

Longing for Too Little

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 October 2020

Preacher: Thomas Davis

[0 : 0 0] This morning we continue our study on the Gospel of Matthew and we have come to chapter 22. I'd like us to read again the verses towards the end of that chapter.

While the Pharisees were gathered together Jesus asked them a question saying, what do you think about the Christ whose son is he? They said to him the son of David. He said to them, how is it then that David in the Spirit calls him Lord saying the Lord said to my Lord, sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet? If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son? And no one was able to answer him a word nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions. One of the most common features of human experience is that very often we long for things to be different. If you look back through history all across the world people long for things to change and that's not always negative because there's a sense in which all the great advancements in technology, in medicine and in the arts have come from the vision to make things different. But although it's often positive, very often in many ways it's a negative thing. People find themselves in unwanted circumstances and they long for things to be different. Maybe for you today that might be exactly how you feel. One group who definitely felt like that were the Jews in Matthew's Gospel. For many reasons they longed for things to be different. We see that in the passage before us today and we're going to think about that a little bit. But what we also see in the Jews of Matthew's Day is that although they were longing for things to be different, they were actually longing for far too little. And that's our title today, longing for too little. And I think it's very likely that in our own lives many of us, if not all of us, are longing for far too little as well. And as we look at this together we're going to just think about the Jews, we're going to think about ourselves, and then we're going to look at what Jesus is teaching in this passage. So for the Jews, what were they longing for?

Well these verses that we have before us in 41 to 45, and in fact in many other parts of Matthew's Gospel we see a very strong connection between Jesus and David. So I've highlighted David's name in these verses. David was a hugely important figure in the history of Israel and he's one of the primary characters in the Old Testament. He was the greatest king that Israel ever had. Indeed every other king who came after David was measured against him. A good king was like David, a bad king wasn't. And the great hope of the Jewish people was that one day a future king like David would come in order to save the nation. This coming Savior king was called the Messiah or the Christ, that it means the same thing. He was to come from the descendants of David and he would be a great king just like David was. So when Jesus asks the Pharisees, what do you think of the Christ, whose son is he? Their instant answer is the son of David because the connection to David is very important. Now in order to understand why this was such a big deal, we all need to try and imagine and understand a little bit more about how it felt to be a Jew in the first century as it was for those people recorded for us in Matthew's Gospel. How did they feel? Well we can summarize it under three headings. The way things are, which really is referring to their present situation, the way things were meant to be, which involved looking back into their past, and there was the way they wanted things to be, which of course refers to their future. David is a key factor in answering all of these questions for a Jew in the first century.

In terms of the way things were and their present situation, the Jews in these days were under Roman occupation, and this was so different to how things were with David. Way back a thousand years earlier when David lived, everything was so much better. David lived around 1000 BC, and the 1000 years from then onwards was really a roller coaster of a millennium for the Jewish people. David was the high point. They were a strong, united, and prosperous nation, but from then onwards it was downhill. When David's grandson became king, the nation split in two, and before long they were at war with each other. 200 years later, the northern half of that kingdom was

obliterated. The southern kingdom was conquered by Babylon. Most of the people were taken into exile. You can see that at 586 BC. Around 70 years later, around 530 BC, people started to return, but things were never the same. For the next 300 years, they were ruled by the Persians, by the Greeks. For a brief period in between the Old Testament and the New Testament, the Jews, they reclaimed a bit of independence, but it came at huge cost, and there was violent rebellion and conflict and huge suffering. And before long, they were conquered by the Romans, and that's where we find them in the days of the New Testament. And that meant that for every Jew in Matthew's Gospel, they looked back to the way things were, and they thought, I wish things were different. And what they longed for were those good old days of David. That was the way things were meant to be. David didn't have to pay taxes to Caesar. David wasn't, he didn't have a Roman governor in Jerusalem. David wasn't the puppet king of some foreign invader. In David's day, Israel were strong, independent, and they were beginning to thrive. And for the Jews in Matthew's Gospel, that was the way things were meant to be. And for that reason, what they saw in the past was what they longed for in the future. If you asked a Jew, how do you want things to be in the next 100 years, they would say, I want them to be the way they, I want things to be the way they were with David. I want us to get back to that. So we can picture it all like this, if you'll just bear with another diagram, I'm afraid. David was the high point of their history. Since then, it's been all downhill. So the Jews in the New Testament are looking at their situation, and they're looking back at David, and they're thinking, that's the way I want things to be. I just wish it was back like that. And their great hope was that a son of David, a king would come. And when he came, he would drive out the Romans. He would give the Jews their nation again, and he would restore everything to the way it was meant to be. The Christ would be the one who would get the Israel nation, the nation of Israel back to the way it was meant to be. It was perhaps a wee bit like, I don't know if any of you have ever walked around a redundant shipyard, or have gone into a theater that's no longer in use, and you look at these great buildings, and you think, I wish someone would come and restore it to how it was meant to be. That was how the Jews felt concerning their nation. And there's two key words that sum up their situation.

