

The Good News According To Matthew - 27th June 2021

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Preacher: Matt Wallace

[0 : 00] Hey everyone, how we doing? Welcome to today's Sunday session. My name's Matt, the Vigorous and John's. And pretty much all through lockdown, this online stuff has hopefully been one way at least for us to stay connected in our faith and as a wider church together. Indeed, whatever our situation, we trust that God's got what we need for today and the week ahead. Yes, in-person get-togethers would have been a Brucey bonus by now, but at least watching a screen indoors is no bad thing in this season of hay fever hell for some. I'm feeling your pain if you've been sniffing and scratching your way through this week. Whilst here in Burntwood, we've also had the drama of being invaded by swarms of beetles this week. Not John, Paul, George and Ringo, but rather these little brown flying doodlebugs, the splendidly named cockchafer beetle. They're ten a penny in our garden, I can tell you. Well done if you've escaped these lava-laying, lawn-destroying mini-beasts. Sympathies if you've encountered them though in plagues of biblical proportions. Well, allergies and plagues aside, we're going to continue with a mini-series we started last Sunday of looking at each of the four gospel accounts of Jesus' life in turn to see what God might have to say to us through each of these individual biographies. Before we get stuck in with that though, God, we want to acknowledge and express our appreciation for your ongoing presence with us. These are strange times we're continuing to live through and we know you know, God, that we're kind of in this in-between state of maybe getting pretty used to the restricted life that's on offer, while still being unable to do as we please. It's tricky to remain committed to the cause when some folks, whether in public or in private, seem to have given up on social distancing whilst others of us are still necessarily cautious. And yet the prospect of a so-called normal life returning, well it feels itself to be a bit of a weird concept which will take us a while to get used to again when it does eventually arrive. So no matter how settled or unsettled we may be feeling, we want to make a point of saying thank you God for being with us through it all. Thank you that you know the complexity of all that we're processing and it's a comfort to know that you're with us as our guide, our companion and our encourager. And so in turn would you give us a gentleness with each other, keep us sensitive to the needs and nuances of those we share life with so that we can continue to pull together. But also give us an influx of joy, we pray, that we might be able to identify and celebrate whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable. You know, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, may we dwell on and be inspired by such things. At the same time God we want to hold before you those of us, those we know, whose mental health has taken a bit of a battering of late, for those struggling to see light at the end of their tunnel. Equally, we want to hold before you those who are supporting, caring for, grieving perhaps the implications of these pressures as they see loved ones unable to thrive through no fault of their their own. God, whatever level of complication we experience or live with, thank you that you are the comforter, the one who heals the broken hearted, the one who heals the broken minded. Strengthen and sustain us as only you can. And may we trust in your daylight to overcome any darkness, we pray. Speak to us now in ways we can understand, in ways which equip us for the week ahead with you and with each other, we pray. Thank you God. Amen. All right, well, as I said, we're going to continue with a little series we started last week by looking in turn at each of the four Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus. Just as different actors offer different ways to understand Jesus depending on how they play him in various film versions of his life. So too, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John offer us a spread of ways to see Jesus through their eyes as writers and editors of their own biographies of Jesus.

Last week, we looked at Mark's take on Jesus, a Gospel which encourages us to see Jesus as a mysterious miracle man who's always on the move and on a mission, challenging people to work out for themselves just who they think he is.

And the reason we started with Mark last week was because it's reckoned to be the earliest written of the four Gospels. The one which was probably in circulation and going viral within 30 or so years of Jesus' life.

[5 : 47] Today, though, we're going to focus on Matthew's Gospel, generally reckoned to have been written by the Matthew who was one of Jesus' twelve disciples, and a Gospel which came out a few years after Mark's account.

Indeed, it's clear that Matthew was aware of Mark's Gospel because Matthew incorporates and even seems to copy a lot of Mark's material into his own story of Jesus' life.

In fact, about 90% of Mark's Gospel can be found in Matthew. We might think that's blatant plagiarism. In some ways it is, but in ancient times, copying or incorporating someone else's work into your own was seen as a compliment, not a compliment, not a cause for copyright concern. And yet what's interesting is that because we can see where Matthew's copied from Mark, we can also see the other, more original, additional parts of his Gospel that he's chosen to include alongside that Mark material.

Matthew's Gospel is nearly half as Mark's. And so working out these extra parts, these extra stories that Matthew includes, well, it gives us an insight into his priorities as a writer, an insight into what Matthew wants us, his readers, to know about Jesus.

So for example, whereas we saw last week, Mark doesn't bother with any birth or childhood stories about Jesus. Matthew, on the other hand, instead thinks, nah, the background and birth of Jesus is too important, it's too significant to leave out.

