

## Matthew: The King and His Blessings

Matthew, the evangelist, wastes no time before informing us what his writing is about. His opening line gets to the point (underlined is the actual text, then expanded to give the sense of a first century reader heard in those immediate claims): The book of the genealogy of Jesus, who is the Christ (the “anointed one”, “Messiah” in Hebrew), who is the Son of David – you know, the one God’s people had waited for since the promise given to David – and who is also the son of Abraham, who has arrived to bring the blessings that were promised to flow through Abraham, to all the nations. To those familiar with the Old Testament, this was a massive claim, and the rest of the book will seek to convince the reader of it. Even to the final lines of the book, Matthew continues to sound this note to his audience. There we see Jesus, resurrected from the dead, claiming to have received all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18), for He is the King to sit on the everlasting throne (hear: as promised to David’s son in 2 Samuel 7). Therefore, all His people are to proclaim His kingdom as they go about their pilgrimage on earth. No land is off limits, but they are to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all [Jesus’ commands]” (Matt. 28:19-20). Thus, they too are called into the mission. They are to proclaim the King, and Lord willing, be a means of God bringing people from every tribe and nation under the rule of Jesus. And when God’s people live under God’s rule, they experience the blessing of God. What is the greatest blessing? Answer: the presence of God with us (hear: the blessings promised to Abraham is now commissioned to be taken to the nations). And so the book closes with a promise from the King: “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (28:20b).

From start to finish, Matthew seeks to convince his audience that Jesus is the promised Messiah and Davidic King, who brings the blessings of Abraham to the nations. Along the way he will declare what that kingdom is like, how it will spread, how one enters into it, and so much more. But rather than give us these truths in bullet point form, Matthew invites us into the life of Jesus Himself, to watch and listen, to be amazed and struck with fear. Enter into the story with him and be enlightened, challenged, humbled, corrected, and revived in soul – all leading us to worship the King. Once accomplished, the disciples of Jesus (all who read and believe) cannot sit still. They are now part of Jesus’ mission to rule over and bless the nations, and they must proclaim their great King everywhere they go. And Matthew himself demonstrates this. Once a tax collector who cheated people out of money – a man full of selfishness and greed – He met King Jesus, and was never the same from that time on (9:9). This is the story of Jesus through the lens of a man radically transformed by the life, death, resurrection and present reign of the King, and a beneficiary of His blessings.

Therefore, each passage of this theological biography of Jesus, must be read in light of its overall theme. As readers make their way through the story, a few questions should remain in sight:

- Why did Matthew think this passage would help convince his readers that Jesus really is the Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham? What is it about this passage that might do this for the reader?
- What are the realities and ramifications for the reader, assuming the claim made concerning Jesus and His kingdom in this passage, is true?

### A FEW LITERARY MARKERS TO CONSIDER AS YOU READ

1. **STRUCTURAL PHRASE:** Matthew organizes his material around five speaking units – or sermons – of Jesus, ending each one with a similar phrase.
  - “And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching” (7:28)
  - “When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples” (11:1)
  - “And when Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there” (13:53)
  - “Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee” (19:1)
  - “When Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said to his disciples, “You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified.”” (26:1-2)

2. **THEOLOGICAL ARRANGEMENT:** While all the material Matthew recounts is true and really occurred the way he tells it, he is also organizing the scenes for teaching purposes. It may not always be in chronological order, but it is not random placement. Be sure to pay attention to how passages and scenes interact with one another. Sometimes he “stacks” similar scenes right on top of the other (i.e. nine miracles in chapters 8-9; seven parables in chapter 13). Also pay attention to Jesus’ geographical movement. For some reason, in Matthew, Jesus is said to step foot into Jerusalem until His final week of earthly ministry. A final thought is to listen carefully to the miracles. Get into the story and let Matthew’s theological point land on you. Why does he choose to focus on “this” miracle, place it here in the storyline, and how do the people watching respond? This is also why some keywords and the titles of Jesus are so crucial to see.
  
3. **KEY WORDS:** Matthew loves the word, “fulfilled”, and the like (“so it is written” (2:5), “was spoken of” (3:3), etc.). **Fulfill**, alone occurs 15 times throughout the book – which is more than any other book in the New Testament. Clearly Matthew wants the reader to know that Jesus wasn’t just a great teacher who appeared, but His life and ministry brought about fulfillment of the Old Testament. **Kingdom** occurs 55 times, which is also more than any other book in the New Testament. Only Luke comes close, using it 46 times, with Mark in third place with 20, and the rest of them in single digits. Matthew is the only author to use the phrase, “kingdom of heaven”, which appears 32 times<sup>1</sup>. For Matthew, Jesus wasn’t just powerful, but He ushered in the kingdom of God that had been longed for through the centuries. And he ends the book with Jesus being the King who has authority over all things, in heaven and on earth.
  
