

Part 6 - The Messiah's Mission

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[0 : 00] We would turn to the Gospel according to Matthew in chapter 11. Our focus is going to be on the first six verses, but I would very much like to read up to the end of verse 19 as it sets it in its proper context.

So this is Matthew chapter 11, beginning at verse 1. Now hear God's word. When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities.

Now when John heard in prison about these deeds of Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?

And Jesus answered them, Go and tell John what you hear and see. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.

And blessed is the one who is not offended by me. As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John. What did you go out into the wilderness to see?

[1 : 29] A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are kings in houses.

What then did you go out to see? A prophet? A prophet? Yes, I tell you. And more than a prophet, this is he of whom it is written. Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.

Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist, yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear. But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates.

[2 : 46] We played the flute for you, and you did not dance. We sang a dirge, and you did not mourn. For John came, neither eating nor drinking, and they say he has a demon.

The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, look at him, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.

Well, may God bless that reading, and may he bless us with understanding what he has said. So as we come this evening to part six of our studies in the original mission, or the studies called Original Mission, we remember, hopefully, that last time we looked at Israel's mission, the mission that God gave to Israel, Israel, and our study this week continues with that mission, only now the mission is in the Messiah.

Israel were to be a light unto the nations, and we saw last time that that was a precursor to Jesus being the light of the world.

So there's Jesus coming is to do what Israel were meant to do. And the reason I put it that way is because Israel never fully realized, in their terms, never really fulfilled the mission of God that they were given.

[4 : 25] They were a covenant people of God, and as a covenant people, you are meant to represent God on earth to the other nations. But what happened in Israel is they often reflected the other nations around them that they were meant to be witnesses to.

And there's a message there, of course, for the church today. And so because Israel did not reflect God to the nations, they were not a light unto the nations that they were meant to be, Jesus comes and does what Israel failed to do.

Jesus does not adopt the practices of those around him, but Israel did adopt the practices of those around him. Jesus obeyed his father's will, whereas the nation of Israel often obeyed, or at least devoted themselves to idols of other nations.

And so the comparison, at least the attention is drawn as a distinction between Israel who could not do what they were called to do, and Jesus who does do, does accomplish everything that Israel failed to do.

But Jesus does even more than that because Jesus accomplishes salvation. Now, before we rush too far ahead, and we get ourselves all into a muddle, there's something that we need to reflect on in order to understand what's coming up.

[5 : 57] That when Jesus was crucified, there were two men either side him. So in the eyes of the world, you're looking at three men on the cross.

What other distinction can be made? They all look pretty beat up. They all look is that they're bloodied. Okay?

They all look in pain. And they're all hanging there on the cross. And so in the eyes of the world, you see three men crucified. And so we ought to be able to realize the importance of being able to identify which one's saving us.

I mean, if you were there on that day looking at three men dying on the cross, it's pretty important to know which one you need to be trusting. It's pretty important to know which one is actually dying to save.

It's pretty important to be able to identify what and who is accomplishing what. And so as we think of the Messiah's mission, we need to think about it in two terms primarily.

[7 : 06] The first one is identity. And the second one is accomplishment. Because only the true Messiah can accomplish. And therefore, you have to identify the true Messiah in order to follow him.

Okay? As you look at the cross, if you were there on that day, how am I to tell the difference between this man dying on the cross and Jesus dying on the cross?

Well, the way that you're meant to understand it is everything that goes into it up to that point. And of course, Jesus is said by one of the thieves on the cross, didn't deserve to be up there.

Okay? The thief understood, or at least one of them understood, that he was able to make an important distinction that Jesus on the cross was different than him and the other thief who were on crosses beside Jesus.

And so as we consider the Messiah's mission, we need to identify who the Messiah is and then identify that Jesus is that Messiah. If we're going to follow someone, okay, we need to make sure that we're following the promised Messiah.

[8 : 17] And if Jesus is that Messiah, we need to tie in things that are true about Jesus with things that are true about the Messiah in the Old Testament. And if they overlap, if they join, if they mirror each other, then it seems that we have the right person.

because only the right person can accomplish salvation. Only the right person can save men and women, boys and girls from their sin.

Only the right person can save us from the judgment to come. And here we are putting all of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, hopefully, because we really do believe that he is the promised Messiah, that he is the fulfillment of God's promises.

And so what we begin to notice is that this is someone who must be very important. Jesus is the Messiah, but the question is, how did you arrive at that conclusion?

You believe that Jesus is the Messiah, but how do you know he's the Messiah? How do you put that person with the person that was promised throughout the whole of the Old Testament?

