Cultivate

A Christ-Centered Way of Life

… as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted, and built up in him and established in the faith… Colossians 2:6-7

GETTING TO KNOW JESUS THROUGH THE 4 GOSPELS – PART 2

By Marius Gradwell

The Gospel of Matthew: Jesus the King – The face of a Lion

The Gospel of Matthew presents the Messiah, the promised Saviour, the King of the Jews. The Gospel of Matthew is clear in purpose and is unique in its role in the Scriptures. Matthew shows ages of prophecy to be fulfilled in Christ. He shows the fulfilment of the law in Christ, and God's redemptive sacrifice fulfilled in Christ. Matthew goes on to show Israel's rejection of their king, and more, a new people gathered to Christ.

The Gospel According to Matthew begins with the verse, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Mt 1:1). From this first verse of his gospel, Matthew begins his purpose. He has written to show Jesus to be the promised Messiah. Matthew begins by establishing His kingship by referring to Him as the son of David, the son of Abraham.

The genealogy which begins the gospel is the start of a wonderful presentation showing Jesus as the Christ. Everything revolves around, and is tuned to, this declaration of Jesus as the Messiah. Matthew references prophecy after prophecy and shows through Christ's own teachings the things of His kingdom.

It is vital to the scriptures that Matthew has done this work, because nowhere else is our Lord so well presented as the one whom God had promised. In the other gospels we see Christ differently. John shows us Christ as the son of God and manifests his deity for us. This is vitally important, and John brings out this aspect throughout his gospel. Likewise, Mark has his distinct purpose in showing our Lord as a servant, who came to minister and to give his life. Luke shows us our Lord through the events of his days, chronicling all the facts and details of His life. These three all present Christ to the Gentiles, or to the Jews and the Gentiles, but Matthew shows God to be faithful to his promises to Israel and allows the Jews to accept Him as their King. Matthew also allows Gentiles, as spiritual children of Abraham, to understand the identity and work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew is very persistent at pointing to prophetic references to Christ. He shows time after time that the events and details of our Lord's life coincide with what has been said of him by the prophets. Many of these references refer to His kingship, but many of them also refer to His sacrificial death for the deliverance of mankind.

Matthew begins his presentation with the promised King. The genealogy which has already been mentioned satisfies scriptures in Genesis and Numbers; "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." (Genesis 49:10), "I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him,

but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth. " (Numbers 24:17). The virgin birth was predicted in Isaiah 7:14, as Matthew is careful to point out to us in chapter one," Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him and took unto him his wife: (Matthew 1:23-24). Matthew shows us that Jesus' birth in Bethlehem is declared in Micah 5:2, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Matthew 2:5).

Matthew quotes Jeremiah 31:15 when he tells of the slaughter of children by Herod and quotes Hosea 11:1 when he tells how Jesus was hid in Egypt before returning to Galilee.

One of the great proofs which Matthew has, that Christ is the Messiah, is the testimony of Christ and the prophecies concerning John the Baptist. Matthew first refers to him in chapter three, "For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." (Mt 3:3), quoting Isaiah 40:3. Matthew then relates a dialog of Jesus concerning John the Baptist in which Jesus quotes Isaiah 35:4-6 and Malachi 3:1, " For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee" (Mt 11:10) Jesus also reveals John the Baptist as the spirit of Elijah twice in Matthew's gospel; first in Matthew 11:14, and again in Matthew 17.

And his disciples asked him, saying; Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise, shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spoke unto them of John the Baptist. Matthew 17:10-13

By establishing John the Baptist, Our Lord identifies himself very specifically, and without room for doubt, because the validity of John the Baptist and the Messiah are prophetically intertwined in such a way that each requires the other. This is why, when Jesus was asked about His authority in chapter 21, He could reply with a question of John's authority to baptize.

