



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Sermon Notes

Reform, and Follow the King

David Anguish

An Intriguing Question

Two writers I was reading recently – for different purposes – asked the same question.

1. One put it this way: would the book of Matthew have been just as useful for teaching us what we need to know about being Christians if Matthew was just four chapters long instead of 28, if chapters 3-26 had just been omitted?¹
2. The other referred to the ancient statements of belief (creeds) that many recite and called attention to their glaring omission: they skip from the virgin birth to the trial, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and future judgment.²

Both want us to ask, why did Jesus live? What difference does it make for us?

1. Is all we really need to know about Jesus that he was born miraculously, died sacrificially, conquered death, intercedes for us, and will one day come again to judge the wicked and take Christians home to live with God forever?
2. If so, why did Matthew and the others tell us all those other things about Jesus?
 - a. “Were they just giving us the ‘backstory’ to satisfy any lingering curiosity the church might have about the earlier life of the one Christians now worshipped as Lord?” (Wright, 13)
 - b. Does that really fit what we sense they are doing when we read the Gospels? Or, did they want us to know more?

To answer, we need to read the story with fresh eyes. What did Jesus say he was about? That’s especially practical when we remember we are to imitate him (cf. 1 Cor. 11.1; Phil. 2.5-11; 1 Pet. 2.21-25; etc.). How can we imitate him if we aren’t clear on his aim?

¹ N. T. Wright, *How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 13.

² Glen H. Stassen & David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 130, citing Jürgen Moltmann, *Way of Jesus Christ*, 150. Wright makes and elaborates the same point (pp. 10-20).

In practical terms, we are asking what is important for staying faithful to the things that matter to Jesus. This sermon, and the ones to follow, will review that question and call for a renewal of undivided allegiance to Jesus based on his most famous sermon, a directive to disciples.³

The King and His Work

Our text begins Jesus' story in earnest; up to this point Matthew has "introduce[d] Jesus to his audience so that there will be no mistake about Jesus' identity."⁴

1. He is "Emmanuel" (1.23), God present with his people.⁵
2. He is the one completing Israel's mission by reliving their history: living in Egypt before spending 40 days in the wilderness (2.14-15; 4.1-11).
3. He is the one aiming to show the meaning of righteousness (3.15).
4. But, most importantly for Matthew, he is the King, come to establish the reign of God in keeping with the Old Testament promises (1.6; 2.1-3), a theme to which Matthew will keep returning in both explicit and implicit language (e.g., 21.5; 22.1-14; 25.31-46; 27.11, 29, 37, 42; see also 28.18).

Those promises and his identity are prominent as Jesus embarks on his mission (4.12-17).

1. The fact that he began his ministry in Galilee is in keeping with the expectations of God's ultimate reign; here, the specific reference is Isaiah 9.1-2 (Mt. 4.12-16).
2. It is in light of that promise that Jesus began to preach his message: "From that time Jesus began to proclaim, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near'" (4.17).
3. The expectations of what would happen when God inaugurated his reign were coming to pass; the King had come, his work had begun.⁶

Seeing this theme is vital for what will come in his teaching in the Sermon

1. The blessings of God's reign are for those who have completely surrendered to God's way, no matter the cost (5.3, 10).

³ A course that will not be exhaustive, either in the sense of covering all that Jesus said and did (necessary to fully answer the question we've raised) or in the sense of a detailed study of the Sermon itself; our focus will be on the Sermon's big ideas.

⁴ Frank J. Matera, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Perfect Measure of the Christian Life* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), 10.

⁵ Unless otherwise noted, the translation quoted in this sermon is the NRSV.

⁶ Note the NRSV's translation of the perfect tense verb ἤγγικεν (*eggiken*): "... has come near."

2. The blessings are for those who are completely dedicated to seeing his righteousness consistently practiced in the world, just as in heaven (5.6; see 6.10).
3. It is expected of those who would reap the benefits of God's reign that they take seriously his law (5.19-20).
4. It is expected that they will completely give up allegiance to the things that consume so much of the world's attention and energy, striving first for God's reign and trusting him to take care of their needs (6.33, cf. 6.19-32).
5. There can be no compromise: profession of faith, even doing amazing works of religion, are for naught without complete allegiance to doing his will (7.21-23).
6. These things are only to be expected of those who are called to a complete reorientation of purpose and life (4.17).

Matthew then illustrates where that will lead, telling of Jesus' call of four followers.

1. To better see the point, we need to first see something from John 1.35-42:
 - a. Andrew (see Mt. 4.18) had originally been a disciple of John and had brought his brother Peter to Jesus.
 - b. Their contact in Matthew 4 was not their first experience with Jesus; what's different here is that they are being called to an undivided commitment.
2. There are three key ideas in each half of the story.
 - a. Both sets of brothers are called to follow Jesus, the essence of being a disciple (4.19, 21).
 - b. Both sets of brothers were busy with tasks essential to making a living in their profession (4.18, 21).
 - c. Both sets of brothers made a clean break with the good and important things and families in their lives for the sake of following Jesus on his mission (εὐθέως, *eutheōs*, "immediately") (4.20, 22).
3. It's important that we understand these things when we come to Matthew 5.1-2 where we learn that Jesus addressed the Sermon mainly to "disciples."
 - a. The Sermon will explain what disciples who have made the complete commitment to Jesus should be and do.

Finally, Matthew shows Jesus showing how to do his mission.

1. He is doing what he said he would show his followers: "fish for people" (4.19).
2. What people? The very ones the prophetic texts regarding God's glorious reign said the King would seek (4.23-24; cf. Isa. 35.1-10; 42.1-7; 49.1-7; etc.).

Doing the Will of Jesus

Why did Jesus live? What are we to learn from Matthew 3-26? Why tell the story between the virgin birth and the trial before Pilate? Consider these words about the Sermon we will survey as you think about those questions:

The sermon is not a body of material to be cognitively mastered. It's a life to be lived. . . .

What Jesus says, . . . is that the wise person is the one who hears these sayings and puts them into practice. . . . It is the most practical, realistic way to live the Christian life that you can imagine. . . . Jesus actually expects us to do this stuff.

So we all have a decision to make in the very beginning.⁷

What will you do? Reform your life (4.17, NAB)? Humble yourself before God? Not give up on seeing his righteousness at work until its presence on earth matches heaven? Seek his reign above everything else?

What will you *do*?

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www.davidanguish.com

⁷ Randy Harris, *Living Jesus: Doing What Jesus Says in the Sermon on the Mount* (Abilene, TX: Leafwood Publishers, 2012), 20-21.