[7 : 28] And so he begins his book with a whole chunk of this origin stuff. In fact, Matthew starts his book in a way which on first sight seems a pretty stodgy, even dull way to begin listing generation after generation of Jesus's family tree.

You can read it in Matthew chapter one, starting way back with Abraham, who was the father of Isaac, who was the father of Jacob and so on. Matthew lists Jesus' ancestral line, all sorts of strange names that would be a heck of a score in Scrabble.

You know, people like Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah and Zerubbabel and so on. I mean, Matthew could spell, yeah, but really? A genealogy, a list of names?

If Matthew's trying to grab our attention, he's probably lost most of us already on page one. And yet, despite its somewhat dull appearance, this start to Matthew's Gospel reveals at least two insights into Matthew's mindset as he puts his story together.

Firstly, Matthew is clearly a bit of a numbers geek. You know, not surprising, given that he was a tax collector, you know, an accountant, a riot of parties, no doubt. But we know he was a numbers guy because Matthew points out that he's split this family tree into three lots of 14.

[8 : 57] Abraham to David, David to the Israelites exile in Babylon, and the exile in Babylon all the way down to Joseph, the husband of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Three lots of 14 generations, which makes for 42 generations, which is also six groups of seven. And that means that Jesus' arrival is like a seventh seven.

Seven often being a special holy number in the Bible, like the seventh day of rest in the creation story in Genesis and so on. And so for a number cruncher like Matthew, he obviously gets a kick out of the idea that these numbers indicate something uniquely special about Jesus.

But if all these numbers go over your head a bit, don't worry too much, because they also show that Matthew is a history buff as well. Since by listing these generations in distinct blocks, Matthew's suggesting that there's a plan, an order, a destiny to the fact that Jesus came at just the right place, at just the right time, to just the right family.

Indeed, Matthew's keen to point out that Jesus is a direct descendant of Abraham, father Abraham, you know, the proper smurf of them all, and the great, great, great, great grandfather of King David, the original iconic king of Israel.

[10 : 32] This prestigious family tree is therefore Matthew's way of saying from the word go, look, this Jesus, he's got real pedigree, real history. Real history. Jesus is the culmination of this story of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the ultimate successor to King David.

You know, all of that Old Testament stuff, all of those stories, those prophecies, they all point to and find fulfillment in Jesus. So pay attention to my gospel, says Matthew in chapter one, effectively, because I'm telling you, Jesus is the Messiah, the chosen one we've been waiting for.

You know, with this in mind, thinking about us, it's interesting, but I don't know the extent to which you've thought about the family line or the tree of faith, which has resulted in you being the person you are today.

You know, the circumstances, the people who have led you to being someone who, whether you'd call yourself a Christian or not, is at least open to the reality of God and God's love in your life.

I know for me, thinking of those who have gone before me, I sometimes find myself thinking about my grandma, a woman called Elsie Pratt.

[11 : 55] Here she is, bottle of sherry in hand. It runs in the jeans, this fondness for a drink, I tell you. But when she was alive, and particularly in my late teens, early twenties, I remember distinctly, she'd often tell me that she prayed for me every day, wanting me to know God's provision and purpose in my life.

Probably also because she worried that I might go off the rails a bit too, perhaps. And yet I mention and remember her prayers and care for me, because even though she's now dead and has been for some time, I do get this sense when I think of her, that her prayers for me when she was alive are still bearing fruit in my life to this day, because 20 years later, I do know God's provision and purpose in my life.

And I have just about managed to not go off the rails. Yes, I'm aware her prayers for me have been combined with those of others for me over the years.

You know, my parents, family, friends from church and so on. But there's something significant about the legacy which our prayers, our actions, our words can have on those who will outlive us. Those who we perhaps pass that prayer batten onto further on down the line. You know, when God promised Abraham a blessing of more descendants than he could count stars in the sky, I don't suppose Abraham imagined for one moment that Jesus would be one of those stars, the brightest of those stars, in fact.

[13 : 44] And yet Abraham's prayerful obedience some 2,000 years prior to Jesus, well, it set into motion a line of faith which led to Jesus.

And the legacy of Jesus himself is still affecting and shaping our lives 2,000 years later today. So I think I want to say let's not underestimate the long-term legacy which God can bring out of our faithfulness today.

Seeds we can sow with God's help today, which will continue to bear fruit long after we've left this life in this world ourselves.

And so, whether it's for family, friends, neighbours, I wonder who you might faithfully invest your time, your prayers, your care in, this week and beyond.

Now, knowing that Matthew values both numbers and history, another angle which is worth noting in his gospel is the way in which he not only presents Jesus as the culmination of Abraham and David and so on, but Matthew sees Jesus as something of a new Moses figure too.

