

Approaching the Book

Matthew 6:9-10

Pastor Russ

⁹ Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Lots of people have wild and crazy claims about who they were and what they could do. Sometimes it was just pride. Sometimes it was just manipulation. Sometimes it was calculated strategy. And sometimes, it was just a grand delusion.

Jesus made some wild and crazy claims. One writer put it this way:

Even the people with great authority and great position do not make the claims that Jesus did. They do not claim to be the king of Heaven and earth. They do not claim, as they sit on their glorious throne no less(!), that every person from every time and everywhere will one day come before them to be judged. They do not claim to have authority to forgive sins. They do not claim to be greater than the temple and the Torah or to be the fulfillment and embodiment of the Hebrew Scriptures. They do not claim that their rule will spread to every corner of the world. They do not claim to establish an unconquerable church and institute new sacraments that have themselves as the foundation and focus. They do not claim that all their commandments are to be obeyed. (O'Donnell, p.20).

Yet, somehow, those claims were written down. They were recorded by people who walked and talked and lived with Him for over 3 years. These writings were brought together into a book, the Bible. There you can read those claims for yourself.

But you know what? Those claims are believed by wise, serious, sober, thoughtful, humble people ever since Jesus died, rose again and ascended into heaven... even that is an almost unbelievable statement. We are used to hearing the claims of Jesus and Bible. It is only in an increasingly pagan western society that we are starting to get the reaction from people in our world that Christians would have gotten in the first generation. Jews had even stronger reactions because they knew the Old Testament. They knew the Messiah was going to come and rule and Israel would rule the world. To have Jesus, a humble, poor, itinerant teacher and healer claim to be their promised Messiah was just too much. Then, just to blow whatever PR He might have attained, He claimed to be God, to be eternal, to be alive when Abraham was, to have created the world and that He would die and be raised again *just as the Old Testament* prophesied.

Matthew was written partially to present to the Jews their Messiah whose life, death and resurrection brought the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants to their intended scope. Jesus's kingdom would be in all the world and over all the cosmos. The overarching purpose speaks powerfully into our unbelieving, shocked world. The calls on us to believe shocking claims as universal truths.

One writer put it so well:

This Gospel was written by a man for men about the Man. Matthew wants all people everywhere to bow down before that Man, the one to whom all authority in Heaven and on earth has been given. He wants Gentiles and Jews to submit to their King, trusting Jesus to be Savior from sins and Lord of life. He wants us to know Jesus, worship him, obey his teachings, and tell others to do the same. (O'Donnell, p. 15).

Let us take up this book and begin our journey.

The Manuscript for the Study

Let's think together about the book itself. Now much of this sermon is about the book. We will certainly begin next week to preach the book itself. Since we are so far distant from the

world and the realities in which the book was written, let's be sure we have our facts straight. If the arrow is not straight and true, then the flight will be wrong and the target missed.

Its Date

Matthew was written in the late 40's or early 50s. This is what was generally and commonly held until the middle 1800's. Liberal scholarship, from a stance that the Bible was not without error and not breathed out by God, taught that Matthew was written after the Gospel of Mark. They detected a document behind both Matthew and Mark. They said, without an awful lot of evidence, that Mark was written first. Matthew was a polished version of Mark with much supporting material included. It would be easy to dismiss this theory out of hand because of the motivations, methodologies and purposes employed. However, for almost 75 years, many evangelical commentaries repeat those ideas.

More recent commentators, having a high view of Scripture in its inerrancy and its infallibility ground in its inspiration by the Holy Spirit have dismissed those views. And so do I. While we cannot know for certain when it was written, there is little real reason to challenge the traditional general date.

However, we must note something important. By the time Matthew was written, it is fairly established that James, 1-2 Thessalonians, Galatians, 1-2 Corinthians, and Romans were already written and beginning to circulate. Matthew was writing his book in the context of basic New Covenant writings. He is writing at a time when the debate about the relationship between the Jew and Gentile in the church. Matthew, as much as any other book, sets out that the gospel was always intended to go beyond the Jews. The gospel of the kingdom was meant from the beginning to be for all the Gentiles.

This is important. We usually think of Paul and others conforming their writing to the Gospels. This is not usually the case. Matthew was well aware of what Paul was teaching. The New Covenant understanding of the Gospel quite clearly in Romans, Galatians and Corinthians would be known and would have helped shape Matthew's writing.

Its Author

Until the late 1800's, the authorship by Matthew was never questioned. It is strongly attested to by the early fathers and was generally accepted. It was only the advent of higher criticism that the authorship of many of the New Testament books was questioned.

Matthew was a disciple of Jesus. As all the disciples, he was a Jew. He was a publican, that is, a tax collector for the Roman government. This would have almost certainly meant that he was educated and well spoken. He also would have been hated by the Jews. But he responded immediately to Jesus' call to discipleship. He left all and followed Jesus. We know almost nothing more about him.

