

## **Do You Know My Jesus? Studies in the Gospel of Matthew**

### **By Bob Young**

#### **Introduction**

How does Matthew describe Jesus?

- First, in terms the Jews would know and appreciate. But these are words also for us.
- Second, he begins with identity narratives to answer the “who is” question. These narratives at the beginning of Matthew are unique, distinct, attention-getting.
  - The Genealogy, orderly, of God, attached to King David, genealogy of a king
  - The name: Jesus
  - The description: Emmanuel (with us)
  - The title: Christ/Messiah/Anointed One, not just any king, long-awaited king from God, contrast with the usurping king
  - The validation at his baptism: Beloved Son
  - The validation in his temptation
- Third, with various organizational clues and themes
  - Matt 4:17; 16:21, from that time on.....
  - Teaching/preaching/healing (Messiah tasks), king in the kingdom tasks
  - Dying (not a Messiah task in the eyes of the Jews), suffering servant task

#### **In Matthew’s Gospel, what does it mean to “know Jesus”?**

##### **HE SHOWS US WHAT IT MEANS TO LIVE OUT THE REALITY OF THE KINGDOM**

In the literature of the church that remains from the first three centuries, the Gospel most often referred to is Matthew's. Its place as the first Gospel probably reflects the church's view of its priority theologically, as a connector to the OT, rather than chronologically.

In order to understand Matthew’s teachings, especially his teaching about Jesus, it is helpful to begin at the end. The Great Commission (28:16-20) has been called the key to the Gospel. Several important themes are brought together in these verses.

First is a focus on the resurrected Christ. Each of the Gospels portrays a facet of Jesus' life and ministry. Prominent in Matthew is the picture of Jesus as the Christ, the Messianic Son of God who is both suffering servant and risen King. As we have already noted from the “internal outline”, he comes preaching kingdom and willing to suffering to make it reality.

At his baptism Jesus told John that his ministry was "to fulfill all righteousness" (3:15). Righteousness in Matthew is a term meaning covenant faithfulness and obedience to God. An angel told Joseph that Jesus "will save his people from their sins" (1:21). Later Jesus told his disciples that he had come "to give his life as a ransom for many" (20:28). The prayer of this righteous Son in Gethsemane, "not my will but yours be done" (26:39), was fulfilled on the cross and affirmed by the Roman soldier's confession, "Surely he was the Son of God" (27:54). Christ fulfilled all righteousness. He was perfectly obedient to the Father's will. The resurrected Christ possessing the regal authority of God (13:37-42; 26:64), appeared to the disciples to commission them.

Another aspect of this last narrative of Matthew’s Gospel is the affirmation of Christ's spiritual presence with the disciples. Jesus assured the disciples, "I will be with you" (28:20). The first of a series of OT texts cited by Matthew is Isaiah's prophecy of Immanuel (Isa. 7:14). Its

significance is made clear in the phrase "God with us" (1:23; Isa. 8:10). Christ's presence continues. Jesus' promise to the disciples, "Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (18:20), also confirmed his continuing presence. Matthew wanted his readers to know that the regal ascended Christ was also spiritually present with his disciples (cf. Eph. 1:22-23).

This idea of presence relates to Matthew's teaching about the people of God, in the NT, the church. Alone among the Gospels Matthew used the word "church" (Gr. ekklesia, 16:18; 18:17). Not without reason has this been called "a pastoral Gospel." Matthew sees that what Jesus teaches the disciples applies to the church. Of great importance in this regard is the commission to make disciples of all nations (28:19).

From that time on: Jesus came Jesus came preaching and teaching and healing. Jesus preached the good news (4:23) to Jews (Galilee and Judea, 4:25) and Gentiles (Decapolis, 4:25). His disciples and the church which he founded (16:18) were to do the same. John's Gospel records Jesus' self-confession, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). Matthew, on the other hand, underscored the disciples' missionary responsibility by recording Jesus' statement, "You are the light of the world" (5:14). The disciples, and the church, continue the ministry of Christ.

They were to make disciples of all nations. Although Israel was temporarily displaced as God's chosen instrument of ministry (21:43), this displacement was not permanent (19:28; 23:39). However hard of heart most Jews might be to the gospel, the mission to Israel was to continue alongside the mission to the Gentiles until Christ returned at the end of the age (10:23; 28:20; cf. Rom. 11:11-12, 25-26).

