish ears and in their hearts. This gossip would have spread quickly. Could it really be happening?

[8 : 17] After 400 years of silence from God, could the son of David have arrived? Herod certainly thinks so because he asked the chief priests when the Messiah, where he was to be born.

Is the everlasting kingdom of righteousness and peace finally here? Is the king here? I think it should have been like if you're a prisoner of war in World War II.

My grandfather was a prisoner of war in World War II. Could you imagine that, being a prisoner of war? And imagine someone comes and whispers in your ear away from the officers in charge of you and just whispers that the allies have invaded Berlin.

The war is almost over. You can have a full meal again. You can go home. That cold, dark night is about to change.

The light is coming up. That's what it should have felt like, this news. But what's Herod and all Jerusalem's reaction in verse 3?

[9 : 34] They're troubled. They're troubled. It's a word for inner turmoil. They were afraid. Why?

This should have been awesome news. Why were they afraid? I think maybe Acts chapter 5 gives us a hint.

In living memory, there had been at least two widely known instances where a man claimed to be somebody leading Jews to rebel against the authority of Rome. And for both these men, Judas and Theodos, Rome came crashing down and killed them and killed those who followed them very quickly.

This is politically dangerous news that a king had come who wasn't appointed by Rome. Maybe they were afraid of Rome.

I was intrigued that the word troubled is the same one used in a Greek translation of Isaiah 8 verse 12 which is surrounded by this promise of Emmanuel.

[10 : 44] I'm just raising it because I would love to just get you guys to tell me what you think. Go away and read Isaiah 7 to 9 and think is Matthew using Isaiah 7 to 9 in his story of Jesus coming?

I'd love to hear your thoughts. As you look at it, look how the promise of Emmanuel is God with us. God can be with us in judgment and God can be with us for salvation.

The sign has both emphases in Isaiah. So I'd love to hear your thoughts. So Herod and Jerusalem, they were probably afraid of Rome.

Maybe Jerusalem was afraid of Herod, what he would do to protect his throne which, yeah, as we're going to see next week, there would be good reason to be afraid of Herod. So we might be sympathetic to this fear.

But this isn't just some ordinary man claiming to be somebody. If this really is God's eternal king, could Rome stop him? Could Rome stop God?

[11 : 56] Surely not. Well, I think they were afraid to lose their current way of life. I think they would rather keep the status quo. Even though it's not perfect, they'd rather not rock the boat.

Like Israel, after just being delivered from slavery in Egypt, heading towards the promised land, because of just a little bit of hardship, they longed to be back in slavery in Egypt. they feared the life they had. And Herod leads the way in this self-protection, this protecting of their life.

So Herod and the people had God, they didn't just have a star, they had much more specific revelation from God. Herod summons all the chief priests, all the experts in the law, the experts in the Bible and asks when the Messiah was to be born.

This is a really simple question. It should have been common knowledge. It's a bit surprising that Herod even asked this question. The prophet Micah, chapter 5, verse 2, it was very clear.

[13 : 13] The Messiah is going to come in King David's own town of Bethlehem. I'm going to read the original quote from Micah. But you, O Bethlehem, Ephathrath, I don't know how to say that, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth from me, one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from old, from ancient days.

Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth. Then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel, and he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God, and they shall dwell secure.

For now he shall be great to the ends of the earth, and he shall be their peace. To make it even clearer for us, Matthew kind of meshes into this quote, 2 Samuel chapter 5 verse 2.

You might think that's just a random part of the Bible. It's not random. This is the moment that King David is enthroned over Israel. This part that's meshed in. And Matthew just starts this story, it almost seems like minor biographical detail, saying these things happened after Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

But this is big news, that he was born in Bethlehem. Can you get any clearer than that? Herod and Jerusalem had all the light of knowledge of what God has said, and what did they do with it?

[14 : 49] They were troubled, they were afraid. I think they feared to lose the degree of control that they had over their lives. Herod feared to lose his control.

His throne was under threat. I think we see this in all Herod's scheming. He said with his lips that he wanted to come and worship this king, but his behaviour tells a very different story.

Bethlehem is just 15 kilometres south to Jerusalem. It's like from here to Toronto. He didn't bother. The Magi travel for months.

He didn't bother a few hours walk. If he really wanted to come and worship that king, it would be quite easy to do so. He didn't need to summon all the chief priests and the scribes.

Why did he summon all? He needed one, if that, because it was pretty common knowledge. I reckon that's a political move. I think he's sending a message to the chief priest, I'm in charge of this situation.