[15 : 04] You know, Moses the one who led the ancient Israelites out of the clutches of Pharaoh in Egypt. Now, there are all sorts of parallels between Moses and the Jesus who Matthew presents in his gospel.

They both got a journey out of Egypt, both spent time in the wilderness, 40 days for Jesus, 40 years for Moses. There's miraculous feeding of hungry people, manna in the desert from Moses compared with loaves and fishes from Jesus and so on.

It's worth googling those and other parallels if you want to know more, but for us today, I just want to focus on the way Matthew sees Jesus as the new Moses through the way he teaches the people. You see, if we recall, Moses was famous for giving the people the law, teaching which enabled them to know how to live God's ways.

Most famously, that teaching came in the form of Ten Commandments, which he received from God whilst being on a mountainside. But we also read of these laws, these teachings, as part of the first five books of the Bible.

[16 : 19] Books, traditionally at least, said to have been written by Moses. And so, Matthew does all sorts of clever things with this Moses-Jesus teaching combo in mind.

For example, he presents Jesus delivering his most famous sermon on a mountainside, like Moses. In this case, Jesus' sermon on the mount.

But Matthew also splits Jesus' teaching in his gospel into five distinct blocks. Chapters 5-7, 10, 13, 18, and 23-25.

These five blocks, which echo the five books of Moses in the Old Testament. We know Matthew does this intentionally because at the end of each of these five sections, each time Matthew says something like, when Jesus had finished saying these things, or words to that effect.

You know, there's a definite conclusion to each section of teaching which Matthew wants us to notice. And yet, it's not just a clever numerical or nostalgic thing for Matthew.

[17 : 30] No, rather, Matthew presents Jesus, not simply as a teacher similar to Moses, but ultimately as one far greater than Moses.

He's a fulfilment of all that Moses himself taught, of all that those Old Testament books pointed to. So, as this quote from Matthew chapter 7 continues, we're told, when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching because he taught as one who had authority, and not as the teachers of the law.

You see, Jesus is greater than simply being any old teacher of the law because he had, in Matthew's words, authority.

Where does this authority come from? Well, it's tied in with Matthew's view of Jesus as being this fulfilment of that family tree of faith.

Jesus has authority, not simply because of what he teaches, but because of who he is as a teacher. It's not just do as I say with Jesus.

[18 : 43] It's be as I am. And yet what's interesting is that if we dip into some of the content of Jesus' greatest block of teaching, this Sermon on the Mount, his teaching reflects, not just his own experience, but that of the people he's teaching too.

So, for example, time and again in this famous sermon, Jesus uses everyday objects and situations to make his point, visual aids which would have been really familiar and relatable to by his audience.

So, he talks about the way our faith can sustain us in life as being like salt, an everyday preserver of food in Jesus' day.

He talks about us and our faith being a source of light for others, light which we should ensure shines so others can see it. Jesus talks about murder being forbidden, but extends it to even thinking about wanting someone to disappear.

He talks about the need to reconcile with each other rather than fight and hold grudges. Jesus highlights the importance of not committing adultery, but then raises the bar further by pointing out the need to not even look at someone else in a way which lusts after them.

[20 : 10] What else? Well, Jesus speaks of not storing up treasure on earth, but in heaven, treasure rooted in generosity and in sharing with those in need. He compares the way God enables the flowers to grow beautifully with how much more God will enable us to flourish when we put our faith in him.

He talks of the need to not judge others, likening it to the need to remove the plank of wood in our own eye before we try to remove the speck of sawdust from someone else's.

He teaches on the need to ask God to help us bear good fruit in our lives, not keeping any goodness for ourselves, but being able to bless others by the goodness which grows out of our lives.

He likens us obeying his teaching to a builder who wisely constructs his house on a foundation of rock, whereas those who ignore Jesus' wisdom, well, he likens them to those who foolishly build their home on a foundation of sand with all the instability and collapse which inevitably comes with that.

And so on and so on. But do you see, time and again, Matthew presents Jesus as using everyday examples from people's lives to illustrate the difference that God's ways can make in how life is lived.

[21 : 37] Indeed, I'd say Jesus' authority as a teacher comes not only from who he is, comes as well from Jesus' knowledge of who we are too.

He understands the everyday stuff we experience, the feelings we have, the challenges we face, the struggles we wrestle with. You know, God's creation, this world, has never ceased to be the

very good thing which God declared it was way back in Genesis.

Yes, we mess up, and not everything we cultivate in this life is in line with God's good ways. You know, far from it. But the Jesus, the God who Matthew presents to us, is someone who is rooted in real life, connected to culture, committed to community, one who loves and cares for this world.