[9 : 10] One, king and enemies. For the Jews, they had no king, and they had enemies all around them.

But it was so different with David. With a king like David, they had a sense of community. They had this, they were a nation, a family, a people. They could build a society that was the way that they wanted it to be, even if it was different from what everyone else in the world did. They had their identity as a national community. The king brought them all together.

With a king like David, they had territory. They had their own land, their own cities, their own space, a home that was theirs. And with a king like David, they would have a future.

They could plan and build and grow and thrive and be who they wanted to be. But now, in the days when Matthew is recording, the days that Matthew records for us here, all these things are in the hands of their enemies. So their Jewish community and culture was being eroded. Greek influence was penetrating into the population, and the Pharisees in particular were desperate to hold on to their Jewish identity. Their territory was someone else's property.

This precious land of theirs was just a toy in the hands of some guy called Caesar, who lived hundreds of miles away in Rome. And their future was in their enemy's hands.

[10 : 48] They had already seen their nation crushed by foreigners on multiple occasions. And with no king like David, their future was controlled by their enemies. And if only the son of David would come, all of that would change. He would defeat their enemies. He would reclaim their territory. He would reestablish the community. He would transform their future.

The Jews were longing for the son of David because they were longing for things to be different. Now, you might be thinking, well, Thomas, all of that is very interesting. But what on earth has it got to do with any of us today? It seems a million miles from 2020 in Scotland. Surely, our problems are very different from those of the Jews in Matthew chapter 22. And in many ways, that's true. We don't live under the rule of a conquering empire. We don't face the same crisis of national identity. And I think there's probably no one who says, I wish we could go back to the way things were a thousand years ago. But if the great characteristic of the Jews was that they were longing for things to be different, then I think it's true that in so many ways, we are exactly the same. How many of us look at our lives and look at the way things are and think, I wish it was different? That can be as a nation. So you might be longing for Scotland to become independent. Maybe you're longing that

that word never gets mentioned again. It might be in society, some of you might be longing for a change in rules for different policies for different laws.

It might be for the environment. You might long for things to be different in the face of the threat of climate change. And even the way things are right now, some of you might be longing for these restrictions to be lifted and for everything to go back to normal. Or it might be for you as an individual, your work, your relationships, where you live, what you earn, how you look, what you've achieved. Maybe you look at all of these things and long for them to be different.

And like the Jews, maybe you long for the way things were meant to be. Now that might be a case of looking back into your own history. Maybe there's a time in your past that you that you yearn for. Maybe school days, maybe student years, maybe starting out in your career, maybe having a house full of children, maybe a time when you are fitter, stronger and faster. Or maybe it's not necessarily something in your own history, maybe it was just something in your own hopes and expectations. Maybe there was dreams of a relationship that hasn't happened or maybe there was one which didn't work out the way you hoped. Maybe there was a job you always thought you were going to get and it hasn't happened. Maybe there was a house you dreamed of building. Maybe you're a first year student at uni thinking this is not the way it was meant to be. And all of that makes you yearn for things to be different, to long for the way you want things to be. And all of that is very real and very tough. And I don't think for a moment that the Jews were wrong to wish that things were different. And neither are you if that's how you feel. I think that for all of us there's aspects of life where we look at ourselves or look at our situation and say I wish it was different. The key issue is how we respond to that feeling. And what we have to recognize is that just like the Jews we have our king and our enemies. Now you might be saying Thomas what are you on about? We have neither. Well I'm not so sure that that's true because when we talk about a king and about enemies what we're really talking about is our security and our threats. So we want security.

[15 : 41] We want to be safe in order to thrive. We want to be part of a community. We want to enjoy our own territory. We want a future that's bright and we will look for a king to give us that. It might be our job. It might be our salary. It might be a political party. It might be a partner. It might be a certain lifestyle. And these things are not necessarily bad. There's a huge amount of good in many of them. But we will make them our king if we say to whatever it is you are the key to making things better. I am your loyal subject and I will do whatever you say. And equally we want to overcome the things that threaten us. So it's not a foreign army that threatens us today although we must never forget that we only have to go back to our grandparents to see a generation for whom that was true. But for us today we might feel threatened by our colleagues, by our classmates or fellow students. We might feel threatened by our circumstances whether financial or social.

We might feel threatened by our past that something's going to come back to haunt us. We might feel threatened by people who think differently from us. Or maybe we even feel threatened by our own sense of expectation or our feelings of failure or inadequacy. All of these things can make us feel like we're surrounded by enemies, by threats who are trying to make things worse for us.

