

The True King of the Kingdom

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[0 : 00] So let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word. We thank you that you do continue to speak to us through it. And Father, we pray now that you might help us to hear what it is you are saying to us today.

But not just hear it, but to understand it such that we live it out. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, it's election year, isn't it?

Both in the US and in Australia, we'll be looking for a leader towards the end of this year. And people will soon need to vote on who they recognise as the best person for the top job.

One of my kids said to me the other day that they would vote for me as Prime Minister. Isn't that sweet? Then I woke up. It was a dream. But come voting day, the question is, who will we put our trust in to lead us for our good?

In a world where there is unprecedented global terrorism, growing climate change, which is affecting crops now, struggling economies and a refugee crisis never seen before in history, who do we think has the ability, the power and the compassion to govern for the common good?

[1 : 21] Which candidate gives us the most confidence to lead us? Of course, the answer might be no candidate. I mean, in the US, it seems it will come down to a choice between these two on the next slide.

Thanks, Ryan. Trump versus Clinton. Trump seems to have the ability or power to govern, but he's given his racist comments. He lacks compassion.

In fact, even Obama said Trump would not make a good president because, I quote, you have to be able to work with other world leaders. And then there's Hillary Clinton, who broke national security, and if she was anyone else, would be in jail at the moment.

And so she seems to use her power for her own ends. And so neither candidate gives us much confidence. In fact, on the next slide, the Economist magazine said yesterday, the prospect of Trump versus Clinton is grim.

And we in Australia are not much better off, are we? I mean, our leaders, well, they don't even seem to have the power to stay leader of their own political party for very long, let alone the country.

[2 : 26] A journalist from the ABC apparently said that choosing between our leaders is like choosing the lesser of two evils. Both bad options. And so as we head into an election year, who really has the power and the compassion to lead us?

Which leader really gives us confidence that we can put our trust in them? Well, today we move from the parables of Jesus to the person of Jesus. Notice chapter 13, verse 53.

When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there. And coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue. And they were amazed, where did this man get this wisdom?

Who is this guy? You see the transition from parables to the person of Jesus. But there is a deliberate connection, I think. You see, two weeks ago we heard the parables about how the kingdom of God will be the greatest and so that we're actually on the winning team despite appearances.

And then last week those who were here heard how the kingdom of God is worth everything we have. But those things are only true if the king of that kingdom has the power and the compassion to deliver on his election promises, so to speak.

[3 : 40] Has the power and the compassion that gives us such confidence we're willing to put our trust in him. And so Matthew spends the next few chapters looking at the person of Jesus until that climactic moment in chapter 16 where Peter confesses Jesus to be the Christ.

And today Matthew wants us to recognize who Jesus is. That he's both the one who has both power and compassion to lead us. The one we are to put our trust in. The one who gives us confidence to keep trusting him.

And the way Matthew does this, just let me quickly show you the structure of the passage. The one who gives us the passage is he's got these two contrasts between Herod and Jesus. So on the next slide, I've tried to break it up here.

In the middle of the text you've got Herod the non-king and then you've got Jesus the God-king. And on the outside, each end of the beginning and the end of the passage, you've got a wrong recognition of Jesus and then you've got a right recognition of Jesus.

And then this structure helps us to see who he is. And so I've tried to reflect it on your outlines there. You might like to pull that out of the bulletins and follow along. We're at point 1, chapter 13, verse 54.

[4 : 49] So coming to his hometown, Jesus began teaching the people in their synagogue. And they were amazed. Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers, they asked?

Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary? And aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us?

Where then did this man get all these things? And they took offense at him. I'm sure you've all heard the saying, familiarity breeds contempt. Well, here it is in action, isn't it?

And notice they don't deny Jesus' wisdom and miraculous power, do they? They simply refuse to accept that it's from him. Notice they ask, where did he get this?

It can't be from him because we know him. He's the carpenter's son from down the road. And so they take offense at him. It's kind of like when your parents still treat you like you're a teenager.

[5 : 53] Because that's how they know you the most. That's how you've lived the most at their home. We have some parents coming next weekend. Should be good. It's a joke. But it's also how kids often treat parents.

