

King of Kings?

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Date: 29 March 2020

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[0 : 0 0] Now, if you would be able to, if you're able to, with your Bibles, turn back to the reading that Ally read earlier, Matthew chapter 6 from verse 19 to verse 34.

It's the second half of this chapter. Thomas looked at the first half of the chapter last Sunday. We're looking through Matthew's Gospel and we've kind of slowed down at the Sermon on the Mount.

There's a great material in it. And today we're going to be looking at the section that Ally read. Great thing about the Bible, great thing about this passage today, is that it's a hugely relevant passage.

It always is. But maybe it's just that we're listening and reading a little bit more intently in these days to what God is saying.

But I think it's important just to remind ourselves that this word, the Bible, is God's living breath.

[1 : 1 0] These days have been quite difficult for some of us, more than others. Some of us that are technologically illiterate have had to learn a different kind of language, a different kind of communication.

We've had to become better at talking online and listening for the gaps and not bumping into one another and dealing with all the different issues that come up sometimes from online communication.

It can be tough, it can be tiring, but we're really grateful, we're really thankful for it in these days. It's amazing in these days of isolation. But remember too, when we come to the Bible, it also is a different kind of communication that we have to learn.

It's more than just listening to a sermon with our physical ears or online or in the television. It's more than just reading with our physical eyes like any other book.

When we come to God's Word, we do need to have spiritual reception. We need spiritual equipment to be able to understand and listen and grasp what God's saying to us.

[2 : 1 7] When that ability comes from God, we have to put our faith in Him, trust in Him and ask Him to open our eyes and to open our ears spiritually so that He can speak into our lives and that we are listening to what He's saying.

So we ask Him and we seek His help anytime that we come to the Bible because it's His living Word and He speaks to us through it.

And in the Sermon on the Mount, the first thing I want to say is that He speaks to us as the King of Kings. You might not get that necessarily immediately from reading the passage because you just think of Jesus in His gear on the mountainside preaching to a bunch of people just like any other preacher in many ways.

But there are hints that what we have here or who we have here is the King of Kings. He speaks a lot in the Sermon on the Mount about the Kingdom of Heaven. He speaks about hell.

He speaks with a really strong spiritual dimension and he speaks with great authority. And we know if we broaden our look through the Bible to who Jesus Christ is, we recognise that even here He's speaking, even though it's kind of guarded, He's speaking as the King of Kings and as the Lord of Lords, got this magnificent description of Him in Revelation chapter 17 where we also know that other description of Him is the Lamb.

[3 : 47] They will make war on the Lamb and the Lamb will conquer them for He is the Lord of Lords and King of Kings and those with Him are called chosen and faithful.

And that reminds us even though it's veiled here in the passage in many ways or in this part of His ministry that this is the King of Kings who's speaking.

I don't listen to a lot of classical music or songs that are sung classically but Handel's Messiah is just outstanding and that Hallelujah Chorus which speaks of Him as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords is so majestic and so awesome and spine-tingling for us.

And we recognise that's who He is and indeed later in the Gospels, in Mark's Gospel where the kids are working from today in the kids' lesson in the kids' church, if that's what they're going to do.

God does make Himself known very dramatically as the King of Kings on the Mount of Transfiguration. And that's hugely significant as we remember and come to this passage that is God in the flesh, the Lord of Lords, King of Kings who's speaking and the claim is no less than that.

[5 : 17] He is the one before whom every knee will bow one day and it goes way beyond our current estimation of Him. Even the greatest, most insightful Christian doesn't in any way grasp the majesty and the glory of this Jesus.

He's way more important than we understand Him to be and so when He speaks, He's speaking and He's challenging us and I think it's good for us to be reminded of that.

It's all or nothing with Jesus. I hope we're never content with a divine weakling because Jesus isn't a weakling and we recognise Him as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

So He speaks as the King of Kings and as the King of Kings and as He speaks in this sermon, we recognise that He is looking, He is seeing with an ultimate vision, with an ultimate reality, He's seeing something really great, He's seeing a whole picture even as He delivers this sermon.

Now we often speak of the sermon in the mount as ethical and moral teaching and it's very practical and it gives us very practical advice and please hold on to that thought because I'll go on to say something about that practicality because it is, it is practical teaching and it is moral and it is ethical but it's in a remarkable context and it's actually much more than that, much, much more than that because the context of the sermon must bear in mind where Jesus had come from because Jesus was pre-existent.

[7 : 02] He had come from a spiritual realm, the spiritual realm. He is God the Son. He is the originator of all life. He had come from heaven, a place of indescribable perfection of beauty and of energy, of light and of life.