4. **TITLES OF JESUS:** Matthew includes several different titles for Jesus throughout the book. **Christ** occurs 17 times throughout (over half occurrences include the definite article, “the Christ” – 1:17; 2:4; 11:2; 16:16, 20)). **Son of David** appears 9 times (1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22). This is the most occurrence of any book in the New Testament. Actually, Mark and Luke are the other authors to use this title, each doing so 3 times. **Son of Man** is also a favorite of Matthew, using it more than any other New Testament author – a total of 30 times. The final statement of the book makes it clear that this title is meant to connect Jesus to the promise of Daniel 7, where one like the son of man came to the Ancient of Days and was given an everlasting kingdom, where he would rule over all peoples. This Jesus declares of Himself after His resurrection, and then sends His people out on His mission. **Son of God** occurs 8 times, second only to John, who uses it 9 times.
  
5. **PARABLES:** Jesus often spoke in parables, which were understood by some, but left others confused. Slowing down to consider them carefully, we are never left neutral. The riddles enter our intellects and probe our common thoughts and assumptions. They examine our wills, testing our actions in everyday life. And sometimes they touch our hearts and emotions with soothing comfort and joy. It’s no wonder: those masterful riddles were delivered by the Master Himself, and when they master your heart they change your life. Pay close attention to the context of the parables (did a character just do something, or ask something? Did Jesus just say something to correct someone, leading into the parable? Etc.). This will help discern why Jesus delivers the parable, and what the meaning of it is. And keep in mind that a parable has one central theme, not a handful.

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<sup>1</sup> Kingdom of God is used 5 times. Matthew 19:23-24 give the indication that “kingdom of heaven”, and, “kingdom of God,” are synonymous: “<sup>23</sup>And Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>24</sup>Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” See also 3:2; 4:17, as compared with 12:28.

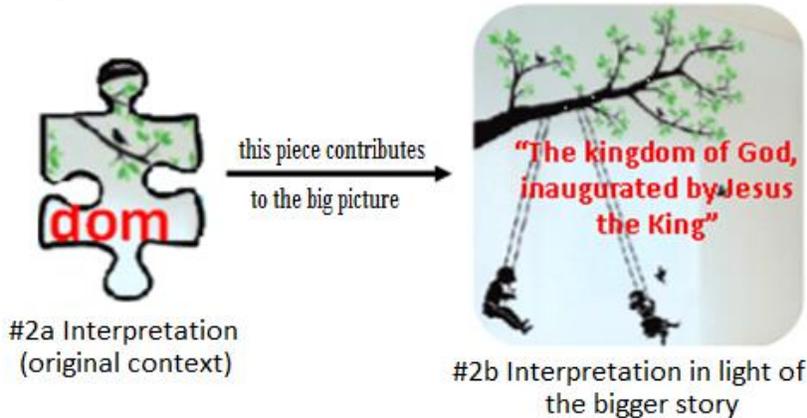
## #2b: interpretation – in light of the bigger story (description)

The meaning of a passage in its original context is not the end of the story. This is because no passage of the Bible is an island unto itself, but is part of the progressive story of Scripture, which climaxes and centers on the Christ event (the life, death, resurrection, present reign and return of Jesus). The story begins in a garden and ends in a garden (and a city), and is jam-packed with tragedy and grace-filled triumph in between. From beginning to end, the Bible is:

*The story of God building His kingdom through the redeeming work of Christ, and what life as His people under His rule ought to be like*



This overarching story necessarily impacts the meaning of each passage. Consider an individual puzzle piece. It is not left sitting all alone, because it only reaches its full meaning when placed in the big picture. In the same way, every passage should be read as a piece contributing to the bigger picture of Scripture, where it reaches its ultimate meaning.



Therefore, we need to ask every passage: **how does the main idea direct us to the Christ and/or His work in redemption?** In order to answer this, the first step is to describe the *main point of the passage in its original context* (this is the answer given to the question in #2a Interpretation (original context)). Be sure to *stay with the meaning of the passage in its original setting* to avoid focusing on minor textual details and making illegitimate connections to Jesus. We're not looking for a "new" or "hidden" meaning.

Next, describe how that *main point* directs us to the Christ by determining the appropriate category from the C-H-R-I-S-T acronym, which suggests six ways a passage might be directing us to the Christ event.

Ask: Is the truth of this passage...