Its Recipients

Matthew does not specify who his recipients are. Identifying them usually depends on what Matthew's purpose is understood to be. But that is deeply tied in with the hermeneutical approach. In my view, if the author does not clearly identify a narrow segment of the body of Christ, (a church, a group, Jews, etc.) then we should be very careful using who we think the recipients were as a means to understand the theme and core ideas of the text. That puts us, not in a helpful hermeneutical spiral, but rather possibly in circular reasoning.

Its Relationships

One of the contentious questions that has been raised is the relationship between the gospel of Mark and the gospel of Matthew. I am not going to get into all the technical discussion. As I noted earlier, liberal, higher criticism in the 1800's proposed that Mark was written before Matthew and that both books were dependent on another document that was labeled Q. Although very technical, academic, and some creative internal evidences were argued for this position, the underlying agenda was to undermine the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures. They were wrong. Many evangelicals have also followed suit and presented this idea as having merit. I believe they also are wrong. I do not believe that we should give any weight or credence to unbelievers who write about the Bible. (For further and deeper discussion on this, please see William Hendriksen, p.91-94.)

Historically, solid scholarship has accepted that Matthew wrote his book first, Mark's is second. While they may have had secondary sources (written pieces, fragments, memories, stories...) it does not matter. At the end of the day, Matthew wrote a book under his name by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit so that what was produced in the original Greek is the inerrant, infallible Word of God.

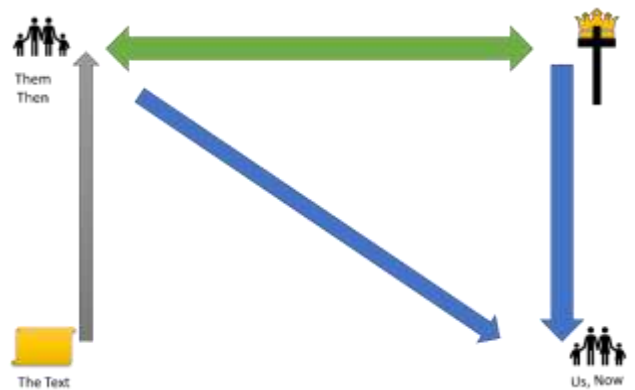
We take this book up with great sense of respect for its divine and human authors. We trust that it is God's Word to us. We engage it as profitable for us. We humble ourselves under its teaching so that our beliefs are changed, our wants submitted to God and our lives transformed.

The Method of our Study

Studying, learning, and preaching the gospels presents us with several challenges. To address those challenges, it is important for you to know and to keep in mind our approach and method in handling the gospels.

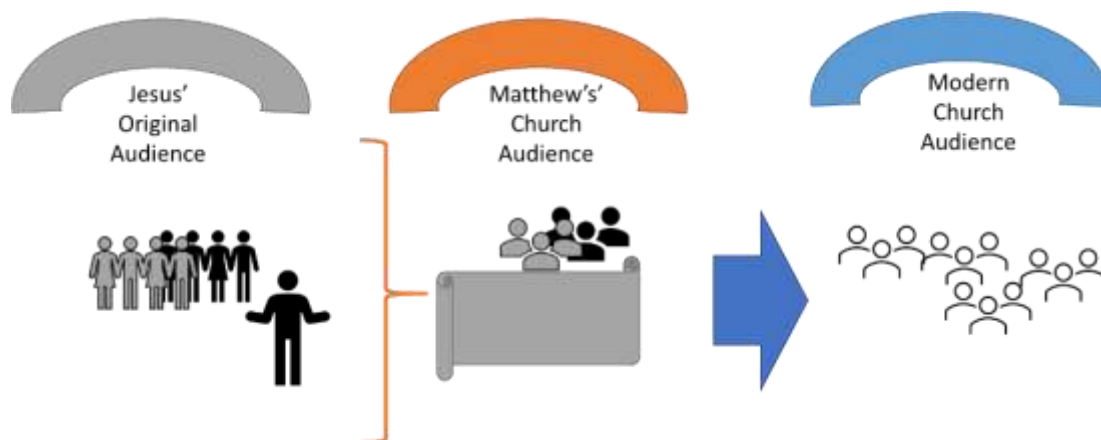
The long journey around with the text

Similar to the way we handle the Old Testament, we want to recognize that the Gospels occurred under the Old Covenant. They were written under the New Covenant. We want to be sure that we have the text right, what was being said to the first hearers right and the application that was intended from a Christ-centered, New Covenant perspective.



The three horizons/audiences of the text

The evangelist takes the material from the time of Jesus and intentionally applies it to the lives and times of his readers. And, significantly enough, in most of the chapters of this Gospel, there are three audiences in view. First, there are the disciples; second, the crowds; and third, the teachers of the law and Pharisees. Those three groups are apparent everywhere throughout this Gospel.



Jesus' original hearers including the disciples...

Matthew's original audience of his day...

The church down through the ages including us...

This way of understanding the gospels helps us to profit from them in theological and in practical ways.

The Melodic Line in our Study

Most books have a main theme, a melodic line. Like the melody of a song, or the main theme of a symphony, this main theme holds the book together. There may be sub-themes and other highlights but having some form of the main theme is important to being able to handle the book as was intended by the Spirit through the author.