[9 : 32] Well, the way Mark does it is he divides his gospel into two halves, into two, and there you have two halves. The first half answers the question, who is it?

Who is this man? And the second question answers the question, why this man must die? Okay? So Mark, verses chapter one through to eight, is asked or answering the question, who is this man?

Who is this man Jesus? And in the second half of Mark, it's answering why this man, Jesus, must die. Now Mark draws our attention to Jesus in that way.

Matthew does it in a different way. Luke again does it differently. And John also does it differently. But it doesn't matter which gospel you read, you will arrive at the conclusion that Jesus, point for point, matches the Messiah that was promised in the Old Testament.

And that this person who does die and rises again is what God promised would happen. And so our faith in him is grounded in the right person.

[10 : 43] So how do we identify Jesus as the Messiah? So identifying Jesus. The disciples had trouble with this. On one occasion, they asked, who is this that can calm the wind and the waves?

They had never seen anything like this before. They knew what the Old Testament said. There's only one person in the Old Testament who can actually calm the wind and the waves according to the Psalms, and that's God.

There's only one person who can do it. And yet they're looking at Jesus in the boat. They're waking him up because he's fast asleep with his head on a pillow. And as he wakes up, he rebukes them for their little faith.

And then he rebukes the wind and the waves. He tells the wind and the waves to be calm, to be still. And this extraordinary event leads them to conclude that this must be an extraordinary person because we've never seen anything like this.

So then they ask the question, who is this that can calm the wind and the waves? And so from their question, they're following a person, Jesus, who they don't yet fully understand.

[11 : 55] They're still learning about Jesus as they're following Jesus. That Jesus was the one who told them to drop their nets and come and I'll make you fishes of men. And they go ahead and do it.

And yet they're following a person that they haven't fully understood. And many a Christian once saved finds themselves in that exact same place.

You don't know everything about Jesus before you follow him. Okay? We learn more about Jesus as we follow him just like the disciples did here.

They learn more by hearing. They learn more by seeing. By hearing more, they hear more. By seeing more, they see more. And they build up a knowledge of who this person is.

And having read the Old Testament, they would go, this looks a lot like the Messiah. They ask questions of Jesus and Jesus, every now and then, turns that questioning onto them.

[12 : 56] And he asked them a question. And so in Mark 8, where you have the turning point between who am I and why I must die, Jesus asked the questions to the disciples regarding everyone else.

And he says, well, who does everyone else say that I am? And of course, the disciples come up with a load of names of what people say concerning who Jesus is.

Well, he could be this person, he could be that, he could be Elijah, he could be John the Baptist, right? He could be those people. But then Jesus, in order to get to the point, says to them, but who do you say that I am?

Because Jesus and we hopefully understand the difference between what other people think about who Jesus is and what you think about who Jesus is.

Okay? Jesus wants to know what you think about him. Jesus wants to know who you think he is. He also wants to know what they think he is, but he's less concerned about you knowing what they think.

[13 : 57] He's more concerned about what you think about him. And so the disciples are unsure, but Peter, being Peter, says you are the Christ. Bingo.

Jesus then says that he has to die and Peter says, no Lord. He identifies who Jesus is. He identifies that Jesus is the Christ.

He is the Messiah, but then he does not relate this to the accomplishment that the Messiah must achieve. He does not relate this to the fact that the Messiah must die.

He identifies Jesus as the Messiah, but what he doesn't see is what the Messiah has come to actually do. So he's right, but he's right up and to a point.

And when it comes to why this person, Christ, must die, Peter doesn't understand. He doesn't see why. And yet this is the way things are going.

[14 : 59] In Matthew chapter 11, which is the section we read, John tells his disciples to go and speak to Jesus and this is to do with the identity of Jesus.

He tells them to go and ask Jesus and ask him this question, are you he who is to come or shall we look for another? See, what John understood is that if Jesus isn't the Messiah, then we need to carry on looking.

But, if Jesus is the Messiah, then we don't need to carry on looking. And that's the question that still remains today.

Okay? You think of every Jew who's still waiting for the Messiah. What they, the position they've got themselves into is they ask the same question perhaps of Jesus, are you the Messiah or shall we look for another?

And they come to the conclusion he isn't. And so, they keep looking. John understands the importance of the question. If I, if you are, then I don't need to look any further.

[16 : 09] And so, Jesus tells John's disciples to go back and tell him what they see and hear. Jesus doesn't give them a direct answer, you'll notice. He actually says at the end of verse 4, go and tell John what you hear and see.

