



The Kingdom Ethic Part One: Something Old, Something New

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I think if each and everyone one of us were honest we would say that we are prone to skepticism, and perhaps even paralyzed by it. The optimist says: the glass is half full. The pessimist says: the glass is half empty. And the skeptic says: Something is fishy here, the water is poisoned.

I think skepticism is really the most honest view we can have. We live in a society where marketers prey on our anticipation and we have been fooled too many times. Something is billed as the next great hope, but then it falls on its face. We see this in the tech world: everyone is looking for the next Bill Gates, the next Steve Jobs. In sports, teams are searching for the next Tom Brady, Steve Young or Dan Marino.

Because our anticipation is so strong, we are crushed when the promised product or person fails to deliver. The result is skepticism.

Perhaps today you sit in church and you are skeptical of what is going on here. Skeptical that what you hear is relevant or timely. Doubtful that it will actually make a difference. You've heard it all before. And yet you're here, maybe to appease your spouse, or maybe because you want to know more. You want to find a system of thought or living. You want to know how it is you ought to live.

Today we are starting our series looking at the book of Matthew. This series is called the Kingdom Ethic because in this book we are going to see Jesus come to a skeptical people and proclaim not only a new kingdom, but a new way of life. He is going to provide them with something new, and something different, but at the same time something certain and transformative.

Today we are going to look at the opening chapter of Matthew's gospel and this is what we are going to see: **Jesus is the "something different" that we've always needed.**

A brief background on the Gospel of Matthew. First of all, this book is called the Gospel According to Matthew, but this book is not the gospel. That may sound confusing, but let me put it this way: If I were to hold up a newspaper and say, "Here's what happened in our world yesterday!" We wouldn't assume that this paper is the actual event. That paper is an account of the event, it contains the news of what happened, but the paper and writings of the news is not the actual news event.

In the same way this book, though we use shorthand to call it "the Gospel of Matthew" is not the gospel. It contains the gospel. It tells us of the gospel but it is not the gospel. The gospel is the good news of what Jesus has done to save sinners. And in God's grace he has given us four men who gives us different accounts this news which happened when Jesus was on earth. My phone has all the information I need to get in contact with my wife, but my phone is not my wife. In the same way when we think of the gospel we shouldn't think that the gospel is a book, but that the book puts us in contact with the news and person of the gospel himself: Jesus Christ. This distinction is important because there is nothing more important than knowing clearly what the gospel is and what the gospel is not.

The second piece of information is, that though this book is written anonymously, the earliest writings of church history ascribe authorship to Matthew the tax collector and disciple of Jesus himself. From what we can tell this book was one of the earliest accounts of the life of Jesus to be written down. And as we will see in this book, Matthew wrote his account of the gospel with a specific intention. Matthew uses over twice as many Old Testament references in his book than the other gospels, and uses the theme of Kingdom more than any other writer as well.

This is because Matthew is writing this book to the Jews. The people to whom the Old Testament was given and written to, the people who were long awaiting the King of Israel. Matthew wanted them to know that Jesus was their King. This is part of the reason why our series is called the Kingdom Ethic. Matthew wants the Jews to see what it is that the Kingdom of God actually looks like, and in order to do that he must show them what the King looks like.

And if we want to talk about skepticism, the Jews were the most skeptical. For thousands of years they have been anticipating the finalization of their Kingdom. And this dream wasn't a pipe dream. They had good reason to have such a strong desire and that reason is that God had told them that they were going to have a Kingdom. In looking at Jesus as something different we are going to see him as the promise of something old, and of something new. Here is the first part: **The Promise of Something Old.**

For the Jews there are two pinnacle moments of this Kingdom hope. The first is in Genesis. In Genesis 3 we see Adam and Eve kicked out of the presence of God because of their sin. But later on in Genesis we see God pursuing a relationship with the very people who sinned against him. By a sheer act of grace God approaches this man named Abram and promises to make him into a powerful nation. Look with me at **Gen. 17:5-8**. So here we see God doing two things: first he is moving towards those who have moved away from him. God was the aggressive party in the relationship of redemption. This is true even in your own life. The reason you are interested in God, the reason why you believe in God is not because you sought out God, but because since the very beginning God has made it his business to seek out his own people.

But second, we see that God's redemptive relationship provides two big promises: the promise of kings, and the promise of an everlasting land. This promise was the birth of the Jewish nation, and also the Jewish hope. God will give us a King and a land which we will inhabit forever. For the Jews, Abraham is the grandpa of all grandpa's. He's the guy whose picture hangs over everyone's mantle because he is the one to whom the promise of blessing was given. That's peak one of the Jewish hope.

Peak two happens roughly a thousand years later. The people of Israel have been brought out of Egypt, God has displaced their enemies before them. They have settled in the Holy City of Jerusalem, and David is their King. Now God had always said that the eternal king of Israel would come out of the tribe of Judah. And here is David, man after God's own heart, ruling Israel in the heyday of its power, a King from the line of Judah. But look at what God says to David in **2 Samuel 7:12-14**.