There are many ways to uncover the main theme the author intends to follow.

From the Beginning of the Book (Matthew 1:1)

1 The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

We hear the melody most clearly at the top and tail. Look at the first words with which Matthew begins: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David" (1:1). Notice that there are three attributions or titles of Jesus here.

Jesus (the) Christ

Notice the first two titles applied to Jesus. The first is "Christ." That is not a last name. That is a title. It means "anointed one" or "king."

Son of David

This is a book about King Jesus. That point is reiterated with the next title, "the son of David." David was the great king of Israel, the one to whom a great promise was made. In 2 Samuel 7 we are told that through his offspring God would establish a forever kingdom. So with those first two titles you can hear the first note of the melodic line: Jesus, the King. Jesus is a sovereign who will be sovereign over an everlasting kingdom!

Son of Abraham

From that note of kingly authority Matthew subtly drops a half-step to the next note. He does this by moving from Jesus being “the son of David” to also being “the son of Abraham.”

Who was Abraham and why does he matter? Abraham was the non-Israelite Father of Israel. At the time that God gave Abraham his Covenant, Abraham was a Gentile. He exercised saving faith, not as a Jew, not even to become a Jew, but as a Gentile. This is important to Paul in Galatians and I believe, is part of the reason Jesus is called the son of Abraham.

The Abrahamic Covenant promised a son, the Son, a people, a land and a blessing for all the world, all the people groups. Matthew is going to show how Jesus is the fulfillment and the bringer of the promises made to Abraham. So we will be listening for this idea as we read and study the book.

From the End of the Book (Matthew 28:16-20)

At the end of the book, we see three important elements in this closing paragraph.

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

The book and our journey began with Jesus the Messiah, the fulfiller of the Davidic Covenant and throne and the fulfiller of the Abrahamic Covenant. Now it arrives at its destination.

All Authority

Now the authority Jesus holds is not tied solely to the Jewish people and Israel’s throne. It is not merely a tribal or national authority. It is not merely an Old Testament, Old Covenant authority. The old creation began to come to an end at the cross. The new creation has begun to unfold in the resurrection. Now Jesus has been invested with all authority, not just in Israel, not just on the earth, but in heaven as well.

All Nations

Here is the second grand trajectory of Matthew. Jesus is born in Israel. He is a Jew. He lives under the Old Covenant. He is under the Mosaic Law. But through His death and resurrection, the good news of Jesus’ redemption and rule is for all the people groups. It is no longer confined to a people, Jews. It is no longer focused on a place, Palestine. It is now to be proclaimed into all the nations. David’s Son is now the King for all the peoples.

All Allegiance/obedience

The Mosaic Law was for Israel. Obedience to God was through the revelation in the Old Testament. But now, there is a greater, deeper, clearer, more amazing obedience that is called for. Now, the faithful disciple of Jesus has been taught and makes progress in all the Jesus commanded. The rest of the New Testament expands on this great transition that has taken place. The universe of Jesus’ commands is to be the world of our obedience.

Here then is the primary theme, the recognizable melody throughout the book: Jesus, the promised Davidic King and fulfiller of the Old Testament, will reign over that eternal kingdom that will be a blessing to all peoples of the earth.

Why this Book?

In closing, I want to answer the question, “Why this book?” Why does the book of Matthew exist? And why are we taking a year to journey our way through its varied and lovely landscape?

Its Correspondence to the Mosaic Writings

The book opens with language that ties it with Genesis. Genesis opens with “In the beginning, God created...”

We should probably see in the five great discourses of the Gospel an allusion to the five books of Moses. Matthew presented Jesus as the New of which so much was the Old. He highlights Jesus as the new Moses.

Its Distinctiveness from the other Gospels

Through the Holy Spirit, the Lord gave us four books that tell us about Jesus, His life and ministry. Three are written in the common biographical style of the Jewish and Greco-Roman world. Matthew is more distinctly Jewish in its content. But it still follows the biographical form. Matthew organizes the material to unfold his themes. Each narrative set either has a teaching section from Jesus or instructional lessons in Matthew's voice, though this is less common.

Luke is more chronological but not strictly so. John's gospel, written in early 90's AD is different altogether. It has a purpose statement at the end and clearly uses the narrative as a wrapper for the instruction. Mark is different yet in its deep, interwoven, complex structures all contained within a fast paced, quick moving story.

While a comparison and contrast of the gospels is useful to help uncover the distinctives of each, a synthesis to try to create a “Life of Christ” violates the purpose, themes and integrity of the gospels.

Its Development of the Universal Kingdom

“The Jewish particularity and the Gentile universalism in this Gospel do not contradict each other; the gospel is ‘first for the Jew, then for the Gentile’. As we have already stated, Matthew is intended to show us how Jesus’ coming has brought a universal newness.

Its Defense of the Christ-Centered Gospel

How we need this again. We need it for ourselves. We need it for our ministries. We need for our proclamation of the gospel. Matthew will teach us, equip us, enlist us and encourage us to be faithful as a Commisssional church.