Not long ago we tried to tell our kids that we understand what life is like for them. Because we were kids once too. But they didn't believe us. No, you've just always been adults. We showed them some evidence, some photos.

And even then one of them said, no, you're still dinosaurs. Because that's how apparently they know us. You see, we sometimes treat people according to how we knew them rather than the evidence before us.

Parents sometimes treat adult children as still children. Children sometimes treat parents as dinosaurs. And Jesus' hometown cannot treat Jesus as anything more than how they knew him. The carpenter's son. Even though the evidence is right there before them. Much like people today, really. And so they take offense at Jesus for suggesting he is someone more.

[6 : 53] And so verse 57. They take offense at him, but Jesus said to them, A prophet's not without honor except in his own town and in his own home. And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

You see, they do not recognize Jesus for who he is. That is, they do not believe or have faith in who he really is. And so in turn, Jesus does not do many miracles. But there is another wrong recognition of Jesus in chapter 14.

This time, not from the hometown, but from Herod. You see chapter 14, verse 1. At that time, Herod the Tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus and said to his attendants, This is John the Baptist. He has risen from the dead. That is why miraculous powers are at work in him. Now you might remember John the Baptist who prepared the way for Jesus.

They were both living at the same time, actually. And so what I think Herod is suggesting is that John's spirit has risen from the dead and is now at work in Jesus, giving him power.

[7 : 58] I think that's what's going on there. In fact, there was a superstitious belief at the time, so the historians say, that some spirits could be used to perform miracles.

The most powerful spirit was that of actually a beheaded man. So think headless horseman, if you like. And so Herod thinks John's headless spirit is risen and now at work in Jesus, which is why Jesus can do these things.

And he thinks it's partly because Herod was a superstitious guy, but mainly because of his guilty conscience over what he did to John. We're told that reason in verse 3. See, verse 3 starts with the word for or because, and it gives us a flashback of what Herod did to John in the past and why he

now thinks John is out to get him.

But as we look, actually, verse 3 should start with the word because. It actually starts with the word now in our translation, but it literally starts with the word because. And as we look at this reason, it also shows us the type of king that Herod is.

So point to verse 3. It says, And so Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people because they were considering John a prophet.

[9:23] And so on Herod's birthday, the daughter of Herodias danced for the guests and pleased Herod so much that he promised with an oath to give this child whatever she asked. Prompted by her mother, she said, Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist.

The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted and had John beheaded in prison.

His head was brought on a platter and given to the girl who carried it to his mother. And then John's disciples came and took his body and buried it. Now, do you see what type of king we have here? King Herod. Firstly, he's weak, isn't he? I mean, he cannot make up his own mind to start with. In verse 5, he wants to kill John, verse 5. But in verse 9, he's distressed at having to kill John.

So which is it? Does he want to or does he not want to? He seems to be weak-minded. Also, he promises a child to give her anything she wants for a good dance.

[10:26] I mean, that's not very wise, is it? But he's also a weak ruler because instead of doing what's right, he panders to the people. Kind of like Trump panders to the people's concerns about Islam in America.

So in verse 5, Herod fears the people. Then in verse 9, he fears the dinner guests. And so in the end, we have a picture of a weak king who's ruled by his fears.

And instead of having the power to rule well, to bring life, he takes life, doesn't he? What's more, notice what he's called in verse 1. He's called Herod the Tetrarch.

And the word Tetrarch means governor. You see, this Herod had another father who was also called Herod, Herod the Great. He was the guy who was actually a king. He was around when Jesus was born.

But this Herod here, he's not a king. He's a governor. He's not even a real king. Rather, Herod is a non-king who lacks real power and compassion.

[11:26] So he takes life. Now contrast Herod, the non-king, with what we see of Jesus, the God-king. Have a look at verse 13. When Jesus had heard what had happened, that is what Herod was saying about him in verse 2, when Jesus had heard about that, he withdrew by boat to a solitary place.

Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. And when Jesus landed and saw the large crowd, what did he do? He had compassion on them and healed their sick.

It says, And as evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, This is a remote place and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away so that they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.

But Jesus replied, They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat. But we have only five loaves of bread and two fish, they answered. Bring them here to me, he said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass.