The King would come after David, and this is where anticipation would give way to skepticism. Because after David the Kingship of Israel began to fall apart. His son Solomon reigned for a bit, but by the end of Solomon's reign the Kingdom of Israel underwent such a strong civil war that it split into two nations (we looked at this in Isaiah, there was Israel in the North, and Judah in the South). In this Divided Kingdom people had to choose between competing kings. These kingdoms continued to sin, and as we saw in Isaiah, in 722 BC the nation of Israel was conquered by Assyria, and in 586 BC the nation of Judah was deported to Babylon.

Now why is all this history important to the book of Matthew? Because look at how Matthew starts: **Matthew 1:1**. What may seem subtle to us was a giant fog horn to any Jew who picked up this book. This book is about Jesus, son of David the King, heir to the promise of Abraham.

As we continue to read this book we will see the Jews wrestle to understand Jesus as this King. But this why Matthew starts the way he starts. He wants them to know who Jesus is. The same is true for you. If you do not understand who Jesus is, or why Jesus mattered, then you will have a hard time worshipping him. If Jesus is just the fairy tale figure of our religion you will be burdened by your ability to face the challenges of laying down your life to follow him.

The call and cost of following Jesus is great, and if we do not see Jesus as great, the problem is with our understanding not with Jesus' reality. For better or for worse Christianity has been reduced down to a system of thought and action. And often times we look at what is expected to act Christianly: to love our brothers, to support missions and the church, to serve the lost, to surrender our rights, to fight sin, to pick up our cross, and

then we look at our understanding of Jesus and say "Is he really worth it? Did he really do that much? Am I going to be disappointed?"

The Jews during Matthew's time of writing were wondering the same thing. They had heard the promises, and they had read the failures of the Kings. Even after Israel was released from exile they settled back in Jerusalem only to be conquered by the Greeks, and then the Romans. There was a Jewish uprising called the Maccabean Revolution, but those leaders were violently silenced. The Jews supposedly had a King, but he might not have even been Jewish, and even if he was, he was just a puppet of the Roman Empire.

But in Matthew chapter one we see the reminder of something old, and the promise of something new. Jews loved lists and numbers. It was part of their culture. The lists were used to trace familial and tribal origins, and there were specific numbers which carried meanings of perfection and fullness. So it is no surprise that Matthew opens with a list of names, three lists to be exact, and each list tracing fourteen generations. While the significance of the numbers is lost to many of us today, it meant something significant to the Jews, but what is more significant is the story that Matthew traces.

I know most of you were hoping to come to church so that you could hear a recitation of Semitic history and read some genealogies, so I'm glad to oblige. If you have your Bible's open, or your bulletins, you see a massive genealogy in Matthew 1:2-16. This list is significant for two reasons. The first is the repetition of the word in the ESV translated "father of," but which is probably better translated: "fathered." Just listen to the cadence you hear in **Matthew 1:2-6**.

What Matthew is doing here is he is tracking the royal line through Israel, he is showing how Jesus is the legal descendant of David and Abraham. But what he is also doing is he is giving the history of three specific time periods, the three phases of Israel's history: verses two through the first part of six give the history of Abraham to King David, verses six through eleven give the history of David to the deportation to Babylon, and verses 12 through 16 provide the story of Babylon to Jesus. This is significant enough for Matthew to summarize this for us again in **Matthew 1:17**.

If we look at this list of names, we see a lot of familiar stories we learned in Sunday school: we see Abraham, Jacob, Ruth and Boaz, David and Bathsheba, Solomon, we see good Kings like Jotham, and terrible Kings like Ahaz. But what Matthew is doing is showing that all of those stories find their end in Jesus Christ. Water flows downhill, and history flows towards Jesus. So one thing we want you to do in your communities groups is to look at those familiar names and stories and discuss how those stories make us anticipate a better King. Matthew is showing us that these people aren't role models, they are sign posts leading us to Jesus. That's the something old in this text. Matthew is highlighting Jesus as the anticipated one from the line of David.

However there is also something new here: **The Promise of Something New**. Read with me **Matthew 1:12-16**. Did you hear the note that ruined this otherwise consistent melody? In this text we hear the repetition of the verb "fathered." He fathered him, he fathered him, he fathered him. But then look back at **Matthew 1:16**. There is no active verb for fathered in the birth of Jesus. Joseph's relationship to Jesus is the husband of Mary, not the father of Jesus. And in Greek when it says, "of whom Jesus was born" that word "whom" is a singular feminine pronoun pointing to Mary not Joseph. Something old had come, but something new was happening.

In a world full of skeptics we always ask the question: "Why is this any different? Why is this better?" Well here we see a drastic difference in the birth of Jesus. He was born of Mary, but not of Joseph. This text gives Jesus not only historical prominence, but proclaims him as the Christ! What qualifies him for such position and title?