Matthew not only presents Christ as the promised king, but also as the promised Saviour. This would not be as clearly comprehended, or as looked for, as His kingship, but Matthew reminds us of the promises that were made and shows their fulfilment, understanding the magnitude of significance as our only hope for redemption from sin. One such prophecy is shown in the fourth chapter where, in regard to Jesus' Galilean ministry, Isaiah 9:1-2 is quoted, "The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up" (Matthew 4:16). In Matthew eight we see Christ fulfilling Isaiah 53:4 and 63:9, which shows Him bearing our infirmities, "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses" (Matthew 8:17). Other prophecies quoted by Matthew relate to Christ's ministry and teaching and various aspects of His sacrificial death.

Matthew also shows Christ as fulfilling the Mosaic Law. This is absolutely necessary because Christ is our sacrifice and as such, must be unblemished. One way which Matthew relates this is by presenting detailed accounts of Jesus' sermons and teachings. In Jesus' sermon on the mount, Christ addresses many issues. One thing which has special relevance is that Jesus is not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil it.

Jesus not only keeps the law, but expounds on it, showing the intent of the heart to be included in the scope of the commandments, and bearing the title of 'Lawgiver' with grace and purpose. That Jesus did keep the Law perfectly is evidenced in the seventeenth chapter of Matthew. God declares His son unblemished, and acceptable in His sight at the mount of transfiguration. By proclaiming His pleasure in Christ's life and ministry, God the Father, gives testimony that Jesus is sinless and has performed the things necessary to do God's will. This is especially significant because it is at the end of His earthly ministry, and our Lord has nothing before him but the cross.

As a willing sacrifice, Jesus is shown to be absolutely committed to the redemptive work He was called to do. Matthew shows clearly the agony that Christ experienced knowing what was before him, but also Matthew is careful to show our Lord's submissive spirit. As the Book of Matthew shows Christ as King, it shows Him to be a rejected king. As Matthew shows Christ as the rejected king, he clearly establishes his rejection as being from the nation of Israel. The gospel of Matthew shows that the Jews take responsibility for Jesus' crucifixion. Matthew relates that Pilot found Jesus to be just, but the Jews still shouted, "Let him be crucified" (Matthew 27:23) and, "His blood be on us, and on our children" (Matthew 27:25).

The sacrifice of Christ was not what the Jews were expecting of their king, but it was exactly what God had in mind. Matthew shows not only Christ's physical crucifixion but also his agony as he cries out, being separated from God the Father. Matthew shows the significance of Christ's sacrifice by showing clear indications of the end of the dispensation of the law. The most significant of these is that when Jesus yields up the ghost the veil in the temple is rent from top to bottom. The rending of the veil is clearly symbolic of our direct access to God through Christ.

Another indication of a new dispensation which is given in the book of Matthew is the bodily resurrection of the saints. Upon Christ's death, Matthew tells us that many dead saints rose from their graves and appeared to many people in Jerusalem. The most significant indication of God's satisfaction with Jesus' sacrifice was Christ's resurrection in three days, as he foretold. Matthew is very careful to show us both the fact of his resurrection, and his appearances to his disciples afterwards.

The Gospel of Matthew does not declare Christ a king without a people, nor does Matthew leave Christ in rejected solitude. There is a transition to be made, in that Matthew presents Jesus as king, but he also reveals his kingdom. Matthew shows first the offer of Christ to Israel, and upon the national rejection of Christ, Matthew reveals the new kingdom, including the Gentile nations. Matthew goes on to show some of the future kingdom of Christ which will include the nation of Israel.

First, it is good to note that the people around Jesus were hungry. Jesus was born into the midst of a hurting, struggling people. He was accepted by the common people, but they were desperate for miracles. Many came to know him as Saviour, but many of the multitudes followed for healing, and feeding. Jesus did not complain, but rather, He had compassion on these multitudes, who He describes as sheep needing a shepherd. As He said, "Even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). Jesus ministered and taught and when the time came, he offered himself as king, only to be rejected by the leaders and the masses of these people. It is with this rejection, that Jesus Christ offers himself to a greater kingdom, open to all the nations of the world, but at the same time, retaining special plans for the restoration of the nation of Israel.