He had come from this, in the mystery of all of the reality of Him, coming from a trinitarian relationship with God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit in this eternal relationship of grace and love so that even the very best of life that we can anticipate and think of is only an absolute fleeting shadow compared with where He'd come from.

It is incomparably poorer and He emptied Himself and came into our world but He came from heaven.

And He came into this world which from its very genesis, from its very beginning, humanity had rebelled against God and were jealous of God and were jealous of who He was and of His power and of His glory and who turned away from Him the author of life.

And that is where death was born. Now today we might feel that we are miles away from Adam and Eve and from what they did and we might throw up our hands in horror and say, well, it's unfair.

[8 : 27] You know, why are we separated from God and from life because of what they've done but we too, we too would absolutely have listened to the lies of Satan.

We too would have chosen to live without God because that's our nature and that's what we would, we have always done and that's what we would have done with Adam and Eve simply being our representatives.

We've become therefore spiritually blind and deceived so that when Jesus is speaking here sometimes we miss the fact of where He has come from and that His perspective in this sermon is often talking about heaven and talking about hell and talking about Satan and God and good and evil.

And He focuses on these things so much, He speaks a lot about them. The sermon on the Mount is full of these references to the spiritual realm.

So it's not just that we need to think of that perspective of where He's come from as He addresses us here but also where He is going. Because Jesus knows exactly where He is going beyond the delivery of this sermon.

[9 : 47] He is going to the place of a skull. He is going to a hill outside Jerusalem, Golgotha, Calvary.

The place of a skull, it actually means the place of the cranium that protects the brain, that very centre of thought and mind and reality for us.

And it seems that that may even point to the centrality of what Jesus was doing on that hillside, outside of Jerusalem.

And as He goes on in life as if to prove the rebellious hearts of humanity that He was walking in among and that He loved, humanity that knew Him as the perfect Son of God rejected Him.

They drove Him to death and to the cross. They rejected His teaching, they rejected His life, they didn't want Him anymore around them. The only real reference to His kingship is nailed on the cross by a secular Roman ruler who says, this is Jesus Christ, King of the Jews.

[11 : 09] But yet His death we know becomes the doorway back to spiritual life for every believer. An astonishing act of love, He pays the price for our rebellion, our separation.

He is plunged into darkness, the darkness of hell in our place, baring the wrath of God, the holy God, that God who can't ignore sin and evil and rebellion because it only ever leads to death.

It only ever leads to death and that's the world in which we live. We can't put that right. We can't overcome death. We can't resist it ultimately. But He did. He could have resisted death but chose to go into death for us and rose again on the third day as we trust in Him. We can know freedom and life.

Now that is Christianity and that is the very core of our faith and it's with that perspective that we look at this sermon on the Mount Always and remember who Jesus was, where He'd come from and where He was going and therefore what He says here is in that context.

And it's in the context of people who already trust in Him, His disciples, and He's giving them because they are redeemed and they are saved and they belong to Him and trust in Him. He's giving them and therefore He's giving us as Christians a great and powerful call to live life differently.

[12 : 43] And He says for us as Christians therefore in this passage that we have to recognize two very important things. The first is that our treasure is in heaven. Chapter 6 in that section verses 19 to 24 speaks about our treasure being in heaven.

Do not lay up yourself treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves breaking in steel. Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. So He's reminding us as believers and with His perspective that our genuine life, our true life, our perspective and our treasure is in heaven. What does He mean by that? What does He mean?

Well it means that as believers Christ has become our treasure. He speaks about where our heart is, that's where our treasure lies. And for the believer Christ has become the core of our life and the core of our love. In Him is real life, love, hope, future, truth and security. It's in Jesus Christ that our deepest love and our longings are met. All of the searches that we make in this life for these things are a pale reflection, a mere broken shadow of what Jesus offers as we put our faith and trust in Him and enjoy a relationship with Him. We have life and forgiveness and belonging and hope and a future in Him and death's power has been removed. The sting of death has removed for us. So Christ is our treasure. He is what our heart is. We have given our hearts to Him and therefore we are called to live differently because of that, because of our treasure being there.