He doesn't say go and tell John, this is my answer, go and tell John. He says, go and tell John what you hear for yourself and see for yourself. Go and tell John that the blind see.

Go and tell John that the lame walk, that lepers are cleansed, that the deaf hear, that the dead are raised up, that the poor have good news preached to them.

And blessed is the one who's not offended by me. Why would Jesus draw John's disciples their attention to those things?

Why those things in particular? Well, because Isaiah says in Isaiah 53, sorry, 35, that when the Messianic age comes, they're the type of things that you should notice.

[17 : 21] When the Messianic age comes, meaning when the Messiah comes, it is the age of the Messiah, one of the things that will begin to happen is that the dead will be raised up, the deaf will hear, the blind will see, lepers will be cleansed, the poor will have good news preached to them.

So Jesus understands what identifies him as the Messiah, and he's just going around healing people and preaching God's word and making the deaf hear in the blind see.

And what we are meant to understand as New Testament Christians is that this is to identify who Jesus is. That's the primary function.

The primary function of Jesus healing a deaf man, though it benefits the deaf man, is not actually primarily for him, but rather to identify Jesus as the Messiah.

When Jesus heals the sick and causes paralyzed men to take up their bed and walk and causes lepers to be clean, these signs and these miracles, these very evidences of God, are to identify, as Isaiah rightly says, what you will notice when the Messiah comes.

[18 : 39] Now it's true that Jesus can heal, and it's true that Jesus does heal, and it's true that all these people are benefited by him doing it, but what is meant to be noticed by Jesus doing all those things, hence why he tells the disciples of John to pay attention to them, is because they are the very identifiers that identify Jesus as the Messiah.

These are the signs that identify not only the messianic age, but the identity of the Messiah, and of course, they're being done by this man, Jesus.

And so go away and put the two together. Go away and understand that if these things are done by this person, then this person must be the Messiah. It's really quite straightforward and simple, and there's no reason to complicate it, but that's what is happening there.

On another occasion, to make the point abundantly clear, Jesus led Peter, James, and John up a high mountain at which he was transfigured before them at the top.

Then all of a sudden, Moses and Elijah appeared before them also. So what you have on the top of this mountain is Jesus transfigured Moses and Elijah up there with him.

[20 : 03] Now the important thing to know here is why Moses and why Elijah? Why not Noah and Abraham? Why not Isaiah? Why not Jeremiah? Why not Jonah?

Why Moses and Elijah? Well, every word is carefully placed and the reason it's Moses and Elijah is because Moses represented the law of God and every one of God's people lived by the law of God, or at least they should have lived by the law of God.

That's what they followed. That's what they listened to. Elijah represents the prophets. God gave his words to prophets to speak to his people, and everybody lived according to what the prophets taught of old.

The prophet Isaiah said this, the prophet Elijah said this, and so these prophets are ones who declared the word of God to God's people. So God's people have always lived up to this point in the revelation of the law and the prophets.

That's what they've done. And yet at the top of this mountain, God speaks out of a cloud that's shining, and he says, listen to my son. If you read the account for yourself, what you'll notice is that at the very top, when God speaks, the one thing that he has to say is, this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased, listen to him.

[21 : 29] Why listen to him? Is God doing away with the law and the prophets? No, not at all. Jesus affirms that God doesn't do away with the law and the prophets. But it is to identify the authority of Jesus.

It is to identify the power of Jesus. It is to identify where God has placed his revelation. And Hebrews 1 says that in these latter days, okay, the final revelation is in Jesus.

And that's what we see at the Mount of Transfiguration. So again, God is identifying to the disciples in the presence of Elijah and Moses that this is where the revelation comes from.

Listen to him, my son, Jesus. So you begin to build up a picture throughout the Gospels to understand that Jesus is quite clearly the Messiah promised.

That everything that we are looking for, Jesus is that person. Then, Jesus' mission, the Messiah's mission, is not only to make his identity known or see who the Messiah is in Jesus, but now we have to recognize that Jesus speaks.

[22 : 47] The Messiah's mission is one where he speaks and God has already told us to listen to him. So the Messiah speaks and we are to listen. And everything that the Messiah says, Jesus says, is of course consistent with all the promise regarding the Messiah in the Old Testament.

And so Jesus comes proclaiming the kingdom of God. He's calling sinners to repent and believe. He's calling the lost to come back. He is seeking and saving the lost.

He is forgiving their sins and he gives his life a ransom for many. All of these additional things, or rather not additional things, but all these other things that we see identify Jesus as the Messiah.