Taking the five loaves and two fish, he looked up to heaven, gave thanks, broke the loaves, gave it to the disciples, and the whole crowd ate and were satisfied. And the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces.

[12:43] You see the contrast with Herod here? Herod takes life. Jesus brings life by healing and feeding. Herod lacks compassion in his week.

Jesus is powerful and shows compassion. It's a complete contrast. In fact, Jesus at this point is acting like a king. Mark adds this next phrase on the next slide.

Thanks, Ryan. It's the next one. From Mark 6, where it says, He had compassion, Mark adds, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. In the Old Testament, the shepherd was often used as an analogy for a king.

Israel's kings were to be shepherds, kings who cared and showed compassion. And Herod was no such king, but Jesus is such a king. For he heals their sick and feeds them.

He displays great power and compassion. And what's more, there's abundant provision. Do you notice how many baskets are left over? Twelve.

[13 : 46] It's an abundance of provision. And the twelve also signifies the twelve tribes of Israel. And it points to the fact that there's something more going on here. Do you remember our first reading?

Israel was in the desert and God fed Israel with bread for them to eat. And they all had enough and were satisfied. And God did this so that on the next slide, from Exodus, next one, maybe?

No, I'm not sure what's happened. Anyway, from the reading it says, so that they might know that he, the Lord, was their God. And so here is Jesus in the desert.

The word lonely places here is literally desert. He's eating the twelve tribes of Israel. And they've all had enough to eat. In other words, Jesus is acting like God.

It's an extraordinary display of his God-like power. I mean, I came home for dinner a couple of weeks ago and there was actually no leftovers. The kids had actually eaten my dinner as well.

[14 : 54] You see, we have trouble feeding three kids, let alone 5,000 men plus women and children. And yet Jesus does it with five loaves and two fish and everyone was satisfied. Twelve full baskets of leftovers.

It's an abundant provision and it's a God-like power. It's meant to remind us of what God did in the desert for Israel back in Exodus. It's meant to show us that here is Jesus, the God-King, who has real power to bring life and the compassion to use that power to give life.

He's a leader worth putting your confidence in. And in case we haven't quite got the picture, we see it again in the next story.

See verse 22? In case we've missed a point, immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of them to the other side while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.

Later that night, he was there alone and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because of the wind that was against them. Shortly before dawn, Jesus went out on them, walking on the lake.

[16 : 05] When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. It's a ghost, they said, and they cried out in fear. But Jesus said, take courage.

It is I. Don't be afraid. You notice what's happening here? Jesus is showing his God-like power again. I mean, walking on water is not normal, is it?

I mean, you can walk on ice, yes, done that, but walked on water? Emits waves and wind? Now, only God can do that. And so I think we do have this verse from Job. Thanks, Ryan.

God alone, says the Bible, stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea. And here is Jesus doing the same thing. What's more, in verse 27, he literally says, take courage.

I am. Don't fear. And the phrase I am is the name God gave himself when he appeared to Moses before he led them out of Egypt.

[17 : 07] You see, Jesus, by his action of walking on the water, by his words of saying, I am, Jesus is showing them that he is God. And this is why they are to take courage and not be afraid because of who he is.

He is God with them. This is what Matthew said at the very beginning of his book. And so on the next slide, I think it is, from Matthew chapter 1, do you remember at his birth, the virgin will be with child and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us.

It's how Matthew ends his book. The very last sentence of his book is truly, Jesus says, truly, I am, there it is again, with you until the very end of the age.

That's why the disciples are to take courage and not be afraid because of who Jesus is. God with them. And Peter senses something of this because it gives him confidence to boldly ask in verse 28.

He says, Lord, if it's you, Peter replied, tell me to come to you on the water. Come, he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came towards Jesus.

[18 : 16] But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and beginning to sink, cried out, Lord, save me. Immediately, Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. You of little faith, he said, why did you doubt?

Here Peter begins to recognize Jesus for who he is. That is, he believes in Jesus such that he knows that at the command of Jesus, he too will be able to walk on water. And yet, this faith wavers such that he begins to sink, doesn't he?

But notice, he still calls out, not to his friends in the boat to save him, but to Jesus to save him. Lord, save me, he says. He still has faith in Jesus to save.