[15 : 57] I could be wrong about that. But he summons all and then immediately after, he has a secret meeting. He has a secret meeting with the Magi to find out when the star had appeared and from the next week's story, it's at least within two years.

He wanted to keep this knowledge secret, just he knew it. He's trying to keep control of this situation. And then he gives these foreign visitors orders. He's got no jurisdiction over them. He's trying to control them under the pretense of wanting to worship.

He's trying to control this threat to his throne. I don't think we can be sure that he had murderous intent at this point, but at the very least he was trying to stay in control.

now we can tsk, tsk Herod and distance ourselves from him, but I wonder if we're really that different.

So for instance, are you here today to sign off on your religious duty so that the rest of your week is yours to do with what you want? Or are you here to listen to God through his word so that you are renewed again to live another week for his sake?

[17 : 26] It's going to look very similar on the surface. One is trying to control God so that you can stay in control of your life. The other is giving yourself to God.

I wonder how else we try and keep Jesus in his little corner and keep him away from the throne of our lives. Contrast this with the foreign astrologers who only have a star to go by.

Although they appear to be obeying Herod, they are actually following the one who's actually in control. The star they had seen appeared again and it moved.

Not really sure how this worked, but it moved. This is supernatural stuff. We're not told exactly how but it directed them to the exact place, the exact house where Jesus was.

God was drawing them to his king. Now I think I need to make clear the point of the Magal being more sincere in following the star than the Jews were in following God's word.

[18 : 44] I don't think that's meant to discourage us from finding God through his written word. We're not meant to leave here and go get our palm read or go read our horoscopes.

It's not what this text is trying to get us to do. We're not meant to look for signs like God if you want me to buy that car make this traffic light go green. We're not meant to do that.

the whole point of Matthew writing this book is so that we would clearly know Jesus. God isn't condoning astrology but I think it does show us that God is willing to meet people where they're at and draw them to himself.

I think that's the main point we're meant to take. God is willing to meet these Magi where they're at and draw them to himself. I think the lesson we're meant to get the contrast between Herod and Jerusalem and these foreigners is at the level of the attitude of their heart.

Something very different is going on. Instead of fear, having been shown the way to King Jesus, isn't this a lovely phrase, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.

[20 : 08] I want more of that. Don't you? They rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. I want more of that. Instead of trying to maintain control, when they enter the home, they express the giving up of their control by falling at his feet.

The point of mentioning Mary being there is not to suggest that she deserved worship as well. the verse clearly says they fell down and worshipped him.

I think mentioning Mary, I'm not sure of this, but I think mentioning Mary without Joseph is maybe Matthew's way of suggesting that these worshippers knew of the scandalous beginnings of the virgin birth and the birth prior to marriage.

They trusted that God had led them to the true king, despite the rest of society, despising and rejecting Jesus. I think that's what's going on here. Instead of trying to protect the life they had like Herod over his little kingdom and all Jerusalem trying to protect their city, there's another lovely phrase, they opened up their treasures.

Matthew could have just said, and they gave gifts, but he's got this little phrase, they opened up their treasures. They weren't trying to protect it, they opened it. This is what happens when you're filled with great joy at being brought to God's king.

[21 : 49] You gladly give him the best you have. You only do that if you've found a greater treasure. gold and frankincense and myrrh.

We get gold being a royal gift, frankincense used for incense. Myrrh we think of being used for burial and maybe that's what's going on here to allude to Jesus' death, but myrrh was also a spice used for celebration and joy.

So we find it in the book of Song of Songs, for instance. These are all gifts of celebration. And I'm wondering what the purpose of these gifts are.

Like I suppose they could have been trying to get political favour from the king once he'd grown up, but rejoiced exceedingly with great joy just seems a bit out of place for a diplomatic visit.

I think there's something deeper going on. I think these worshippers gave her the best they had as a small expression of the value of the king. To be associated with the king was their treasure.

[23 : 04] And so they gladly open up their other treasures. Any Jew hearing this would think of what happened with Solomon, the son of King David, when the Queen of Sheba from the east came.

We read it in 1 Kings 10. when she experienced the supreme wisdom of the son of David, seeing the temple, seeing how happy his people were under his rule, this foreigner praises God because the Lord loved Israel forever.

He has made you king that you may execute justice and righteousness. And then she gives a bucket load of gifts of gold and spices. The gifts were just a small way of expressing the worth of this king and the privilege of knowing him and being associated with him.