And our great hope is that our king will deal with our enemies. So king's successful career will mean that I don't need to feel threatened by colleagues or classmates who are better than me.

King's political party will deliver us from the threat of evil king other political party. King's first class honours means that I don't feel threatened by the expectations of peers or parents or professors.

King Nice House will neutralise the threat of feeling inadequate to my friends.

King's social life will deliver you from the threat of loneliness and rejection. And even king outward religion can be seen as giving us deliverance from this bad world around us and it makes us feel secure because we've got it right and we are just that bit better than everyone else.

[18 : 12] These things are not necessarily bad but please, please you have got to recognise that they are not kings.

The Jews were longing for things to be different. So often we are the same. In all of that, what is Jesus saying to us? Well in this passage Jesus is not saying stop longing.

It would be easy for me to stand up and say that Jesus is telling you today stop complaining, stop wishing things were different, be content, get on with life. Jesus is not saying that at all.

This passage is not saying stop longing. This passage is saying you are longing for far too little.

The key point is that the Jews' expectations were too low. They were longing for too little. If we go back to the diagram that we've drawn, they were longing for David's son and at one level they were right to do so because the promised king would be a descendant of David. But they were longing for

David's son in the sense that he would be the one to bring them back to David's level.

[19 : 49] Jesus is saying that expectation is far too low. They were looking for David's son.

What they actually got was David's lord. In verse 44 Jesus quotes from Psalm 110.

In that Psalm David is speaking about the coming king, the Messiah, the Christ. So we would call Psalm 110 a messianic Psalm in the sense that it's prophetic. It's looking forward to the coming king and it's telling us something about him. Part of this Psalm describes words spoken from God to this coming king. And David describes that in the opening verses of this Psalm. But the point I want to highlight is that when David describes God speaking to this king, David doesn't say, the Lord said to my son. He says, the Lord says to my Lord.

And the point Jesus is making is that the Christ is not just David's son. He is David's Lord.

He's not simply an heir who comes after David. He is the Lord who rules over David. He is not just the descendant who will take them back up to David. He is the Lord who will bring them far, far above David. In other words, the Jews had these great expectations.

[21 : 36] But the truth is Jesus is way bigger and way better. If their dream was to get back up to the level of David, Jesus is saying, hold on a minute. What you are longing for is far, far too little.

At its best, David's kingdom extended to a few hundred miles in the territory at the east of the Mediterranean. At its best, its society was a relatively small ethnic group descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. At its best, it always had bigger, stronger and more powerful nations surrounding it and posing a threat. At its best, its future was a case of surviving as long as possible. And Jesus is saying, my kingdom is way bigger and way better than that. And this chapter, Matthew 22 tells us exactly what it's like. So the kingdom of God is not this small exclusive community just for the Jews only. It is a wedding feast to which all are invited.

It transcends all ethnicities. It doesn't matter what your background is. And it sends an invite out to anyone and everyone. It's thrown the doors wide, wide open. And it's a wedding feast.

It's a place of joy, of celebration, of unity and love. It's a place where everyone delights together in all that God has done for us. And that's why the person who sneaks in with no wedding garments does not belong there. Because the person who comes in with no wedding clothes is effectively saying, I want the food and the wine, but I don't really care about who the bride and groom are. And that mindset is the opposite of everything that God's kingdom is about. It's not about selfishly getting what we want or doing what our own thing or grabbing benefits for ourselves. It's about being united together in one brilliant family with one brilliant Savior who we all love and where we celebrate together. Jesus' kingdom is not one where the Jews can just get back to their best and everyone else can clear off. It's one where the Jews, the Gentiles, all nations of the world are united in a new, beautiful, restored humanity.

And the kingdom of God is not some small territory in Judea at the east of the Mediterranean. The kingdom of God extends across the whole world. In fact, it extends across the whole universe.

[24 : 20] Jesus is not going to get things back to the good old days of David. He is doing something miles, miles bigger. He's going to restore the whole universe so that that can become the real promised land. And he reigns over every square inch of it. And that is why paying taxes to Caesar is absolutely nothing to get worked up over. Jesus says, give to Caesar what is his, because ultimately Caesar and Rome and whoever else they are all under the sovereign authority of David's Lord, the Messiah. And the kingdom of God is not giving us a future where we hope we'll survive as long as possible. The kingdom of God is giving us a future of resurrection life that will last forever. So when the Sadducees who didn't believe in the resurrection came up to Jesus to try and catch him out with all the intricacies of what the future might look like, Jesus says, you're totally wrong. And the rule of this kingdom is so great, so extensive, and so untouchable. It means that all enemies and threats are under his feet. And ultimately, that is not about beating the Romans or beating any other ruler or ideology or force. It is about conquering death. That's the enemy that Jesus has come to put under his feet. And ultimately, that's what lies behind all the other threats, whether it's the threat of an army or of illness or of poverty or of failure. The driving force that makes all these things a threat is death.