And again, we see the power and compassion of Jesus, this God King, for he reaches down and he brings life, he saves, doesn't he? And with that, they climb into the boat and the disciples rightly recognize Jesus for who he is, which brings us to our final point, the right recognition.

Verse 33, then those who were with him in the boat worshipped him, saying, truly, you are the Son of God. See this climactic recognition of Jesus?

[19 : 27] And only Matthew records it because he especially wants us to see, I think, that Jesus is the God King, not just the Messiah, the King, the Christ, but the God King, the Son of God, who has real power and compassion to bring life.

Now, the disciples probably didn't realize at this point that Jesus was fully God. Their understanding of Jesus grows over time throughout the Gospels. It's kind of two steps forward, one step back kind of thing.

But Matthew wants us to see that Jesus is both King and Emmanuel, God with us. For he acts like God, feeding Israel in the desert, walking on the water, saying, I am.

Matthew wants us to recognize Jesus as the Son of God in the fullest sense, the God King who is power and compassion to give life. for this is what it means to rightly recognize Jesus.

And so what follows is another right recognition, verse 34. When they had crossed over, they landed at Geneseret. And when the men of that place recognized Jesus, they sent word to all the surrounding country.

[20 : 35] People brought all their sick to him and begged him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak. And all who touched it were healed. Again, do you see the contrast with the beginning of our passage today?

Back in Jesus' hometown, they recognized him as simply a carpenter's son. Here, the disciples recognized him as God's son. Before, at the beginning, Herod thought Jesus operated by John's power.

Here, at the end, the people recognized Jesus that he has his own power such that even his clothes can heal. Before, in Jesus' hometown, there was a lack of faith and not many miracles.

Here, it seems there is lots of faith because there are many miracles. Do you see these contrasts that Matthew is doing, the way he structured things? He wants to show us, firstly, that Jesus is the God King, who has real power and compassion to give life in abundance.

And secondly, to show us that to receive this life means recognizing Jesus for who he is, believing or trusting in who he really is. For when we do, he gives us life in abundance.

[21 : 47] That is, he gives us eternal life. Eternal. He can't get much more abundant than eternal. Eternal life starts with every spiritual blessing now and ends with every physical blessing later in heaven.

So the question I need to ask you this morning, firstly, is do you recognize Jesus for who he is?

That is, do you believe in him as the Son of God, the God King, who has real compassion such that he went to the cross to die in your place and mine, to take the punishment we deserve?

That's how much compassion he has. Do you believe he's also got the power such that he rose from the dead and will raise us physically too after our death when he returns?

This is who he is. Do you believe it? That's the question. Do you rightly recognize Jesus? For those of us who have, then we are to have confidence to keep putting our trust in him.

For he is the one with real power and compassion to deliver on his election promises, so to speak, to give abundant life eternally. Which means, as I said, those spiritual blessings now, physical blessings later in heaven.

[23 : 08] And so have confidence in him. President Obama was elected in November 2008. A few months later, a book was released.

That's on the next slide. Barack Obama, Hope for the World. And as good as he has been, he's not been able to bring the change he wanted or that the world needs.

Even his Senate has blocked his bills and proposals from time to time. He seems to have compassion and some power, but despite the initial confidence, hope for the world, that's a big claim, he has not had the power needed to bring such hope, to bring such life to the full.

And everyone knows it, which is why you can now buy that book on Amazon hardcover for one cent. Jesus, on the other hand, is the God-King who has real power and compassion to bring life to

the full.

He's Emmanuel, God with us, to help us through this life. And so we are to have confidence to keep trusting in him. And so no matter who you end up voting for this year, Jesus is the one we are to keep putting our trust in above all else.

[24 : 27] For he alone is the God-King. He alone has the power and compassion to give life and to govern for our good. God-King. So let's pray that we would. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for this picture of who Jesus is.

We thank you that this picture has been made clearer by the contrast to Herod, the non-King. And Father, being reminded about who Jesus is, we pray that you would again fill us with confidence to keep trusting in him with our lives, knowing that he can deliver what he has promised.

Help us to reflect this by the way that we live, living for him as our King. Father, we pray that you might help us in this. In Jesus' name.

Amen.