Making disciples involved more than preaching the gospel, however. Matthew recorded Jesus' commission to make disciples by "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (28:20). A disciple was to be righteous, to be obedient to God.

The model for the disciple was Jesus, the perfect Son who fulfilled all righteousness by rendering complete obedience to the Father's will (4:4, 10). The same righteousness was to characterize the disciple (5:20). Obedience to God was to be a priority in the disciple's life (6:33). Complete devotion to the Father was the goal (5:48).

The will of the Father was made known in the teaching of Jesus. Matthew devotes considerable portion of his Gospel to the record of Jesus' teaching. In addition to five distinct units (5-7, 10, 13, 18, 23-25), Jesus' instruction is featured elsewhere in the book (e.g., 9:12-17).

But Matthew is under no illusion that knowledge alone would lead to righteousness. Teaching is essential, but it has to be met with faith. Despite their scrupulous observance of the law, Jesus had condemned the Pharisees for lack of faith (23:23). The righteousness recognized by God is first of all inward and spiritual (6:4, 6, 18; cf. Rom. 2:28-29). Those who believed in Jesus had their lives transformed (8:10; 9:2, 22, 29). Not so much the greatness but the presence of faith was important (17:20).

Where faith exists, however, it might be weak and wavering. Matthew reminds his readers that even in the presence of the resurrected Christ, some of the disciples doubted (28:17). Frequently Jesus addresses the disciples as those of "little faith" (6:30; 8:26; 16:8). This is exemplified in Peter's experience. He boldly responded to Jesus' call to come to him on the water but then wavered in his faith because of the fearful circumstances (14:30). Without the intervention of Jesus, he might have perished.

### HE SHOWS US AND TEACHES US THE NATURE OF LIFE IN THE KINGDOM

The five major teaching sections which Matthew records focus on one thing: life in God's kingdom. The way and the walk are the subject, just as in the Torah of the OT.

Sermon on Mount (5-7)

The first commission, the sending forth (10)

kingdom of heaven parables (13)

life in kingdom present (18)

life in kingdom future (24-25)

HE LEADS US IN KINGDOM LIVING

Matthew shows us the application. Jesus warned his disciples of the persecution facing those who proclaimed the gospel (5:11-12; 10:24-25), opposed by both Jew and Gentile (10:17-18). The natural response in the face of such opposition was fear (10:26-31). Self-preservation led to denial of Christ (10:32-33). This was what Peter had done at Jesus' trial (26:69-74).

Jesus responded to Peter's failure on the sea by rescuing him. In the same way, failures of faith among the disciples and the sin that resulted should be met not with condemnation but with forgiveness and restoration (18:10-14).

Kingdom references occur throughout the Gospel. The beginning verses link Jesus to David the king (1:1, 6). Unlike the other Gospels, Matthew uses the phrase "kingdom of heaven" far more frequently (33 times) than the phrase "kingdom of God" (4 times). The expressions are probably equivalent with a difference in emphasis. The "kingdom of heaven" may stress the spiritual nature of the kingdom.

The term "kingdom" has a spiritual and a physical aspect. The spiritual aspect was present in the ministry of Jesus (12:28) but the physical consummation is anticipated at his return (19:28). The kingdom of heaven about which Jesus preached was entered by repentance (4:17). Forgiveness was based ultimately on Christ's death (26:28).

The ministry of the kingdom carried on by Christ is continued by the church (16:18). The Spirit who enabled Christ to carry out his work (12:28) will enable the disciples to continue it (10:20). The ministry of the church is a phase of the kingdom program of God until the "end of the age" (28:20) comes. The king will separate the righteous from the unrighteous (7:21-23), the sheep from the goats (25:31-46), the wheat from the tares (13:37-43). Those who have not done the Father's will (7:21), who have not believed in Christ (18:6), will merit eternal punishment (13:42; 25:46). The righteous will enter into eternal life (13:43; 25:46). Until then, the followers of Christ were to "make disciples of all nations" (28:19).

### HE LEADS US IN KINGDOM LIVING: TEACHING, PREACHING, HEALING, DYING

Teaching and preaching as the King in the kingdom

Healing as the suffering servant, the benevolent, self-sacrificing King who will act on behalf of his people

Dying to bring into reality the possibility of kingdom for all

And he will stay with us, because in his resurrection and return to heaven is the power for perpetual presence until he returns.