Let's look at the birth of Jesus. In a few weeks we are going to look at the story more in depth as we walk through our Christmas series, but right now I want us to see the implications of the story in regard to Matthew's history: **Matthew 1:18**. So in Matthew's genealogy there are five women. These women are significant in their own right, but the real significance of these women was just revealed. Each of these couples was connected by the Greek preposition "ek." Grammatically that preposition is translated here: "by." Like "Rob (my dad) fathered Tyler by (ek) Vicky." And we see this repetition of "ek" or "by." Perez by Tamar and Judah, Boaz by Salmon and

Rahab, Obed by Ruth and Boaz, Solomon by David and Bathsheba. But then we get to Mary and it's "of" (ek) with no one else? Who was Mary made pregnant by? Well in Matthew 1:18 we see, "she was found to be pregnant from "ek" the Holy Spirit."

That's the missing note to the whole symphony Matthew just gave us. Why is Jesus unique? He is unique not only because all of history flows to him, but he is unique in that he was born of a virgin and of God. We read the significance of this as we continue: **Matthew 1:19-25**.

In this text there are two truths which are wildly significant not only for the Jews in Matthew's day, but for you as well. The first is that we see the uniqueness of Jesus' role. Why did Jesus come? Matthew quotes a passage we looked at a few months ago in Isaiah. God had predicted that a virgin would conceive and that son would be God with us. But why? Look back at **Matthew 1:21**.

When you think of Jesus, how do you think of him. When you think of your greatest need what do you imagine it to be? We are often skeptical of anything which promises fulfillment because we know so comprehensively how nothing seems to ultimately satisfy. That's because we have a sin problem. The people of Israel knew this. I mean look at that genealogy. Tamar got her father-in-law drunk in order to sleep with him. David took another man's wife and then had him killed when she found out she was pregnant. Ahaz oversaw the sacrifice of children.

And you in your own heart probably feel the weight of sin. We were made to be satisfied. We were made to be free. But it is the sin that separates us from God which severs us from freedom and also satisfaction. The problem is that in separating us from its power, it hasn't separated us from its desire. We want to be whole, we want to be satisfied, we want to be relieved and yet we know deep in our hearts that something is fundamentally broken. Our wants make us weary and our desires make us downtrodden by disappointment.

We need something new. We don't need something numb us, or to distract us, or to complete us, we need someone to save us from our sin. And that's why Jesus has come.

Jesus came, and Jesus had to be fully God born through the Holy Spirit, and fully man, born through Mary. Jesus wasn't 50% God, 50% man. He was this paradox of fully God and fully man and that is exactly what he had to be. He had to be this because man was the one who earned death. **Romans 6:23**. Man needed to die. God didn't need to die. God didn't sin. God didn't incur death. We did. Jesus had to be man because man needed to die.

But why did Jesus have to be God? Because man can't fix our own problem. If man could fix his own problem, we wouldn't need God. And God had always said it was his problem to fix. In Genesis 17, God had this ceremony with Abraham to ratify the covenant he promised him. They cut two animals in half, and typically what would happen in that day is that both covenant parties would walk through the animals together to signify that if they breeched the covenant they would bear the penalty together. But in Genesis 17, God paralyzes Abraham and God walks the gauntlet on his own. God was saying that he would bear the penalty of man's sin. He would be the one to uphold it both in faithfulness, and in justice.

Jesus had to be God because it was only God who could, and only God who graciously would save man from their sins. Look with me at the promise God made to the people in **Ezekiel 37:21-23**.

People can promise all sorts of things to you. The problem is that that anticipation will always lead to disappointment because no mere man, no product and no system of living will ever save you from sin. Jesus came to die so that those who are dead in sin might live.

The message of salvation in Jesus Christ is a message that might seem overly simplistic. Something which seems too good to be true, and it is. This message could not be true if promised by any man. This message would be a farce were it not reliant upon the inner working of God himself.

Jesus is not an infomercial scheme, he is the image of the invisible God, he is divinity robed drabs of a

carpenter, royalty rich with humanity's weakness. He is too good, too good for us, but not too good for him to be true. And he came to us so that he might be praised above all things: **Colossians 1:18-20**.

He is God with us. The fullness of deity is incapable making empty promises. He is what you need to see. For as Paul says, all who hope in him will not be put to shame. It is only in Jesus where anticipation gives way to satisfaction unquenchable.

I don't know what you've heard about the gospel, but the history of the world shows we need it. The history of life prior to Jesus led to Jesus, and the history of what is will be flows towards Jesus.

This series is called The Kingdom Ethic, because Jesus came to show us the shape and substance of his kingdom. He came to show us what life should be like in his Kingdom. But what we are going to see as we look through this book is what Matthew just framed for us: Jesus is the ethic. Before Christianity is about anything, it is about God's plan to save sinners through Jesus Christ. And therefore if we want to start the process of fulfillment and put to bed the skepticism which may plague us, we must reconcile ourselves with the person of Jesus.

He must be our King, he must be our Christ, he must save us from our sins. To be a Christian there is no system of living which solves your problem, there is only a savior who saves you from sin. This Jesus, this salvation is yours through faith. By seeing your need, and seeing Jesus as the King who came to save us.