We're called to live in His light. Verse 22, it gives us that illustration of the eye being the lamp of the body and if it's healthy your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad it is full of darkness. And therefore He encourages us to think about the eye as it kind of affects all of life. We use the phrase, what have you got your eye on? What do you really fancy? What would you really like? And it really maybe is an illustration of, to explain what our heart's desire is. So there's a link between our heart and our eye in this picture. In fact, Psalm 119 gives us that illustration. In verse 10 it says, with my whole heart I seek you, let me not wander from your commandments. And then in verse 18 it says, open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. So we've got this reality that Christ comes into our life and transforms our ability, like I mentioned at the beginning, to see spiritually and to live accordingly. And when we're in Christ we are to be living with our heart's desire focused on Him so that we are living in His light. Because everything else is darkness and blindness. And I speak to a lot of people who are not Christians and who say, well I just can't see it. I just can't see it. And the Bible's clear that that's the case. That naturally we are spiritually blind and we can't see it. And maybe that's true of you today. And so I would ask you, if you can't see Jesus Christ and the reality of what He has done and what He is offering and how good news that is, then please pray to Him and ask Him to open your eyes. And therefore Jesus is saying that's what our treasure should be. And He's guarding us against being duplicitous or double-minded or having a divided heart. In verse 24 it says, no one can serve two masters. He will hate one and love the other. He will be devoted to one or despise the other. You cannot serve God and money or God and materialism or God and mammon.

However, you want to describe that. So what He's saying here is, as Christians are treasures in heaven, therefore live as if are treasures in heaven. Don't live as if this world is the most important thing. Don't live as if all that matters is material realities, the accumulation of wealth or depending on wealth and what it brings you for security, for a purpose in life or for comfort. Don't depend on wealth for that. And don't therefore resent God for getting in the way of that. Don't be half-hearted. Don't really have one eye on what this world is comfort and security can offer and think maybe even at best Jesus is an insurance policy for the future when I get old and decrepit. But recognize and see and understand that our heart is absolutely key and that we are to lean on and rest on

[18 : 04] Jesus Christ for our security, our purpose and comfort and not on material things. Maybe. Maybe we recognize that the heart today is absolutely key. Maybe just this crisis that we're going through is revealing where your heart and where my heart really lies. What do we live for? In whom do we trust? What do we love most? What do we believe or not?

There's two ways to live and it's all over this passage, eternally, temporally, in light or darkness serving God or materialism with faith or with destructive worry, a kingdom of light or a kingdom of darkness chasing the wind or resting in Jesus. So He calls us to live differently by recognizing as Christians are treasures in heaven, that's where our heart should be and to give Him all of our heart. But also then I think to recognize that His kingdom comes first. In the second section there, His kingdom comes first. And if you go towards the end of verse 33, He says, seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you. So He's reminding us, He's following on from what He said and He's reminding us that we're to live a righteous life as Christians and the righteous life is to affect everything. Now there's two ways in which righteousness affects our life. One, we're covered in the righteousness of Christ so that when God looks at us, He sees Christ's perfection. But we are also to seek after a life of obedience and righteous living, becoming more like Jesus every day. And we're to live it out, in other words, live out grace in our lives and live out what it means to be a Christian. And that's what the Sermon on the Mount is all about. In other words,

Jesus said, look your citizens of another kingdom, of a different kingdom whose ethics and morals are different from the world in which we live. And therefore all of life comes under this rubric of Christ's Lordship because our heart has been taken by Him and His love is our law.

And so the Sermon on the Mount speaks about all kinds of practical things, as I mentioned at the beginning, dealing with anger, sexual parameters, family life, honesty, respect and love for every human being, even our enemies. Generosity, our attitude to money, our prayer life, charity, to food and drink. And in this section, the second section of this entitled Do Not Be Anxious, the priority that we give to our looks and to our obsession sometimes with fashion and with clothes and worrying overly about these things as if they are ultimately significant for us. It deals with anxiety and worry and its causes and mental health and how much store we put by the opinion and judgment of others rather than God. It's all there. It's all there in the Sermon. And He encourages us to live the righteous life and His strength and His grace.

And interestingly, as He does so, He says something I think that is really quite paradoxical verse 34. He says, Therefore, do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day, as it says in the Av, sufficient for the day is the evil that are of, or sufficient for the day is its own trouble and difficulty.

[21 : 49] So interestingly, what He says is, in the light of eternity, in the light of who Jesus is, in the light of where our hope lies, where our heart lies and where our future lies, He says, Tomorrow is safe, therefore live for today. Isn't that an interesting kind of paradox?

He doesn't, in other words, say because we're Christians and because our treasures in heaven that were to be, as the old phrase goes, too heavenly minded to be of any earthly use.

It's quite the opposite of a pious disengagement from being part of this world. We are, we are, He says, to live for today and not be anxious about tomorrow. Every day has its own trouble and difficulties. It's beautifully paradoxical in a way. In other words, He's saying today, don't anxiously trace a chase after a material lifestyle. In verse 32, He talks about that, you know, therefore don't be anxious saying, what shall we eat, what shall we drink, what shall we wear, Gentiles run after these things, your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. He's not saying these things don't matter, but He's saying, don't treat them as if that's all that life is about, as if chasing these things is simply what your life's about, all there is, taking up all your thoughts and all your priorities.