Jesus' popularity grew with the common people just as His disfavour grew with the Jewish leadership in the Synagogues. This kind of conflict came to a head when Jesus made his triumphant entry to Jerusalem. Again, Matthew is careful to point out the fulfilment of

prophecies. In chapter 21, Jesus sends his disciples to get an ass with a colt for him to ride in on, fulfilling the prophecy by Zechariah.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. Zechariah 9:9

As Christ comes into Jerusalem there is an awesome celebration;

And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees and strewed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. Matthew 21:8-9

It would indeed seem that Christ was accepted by the Jews, but it was not to be, the leaders in the synagogues would not allow it. Christ was eventually rejected, betrayed, given a mock trial, and crucified. As was mentioned before, Israel took full responsibility for the crucifixion, as a nation.

Christ had come for the salvation of all men. He is indeed the Messiah, but he is not the Saviour of the Jew only, but of the whole world. He is not the King of the Jew only, but every knee will bow. The kingdom of heaven is woven in and out of Matthew's gospel from the very beginning. Recall from Matthew chapter two, the Gentile kings who came to worship the Christ child in Bethlehem. Recall how that, even though John the Baptist baptized unto repentance, Jesus had John baptize Him, though He was without sin. What was Jesus doing? When he called His disciples, Jesus didn't tell them that they would be Barons or Lords, but fishers of men. Again, what was Jesus doing? Jesus was preparing to minister spiritually to all people.

Consider the account to the centurion of great faith. In chapter eight, Matthew provides great insight regarding the universal nature of the Kingdom of Christ. A centurion is a Roman soldier in charge of a hundred men, this centurion has a sick servant and asks Jesus to heal him. When Jesus says that He'll come and heal the servant, the centurion evidences great faith by telling Christ that he knows that Christ need only say the word and his servant will be healed. After this Jesus says a strange thing indeed, and it is this that is our clue.

When Jesus heard it, he marveled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Matthew 8:10-12

Who is in Jesus' Kingdom? Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are; the Gentile centurion is, many from the east and west are, and the 'children of the kingdom' shall be cast into outer darkness! Jesus is building His kingdom on faithful people, not only Israelites, and has from the beginning of His ministry even before the rejection of the Jews.

Jesus spent a great deal of time preparing His disciples for this ministry to His kingdom. Matthew shows more of the instructions Jesus gave to multitudes, or to His disciples, than any other Gospel.

No other Gospel contains so much of Jesus' teachings. Matthew 5-7 is commonly referred to as the Sermon on the Mount; chapter 10 includes Jesus' instructions to His disciples as they were sent out to minister; chapter 13 presents the parables of the kingdom;...chapters 24-25

are the Olivet Discourse, a detailed explanation of future events relating to Jerusalem and the nation.

If Christ's kingdom were to consist of only the Jews, he would not have used ordinary people as His disciples, but would instead, have used the best educated religious leaders, of the tribe of Levi. Matthew preserves these teachings for us.

Another unique aspect of the Book of Matthew and his presentation of Christ, is the inclusion of Kingdom based parables in the thirteenth chapter. These typically refer to Israel, but all of them talk specifically about the 'Kingdom of Heaven'. Jesus also speaks one on one with the disciples on the subject of His kingdom. This was the case when Christ explained the motive of having a servant's heart and serving in humility.

But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. Matthew 20:25-28

Truly, Matthew presents Jesus as the promised Messiah, the King over Israel. The Gospel of Matthew is consistent in theme, throughout, and maintains the perspective of Christ as the supreme ruler, ordained by God the father, with a kingdom of faithful people. Matthew also shows Christ to be just and compassionate. Most importantly, Matthew validates that Jesus is the Christ; the Messiah who through the ages, has been prophesied of, and who the Israelites crucified, rather than have as king. It is the same Jesus Christ who, Matthew shows, was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven. This same Jesus, in compassion for mankind, sends his people to win others to saving knowledge of him, "And Jesus came and spoke unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." (Matthew 28:18-20).

This document was written as course work for the New Testament Survey course at Tyndale Theological Seminary.

(c) Copyright 1999 Daniel Stanfield with all rights reserved. This document may be distributed freely but may not be sold or modified.