And Jesus is saying, that's what I have come to deal with. And the result is that the Christ has come to establish a kingdom that is way bigger and way higher than anything David ever achieved.

It's a kingdom that includes people from every nation and background. It's a kingdom that covers all territory. It's a kingdom that has an eternal future. And at the heart of that kingdom are two great principles, love for God and love for one another. And that's what Jesus speaks about in this

chapter. And just think about that. The Christ has come to establish the ultimate, dominant, permanent kingdom. And the foundational culture and atmosphere and goal of that kingdom is love. Now, compare that with Trump versus Biden. Compare that with Brexit versus remain. Compare that with independence versus union. Compare that with me versus my colleague. Compare that with me versus my past. David knew that there was something way bigger and way better.

But the Jews weren't seeing it because they were longing for far too little. We do exactly the same. We think if only I can get my way a little bit of territory, a house, a career or a full life. If only I can have a community where I can fit in, where people won't reject me. If only I can survive as long as I possibly can. We long for health, success, security, fulfillment and love. We feel threatened by others who are either getting that ahead of us or who we feel might take it away from us. And we have this kind of Hollywood movie ideal where we have the house, the job, the car, the guy or the girl, the pension. And we think if we can just get that, then we've made it. But we've got to find it and don't let anyone take it away from you. And maybe some people do get that or it might look like they've got it, but it only ever lasts a brief moment. And for all of us, no matter how much of it we get, it always leaves us longing for more. And we will walk our way into hell because we're longing for too little.

[28 : 59] And all the time Jesus is saying, I will give you something way bigger and way better. Jesus wants to bring us into his family where everyone is precious, where everything is being restored, where all our scars and brokenness and failings are being healed, where no one gets judged or shunned or marginalised, where joy and peace and hope and security abound and where it will last forever.

And the incredible truth is that that is what God longs for. Why is God sending this King? Why is God sending his own Son? Why does God want his enemies under this King's feet? The answer is so that you will be safe, so that you can be in God's family forever.

That is what God longs for. And thank God that his longings are never as low as ours. So if you're longing for the wrongs in society to be put right by your political party, that's good, but you're longing for too little. Because Jesus is going to put right every wrong, and he will hold everyone to account, and yet at the same time he will have mercy on all who repent.

If you're longing for environmental action, that's good, but you're longing for too little, because Jesus is going to restore the whole universe where creation's curse and all environmental damage will be permanently undone. If you're longing for your own territory for a place that you can call home, that's good, but you're longing for too little, because Jesus is preparing a place for you. He's promising you an eternal home where you will be safe and secure forever. And if you are longing to be loved in a relationship, in a family, in a community, that's good, but you are actually longing for too little, because Jesus is saying, I will love you forever, and he will bring you into his family where we are all united together in harmony, in friendship, in unity, in company, where those who aren't married or don't have children or don't have parents or who don't have tons of friends will never again feel like the odd ones out. All the time the Jews were longing for the good old days, Jesus has come not to bring back the good old days, but to give us good new days. In fact, to give us amazing new days, to give us a hope of our new heavens and our new earth, where sin and brokenness and enmity and death are all destroyed and defeated under Jesus' feet, and we can be together and we can be safe forever. That is what God longs for, and in the name of God,
[32 : 20] I hope it's what you long for as well. That's what Jesus died in order to give us, and all you have to do today to be part of it is put your trust in Jesus and follow him.

You just need to pray, Lord Jesus, I long for you. I know I need you. Please save me. Please bring me into your family. And I think maybe the most amazing thing of all is that even if you can understand all of that, and even if you can grasp all, you know, all that I've tried to say about what God is promising, and you read the blessings that are described in the Bible about our future, and you think, you know, I've studied this, I've thought about this, and my mind is full of all wonder that God has for us. Do you know what? The day you get there, you will look around and you'll think, I was longing for too little, because this is so much more than I could ever have imagined.

That's what Jesus wants for you. That's what he's offering you today. That's the invitation that he gives. Please may we all respond with a resounding yes. Amen. Lord Jesus, we thank you.

We thank you so much that your longings are bigger than ours, and that your promises are bigger and better than any that we could ask or imagine ourselves. We thank you that you have come to

give us hope of your kingdom, and of all of that means. And thank you so much that you died to make that possible, and that you are now risen and calling people into your kingdom, and help us all to hear and respond to that call today. Thank you for everything you've done for us. Amen.