Turn over

**A Command/Biblical ethic only Christ can fulfill and empower**

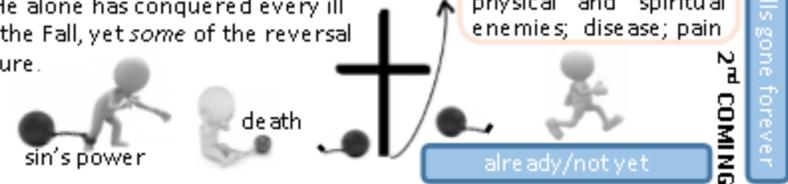
God's commands are for our good and are to be kept perfectly. However, we fail to keep them, and therefore deserve His judgment. Simply trying harder won't solve the problem, because the heart must be fixed and God's justice must be served. Enter Jesus: who kept the law perfectly for His people, bore the full penalty for their law-breaking, gave them new hearts, and sent the Holy Spirit to empower them in holiness (see Ezek. 36:26-27; 1 Pet. 4:11).



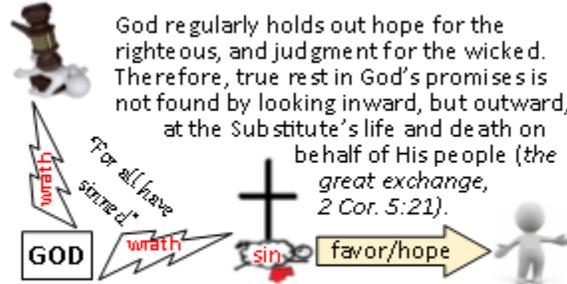
**An Ill that can only be righted or resolved in Christ**

Many passages leave us in angst because of man's condition. It is only through Jesus' work that we can view these problems with hope rather than defeat. He alone has conquered every ill effect of the Fall, yet some of the reversal is still future.

**Example Ills**  
natural disaster; death; power and curse of sin; physical and spiritual enemies; disease; pain



**A Hope in which only Christ can give real reason to trust and rest**

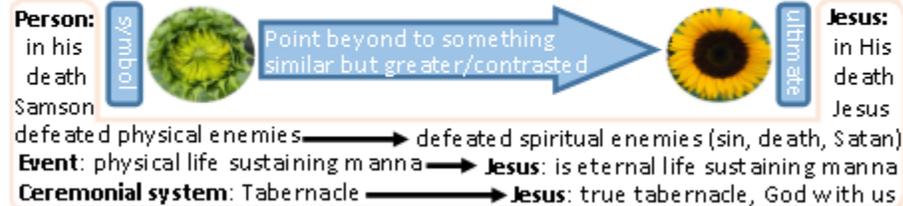


God regularly holds out hope for the righteous, and judgment for the wicked. Therefore, true rest in God's promises is not found by looking inward, but outward, at the Substitute's life and death on behalf of His people (the great exchange, 2 Cor. 5:21).

- Various ways of fulfillment**
- direct (Mic. 5:2; Mt. 2:5-6)
  - different in literal terms (Is. 40:3-5; Lk. 3:1-6)
  - increasing depth (Gn. 12:1; Heb. 11:10; Rev. 21:1-2)
  - re-occurring (Ps. 69:33)
  - installments (Is. 61:1-2; Lk 4:18-19)

**A Symbol illustrating an aspect of the Christ event**

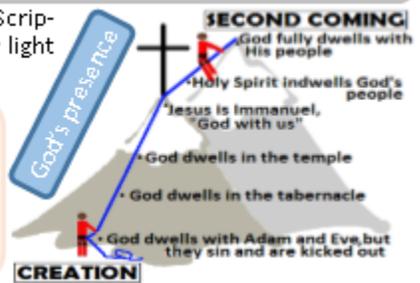
Symbols are real people, events, and aspects of the ceremonial system, that God ordained to foretell the Christ event. These symbols point beyond themselves to Someone who would function similarly, but even greater or in stark contrast.



**A Reoccurring theme that eventually climaxes in Christ**

Various themes and patterns run through Scripture, and when traced out are seen in new light and ultimately demonstrated in Christ.

**Example themes:** God's grace for sinners; God's rest; God turns evil for His glory and the good of his people; salvation through substitution; Promise Land; God's wrath toward sinners.



**A Timeline update of the redemption to be accomplished in Christ**

As Scripture unfolds, particular updates are given so as to remind us the pages we're reading aren't random. God, the Director, promised long ago and things are still going as planned. All history is headed to the Christ event, where the work of redemption is fulfilled (see Ezra 1; Nah. 1; Matt. 1; Acts 2).