And so when we pay attention to the words of Jesus, we begin to see that they're very deliberate. Jesus doesn't say something accidentally. The parables are deliberate.

The parables have a way of communicating something in a particular way so that they are heard by some and not understood by others.

[23 : 59] Jesus, of course, has the power to heal people and cast out demons and unclean spirits. He has the power to forgive sins and, of course, in the end, he accomplishes it on the cross.

We learn much from the actions of Jesus, but you're meant to understand that you're to learn much from the words of Jesus. You want to be a follower? Well, you have to listen.

If you're following, the only way you can make sure you're following properly is by listening. You listen, you learn, and that's how you follow.

Now, when Jesus tells parables, by his own admission, he tells parables in order not to conceal meaning in the sense that Jesus is being arbitrary, but rather to point out the idolatry that is found in the people that he is speaking to.

One of the key issues in idolatry which we have seen is that when people worship something other than God, they become deaf, dumb, and blind to the things of God spiritually.

[25 : 07] They cannot hear what Jesus is saying and make sense of it because their heart is being given over to another idol, or to an idol, sorry. Okay?

They're unable to listen to Jesus because perhaps they love themselves more. Perhaps they love reason rather more than truth.

Perhaps they love this carved image more than the living God. I mean, it could be a number of different things, but one of the spiritual conditions you find that comes with idolatry is that you become spiritually deaf, spiritually blind, to the things of God.

And parables highlight that. And it highlights it even to the disciples, which Jesus was concerned for them. Hence why he has to say, do I have to explain this to you as well?

In other words, he's pointing out to the disciples that if he has to explain a parable to them which they should be able to understand, then their hearts, like the others, are more caught up in a form of idolatry than they realize.

[26 : 13] Because if they weren't, they would be able to spiritually discern the very presence of God amongst them. But because they can and they need things explaining to them, then it's an identity of their sinfulness, the idolatry in their own life.

There's a few parents here this evening. Let me just point out that if you have trouble with your children listening to you, and especially listening to you as you're explaining the word of God to them, or you're trying to exercise a form of authority by using God's word as you should, and your children aren't listening, don't think that that's just an issue of not being able to pay attention.

It could be because their heart is loving and idle. Okay? We don't listen to God, whoever it comes from, whether it comes from the pastor, or comes from a parent, or comes from someone in a Bible class.

We don't listen when our heart is given over into another direction. It's not just about we're not paying attention, but rather the fact that we can't pay attention because the sinfulness of idolatry blinds us, deafens us purposely so that we would not hear what God has to say.

And so Jesus points this out to his own disciples. Of course, he explains the parables so that they would come and understand, which is a measure of his grace, a measure of his mercy.

[27 : 42] And in the parables, Jesus teaches about the kingdom of God. He teaches about salvation. He teaches about the Christian life. He teaches about the judgment to come. He teaches that you are to choose wisdom and stay away from folly.

He also highlights, really importantly, that all people are sinful, and therefore, you know, it's not, it's not, well, I need saving, or you need saving, but I don't, as the Pharisees often thought, no, no, you all need the mercy of God.

You all need to receive it. And so the Messiah's mission is purposeful. It is deliberate. Every parable spoken, every word declared, it is meant something.

Why Jesus must die is, of course, another question which needs to be answered. But, of course, we see it in Jesus coming to seek and to save the last and give his life a ransom for many.

And, of course, that phrase needs to be understood because, as we have already learned, God didn't just send Jesus just for Israel. He came for many.

[28 : 53] Not just them, but for many. In other words, Israel always thought the Messiah came just for us. Okay? No, no, no. No, Jesus came for many. Not just you, but many more.

And Jesus is the light of the world. He brings salvation to the world. And too many people in Israel thought, well, he's air Messiah. He's come to do for us.

And you get glimpses throughout the Gospels. My favorite, of course, is the Syrophenician woman who says, yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that falls from the table. She got it.

She understood it. She understood that Jesus did not just come for Jews. But she understood that God's blessing was for people who were not Jews. People like her.

And yet the Pharisees, who should have understood, didn't get it. They just didn't get it. So Jesus must die on the cross because he's been forgiven sins, forgiving people's sins throughout the Gospels.

[29 : 55] And we must stop and ask the question, well, how do you do it? How do you actually forgive? And of course, when we get towards the end of the Gospels in their narratives, we begin to understand that the Messiah accomplishes salvation, okay, by saving the very people who crucifies him.