I'd suggest, therefore, that if we aspire to follow Jesus, we too would do well to be immersed in the everyday life which surrounds us. Not seeing the world as something which will pollute us and stick into our own little God squad or anything, but rather as a gift for us to engage with in ways which bring the light and love of God into every arena, every aspect, every avenue.

And so again, I wonder for you, as this next season approaches, how might you, how might we, rekindle, rediscover, recommit ourselves to truly living alongside others, seeking to be salt and light in our communities, preserving what's good, adding flavour through our friendships and so on, but also illuminating any darkness as we let God's light shine through us for all to see.

[23 : 37] Yes, we may have been locked down, perhaps lost our confidence or become somewhat de-socialised over time, but maybe a lesson from Matthew's Jesus is for us to ask God to help us to be the salt of the earth, as he calls us in Matthew 5, to be the light for others that helps them navigate their way, God's way, through their life.

You know, ask God, seek God's guidance and let's maybe see what doors, what opportunities arise for new ways for us to be fully present with people once again.

And this leads us on to a final key truth which Matthew wants to convey to us in his gospel, the idea that in Jesus, God is with us in every sense of the word.

You see, if we go back to the early chapters of Matthew's gospel, as we said, he deliberately includes the birth story of Jesus. Jesus, all things Christmas. There's no chestnuts roasting on an open fire, I grant you, but there are angels and stars and wise men, you know, they're all in there. And yet, arguably, the key message of Matthew's version of Jesus' birth story is that Jesus' arrival fulfills an Old Testament prophecy from the book of Isaiah, a prophecy which Matthew makes a point of summarising like this.

[25 : 12] All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet. The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us.

That, for Matthew, is central to who Jesus is. The one who fulfils our family tree, the one who has come to get visibly stuck in alongside us, the one who takes the everyday stuff of our lives and brings eternal truth out of it by his teaching.

And what's interesting is that just as Matthew begins his gospel with this truth of Jesus being God with us, he ends with it too. So here's the final concluding verses of Matthew's whole book.

Then Jesus came to them, the disciples, and said, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. I am with you always, says Jesus, the God who is with us from the beginning to the very end.

[26 : 42] Indeed, Matthew doesn't bother to include Jesus' ascension back to heaven in his gospel, not because it didn't happen, but because he wants us as readers to dwell on Jesus' presence with us.

An ongoing presence through the Holy Spirit who is here with us now. And that truth, that through the Spirit this same Jesus is with us always, well that, I would suggest, should give us confidence for the road ahead.

Not that it's necessarily going to be straightforward or simple or without its ups and downs, but rather that through it all, God is with us.

And so may you and may I be rooted in and reliant on that truth as we journey through this life with Jesus.

Indeed, with the ongoing presence and faithfulness of God in mind, we've got a classic hymn which some of the band have put together this week, one whose words have been a great source of comfort and encouragement for millions of people over the years.

[28 : 02] It's the hymn, Great is Thy Faithfulness. Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father.

There is no shadow of turning with Thee. Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not.

As Thou hast been, Thou forever will be. Great is Thy faithfulness, Great is Thy faithfulness, Morning by morning, New mercies I see.

All I have needed, Thy hand hath provided. Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest, Sun, moon and stars in their courses above.

[29 : 49] Join with all nature in manifold witness, To Thy great faithfulness, Mercy and love.

Great is Thy faithfulness, Great is Thy faithfulness, Morning by morning, New mercies I see.

All I have needed, Thy hand hath provided. Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.

at theailed■■■■■ for and■ ■■■écum5-4 ball ■■■■■■■odus from packet, Pardon for sin and a peace that endures Thy own dear presence to cheer and to guide Strength for today, a bright hope for tomorrow Blessings all mine with ten thousand beside

Great is Thy faithfulness, great is Thy faithfulness Morning by morning new mercies I see All I have

needed Thy hand hath provided Great is Thy faithfulness, great is Thy faithfulness Lord unto Thee

Good stuff Good stuff We've got an extra time session should you wish to follow up the thoughts

from here with some questions Some added material in there as well which may help to flesh out some of the things we've been looking at today

[32 : 50] Let's hope it's not extra time and penalties though for England against Germany on

Tuesday as we all know which way that'll end up if so But footballing fates this week aside We'll be

back next Sunday when we'll get under the skin of Luke's gospel to see what God might have to

give us through that Until then A word of blessing over us as we go on our way And so may the

blessing of God The one who blesses the poor in spirit Who blesses those who mourn Who blesses

those who hunger and thirst for righteousness May the blessing of God the Father, the Son and the

Holy Spirit Be with you and be with me As we seek together To serve God And serve one another

Both now and always Amen