Because if we're simply living for in a materialistic world, might worldview, it leads to deep insecurity and unspoken terrors about the future. What will happen? Will I have enough?

Am I going to survive? What do I look like? What will it be like when I grow old? It's a terrible way to live. It brings out deep anxieties within us. And indeed three times in this passage, He says, don't be anxious, don't be anxious, don't be anxious. And you know, He says, who of us can add one more hour to our day or maybe even one more inch to our height by simply worrying about it? In other words, it's destructive. It doesn't help any, it simply makes matters worse. So I think if this past month has taught us anything, it's taught us that life and what we live for can be taken from us in an instant, in this material world, and this physical life that we live is hugely vulnerable and insecure. Yet we are to fix our eyes on Jesus Christ because He still loves us. He still offers His love. He still reigns. He is still defeated death, and He still is the one who gives real life. So don't be anxious, don't anxiously chase after a material life. It's really what Jesus is saying here, you know, the Gentiles or the pagans that could be translated, seek after, run after these things as if that is all there is. But He acknowledges that each day has its own battles or troubles. So take one day at a time. Each day does have troubles, and He wants us to focus our attention on praying through these and committing them to the Lord. He acknowledges that there's trouble and concerns, and there's certainly plenty in these current days and in this current crisis. And I don't in any way, and God doesn't in any way, and the Word doesn't in any way belittle these things. But we do see in today's crisis, I think, in many ways, a worldwide parable of our own fragility and vulnerability, a sobering reminder that we live in the shadow of death. There's only one hope, one answer, and one love. So take each day as it comes, and rely on the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember

[25 : 45] His prayer earlier on, and give us this day our daily bread. And rather than chase after a material lifestyle, He says, rather be people of faith. In verse 30, He rebukes us for being so, having such little faith in God's provision for us, and really probably living so much of the time like God is a weakling, and that He doesn't really care. But He wants us to cry out to Him, and He will give us what we need in this life, and more importantly, He will give us eternal life. And He reminds us of that by speaking about our heavenly Father, who cares. In verse 26, you know, He talks about the flowers of the field, or sorry, He talks about the birds of the air, and He says, Luke, they don't reap, or gather into barns yet your heavenly Father feeds them. And then in verse 32, again, He speaks about the flowers, and the beauty of how they are clothed by God, and your heavenly Father, if He closes them, knows how much more we need to be clothed. And as Thomas was talking about last week, about the great picture of the New Testament picture of God, who, the great I am, who becomes our Father, our heavenly Father. Again, Jesus stresses that here. He provides food for the birds, and the beauty of the flowers, and He will provide for us, as we put our trust in Him. And there's an ultimate sense, obviously, that He is already provided for us, whatever happens in this life, whatever brokenness and battles and terrible things happen in this life. There's an ultimate sense, which has started now for every believer, that the provision has been made for Him, and we are safe in Him. We're all still going to die unless Jesus comes back first. This life will always be a battle, it will always be death and evil, even though it's defeated, it's yet to be destroyed. It's a broken world, and sooner or later, whether it's by pandemic, or by war, or by famine, or by disease, or by old age, or by accident, or by violence, we will all die. But in Christ, even though the body dies, it dies in order to be raised, and the soul lives on with Jesus

Christ waiting for the fulfillment of all things, the final resurrection and new life, of which this life at its very best, in our youngest, strongest, fittest, healthiest, sunniest, brightest, most fulfilled, satisfied days, is only the opening line of an opening chapter of a never-ending story. The pandemic that we are living through just now is indeed scary. It's a huge challenge to all of our lives, I think, and a huge challenge to where our hope and where our security and where our future lies, because we will all one day stand before the judgment seat of God. And as Christians, it's a great challenge to us as to how we love God, what place He has in our heart, how often our hearts can be divided, and how often we fail to live as citizens of another kingdom. But please do consider the gospel and the message of Jesus Christ. If you're not a Christian, again, to solemnly think about the claims of Jesus Christ, who is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

Amen. Let's pray. Father God, we ask and pray that you would teach us from your word, that we would seek the spiritual equipment that you ask us to have our eyes opened, that we would entrust our lives to you, that we would pray to you and ask for eyes to see, ears to hear, that you would breathe life into us, into those who don't know you. And as Christians, we would grasp more of what it means to be alive in Christ and what it means to be and to help with the spirit, to be citizens of a heavenly kingdom which Jesus knew all about.

And Lord God, we pray that you would bless this strange and difficult and time of great trial and that through it your kingdom would grow, that people would come to know a deeper and greater love and security and belonging than anything that this world can offer.

So that out of what is dark and black, good will come. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.