And the prophet saw a day when all the nations would come and give their gifts to this true son of David. So in Isaiah 60 we hear nations shall come to your light.

Your sons shall come from afar. Your daughters shall be carried on the hip. Then you shall see and be radiant. Your heart shall thrill and exult. They shall bring gold and frankincense and shall bring good news.

[24 : 19] The praises of the Lord. Someone greater than Solomon is here is what Matthew wants us to see. And while God is bringing foreigners to his king into exceeding joy, gladly falling before him, Herod and all Jerusalem fear the loss of their control and the life they have.

we see how pathetic Herod's attempts are to control the situation with everything else going on. Can Herod make a star in heaven rise or fall or move?

Like his political scheming is just pathetic compared to a star. And then we've got this dream. dream. The king of heaven sends a message to these foreigners in a dream and they obey the real king, not Herod.

Herod and Jerusalem's attempts to stay in control is laughable in light of who has just arrived on earth. I wonder if our attempts at staying in control are any better.

Hasn't this year shown us how little we are in control? What a blessing to be shown that. A hard lesson, but a blessing.

[25 : 57] If you have been consumed with worry this year, then come to the one who's really in charge. It's not that God hasn't clearly shown the world that Jesus really is in charge.

They had plenty of testimony then, and we have even more today, this morning. Not only because things are clearer in hindsight, but Matthew has helped us see that Jesus is fulfilling all God's promises throughout thousands of years of his speaking into the world.

He's made it really clear, Jesus is the son of David. Even this early in the story, we've got so much more to learn about this king and what the kingdom is all about, but even this early in the story, we can be sure he is worthy of our worship.

So the question is, what will we do with this king? Will you be afraid to lose control of your life? Or will you joyfully open your treasures at his feet?

These are the only two options. Jesus claims jurisdiction over all nations, every person. he says in Matthew 11, all things have been handed over to me by my father.

[27 : 36] What a claim. And again, after he gets the victory on the cross, rising to resurrected life, some of his last words in Matthew are, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Abraham Cooper famously said, there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry, mine.

Mine. What we do with our bodies, our church services, our drive to work, our country, our homes, our Netflix, our Instagram feed, our sport, our evenings, our mornings, our eating, our drinking, our work, our relationships, our parenting, our health, our leisure time, our sleeping, our bank accounts, our words, our desires, mine.

What will you do with this king? Will you be afraid to lose control of your life or will you joyfully open up all these treasures at his feet?

I think how we're going to respond is going to be dependent on two things. Firstly, will we realise that we aren't very good at ruling our own life?

[29 : 12] If we think we're good at it, then you're going to have no time for Jesus. So GK Chesterton famously responded to a news column that asked, what is wrong with the world?

And he wrote into the newspaper with the simple words, I am, and signed off. I am. Why is this relationship struggling?

I am. I am the problem. Matthew has already told us that this king's name is Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.

We're not good at being in charge. I am not good at being in charge. The other thing we need to know to joyfully open our treasures at his feet is, is he a good king?

is he a good king? To really answer that, we don't have time this morning. We need to listen to the rest of Matthew and get to know Jesus better.

[30 : 26] But for now, I just want to quickly go back to Matthew 11. After he said, all things have been handed over to me by my father, here's his invitation to come under his authority.

He says, come to me. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you.

In other words, come under my rule and learn from me. Why? Why? For I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

He uses his authority to serve us, which is incredible. The problem in trusting Jesus isn't that God hasn't made it clear.

Matthew has shown us that Jesus is the answer to God's promises, very obviously. The question is, will we try and control our lives?

[31 : 37] Will you be afraid and try and stay in control? Or will you be drawn by God to come and see more and more of this Jesus, get to know him better, and rejoice exceedingly with great joy as you find rest for your souls?

That's our choice. Will you pray with me as we finish? Let's pray. Father, I pray that you would show Jesus to each of us in our hearts.

Please show us just how we aren't good at controlling our own lives. Please convict each one of us of that afresh.

And please show us that Jesus really is in charge. And please show us the goodness of Jesus. We praise you that even though you have all authority, you are gentle.

We praise you that you offer us rest. We don't deserve it, but that's what you offer us. We thank you for that. Father, I pray that you would reveal your son to us more and more as we listen to Matthew.

[33 : 04] And I pray that you would give each one of us rest, that we would joyfully open up our life, giving it to you. In Jesus' name I pray.

Amen.