The Messiah accomplishes salvation by dying on the cross by the very people, for the very people who put him on the cross.

Acts clearly points out that while it was completely within the definite plan of God, it was by the hands of sinful men that crucified him. And Jesus is put on the cross by those sinful hands and yet reaches out to them in the forgiveness of the cross.

Jesus is saving the people who are crucifying him. And there's the measure, or rather the insight of not only people's sinfulness and the fact that they're blind to who Jesus is, if they had understood who Jesus was, says Paul, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

They would not have done it, but they did not see who he was, and so they crucified him. And yet Jesus being crucified in that manner saves the people who are blind, spiritually blind, spiritually deaf.

[31 : 23] Jesus then is the Lord. Jesus appears after his resurrection, and Thomas, one worth pointing out, bows down saying, my Lord and my God.

He understands. He understands that Jesus is the Messiah. He understands that all the promises are yes and amen in him. We recognize that as we now look at the cross, that we see three men up there, but we see only one who's saving.

That we see three men up there in pain, but we see only one who has the torment of carrying our sin, of dealing with our sin.

We see three men, but we see in those three men one who is the Savior of the world, one who is the Messiah. So we see, and yet we see more because of what we've understood.

understood. We identify that this person, Jesus, can save. That this person, Jesus, can accomplish salvation. So here's a few considerations as we close.

[32 : 32] Obviously, more can be understood about Jesus than what I've just said. Paul, for instance, says that Jesus is the second Adam, the one who brings in the new creation.

We could talk about that. We could learn about that. We would know more about Jesus. But our focus this evening is to focus on the fact that he is the Messiah. To understand that when you believe in Jesus, you're believing in all the promises of the Old Testament.

You have identified that this person, Jesus, is the promised, is the person promised in the Old Testament. That your faith is not in any of those three men, but it's in the right man.

It's in the one who can save. We draw our attention to the things that our attentions have been drawn to. Jesus is Lord.

He has all authority. And so, if we're to understand Jesus today, it requires no less of an understanding. And yet, when we explain Jesus perhaps to others, we begin with Jesus.

[33 : 36] But when Jesus explains himself to others, he begins with Moses. Jesus goes all the way back with Moses, you listen to the road to Emmaus. Okay, after the resurrection, Jesus is explaining to, Jesus comes along with two people with their head bowed down because, you know, they're miserable and upset and, you know, they're sad and Jesus has died and Jesus appears to them, but they don't recognize that it's Jesus all of a sudden.

And Jesus begins to open up the scriptures to them and he says, and beginning with Moses. Jesus gets to Jesus, not by beginning with Jesus, but by beginning with Moses.

He begins with all those promises, all those things that will identify him as the one who fulfills the promises of God. So, here's the exhortation.

Remember that every promise of God is yes and no and in Christ Jesus. There is no promise yet to be fulfilled. Well, in time there is, but not outside of Jesus.

We recognize that Jesus is the Messiah because we are able to draw conclusions between what is true about him and what is true concerning all the promises.

[34 : 52] We also learn that a partial hardening has come upon Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles have come in. God has a marvelous plan that Israel have been stopped from seeing that Jesus is the Messiah until that time the fullness of the Gentiles have come in and then God will pull out his mercy, pour out his mercy again.

As Paul says, oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments. That's humbling. You're not going to be able to get to the bottom of it.

His ways are, his judgments are unsearchable. That doesn't mean that we can't know anything, but it means that the depth of them we cannot get to the bottom of and his ways are inscrutable.

The Messiah's mission is to save. The Messiah's mission is to bring in the kingdom of God. And though the Messiah's mission is clearly different now, it still continues through you.

Jesus said, I will be with you even to the end of the age. It follows then that if we are clear or clearer on who Jesus is, then our conviction will be stronger.

[36 : 10] If we understand who Jesus is better, then we're able to make him known in a much more, much clearer way. We recognize that no one else can do what Jesus can do.

And so we don't go looking for anyone else. But that doesn't stop many in the world from looking beyond Christ. There must be more. There must be someone else who can do this without all of those conditions, without that having to happen.

No, there is no other way. If we think then back to our first study on the mission of God, we might just remember the first promise concerning Jesus, that Jesus would be the one who would bring an end to sin, that Jesus would be the one who had crushed the head of the serpent.

And on the cross, we hear Jesus say, it's finished. It's done. It's all accomplished. The Gospels are the written identity of the Messiah.

And that Messiah is seen in the person of Jesus. The Messiah is the only one who can accomplish what God promised. And the Messiah is Jesus.

[37 : 24] Amen.