

Matthew – The Gospel of the Kingdom

Today is more of a master class than a sermon as I want to give you an introduction to the Gospel of Matthew.

Authorship

Matthew is only one of two Apostles who actually wrote a narrative of the life and ministry of Jesus, also known as a Gospel. The Gospel of Mark comes close, as it was written by Peter's scribe, John Mark, and is a compilation of Jesus' life and ministry from Peter's perspective. Luke was written by a physician (Col 4:14) who was a companion of Paul in his travels. While Mark could be called Peter's Gospel, Luke could be called Paul's Gospel.

Matthew was a tax collector and as such was one of the most hated people for two reasons. First, he was considered a collaborator with the invading Romans by collecting the onerous taxes imposed by them. Second, tax collectors got rich because they kept a percentage of the taxes collected for the Romans.

As a tax collector it means that Matthew was probably the most educated of all the original 12 Apostles. He was able to read and write and was skilled in mathematics. He was also probably conversant with Jewish Scriptures and Law. Because of this knowledge he was able to interpret the words and actions of Jesus in light of Old Testament messianic expectations.

Matthew's name means "gift of the Lord", and in the Gospels of Mark and Luke, he is also called "Levi".

Matthew's Gospel is largely seen as being written to a Jewish audience and is placed as the first Gospel for that reason and because he was compiling it during Jesus' lifetime.

Recipients

The Gospel of Matthew was written in Greek for Jewish readers. He has more quotations and allusions to the Old Testament than any other New Testament author. He also traces Jesus' genealogy, not from Adam, but from the patriarch, Abraham, which would have been important to a Jewish audience.

Also, his terminology of the "Kingdom of Heaven", instead of "Kingdom of God" reveals the Jewish reluctance to use the name of God. Remember that the Jews never spoke the name of God for fear of using His name in vain.

While his audience were Jews, he had an understanding that his message was not restricted to the Jews.

Matt 13:38

The field is the world

Also,

Matt 28:19

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,

Purpose and Theme

His primary purpose was to prove to his Jewish readers that Jesus is the Messiah. He does this by showing how His life and ministry fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures. To do this he quotes nine proof texts from the Old Testament.

His theme is that Jesus is the long-anticipated Messiah, who brought the Kingdom of God to the earth and is the long-prophesied fulfillment of God's promise of true peace and deliverance for both Jew and Gentile.

Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham to be a blessing to all nations and, His Messianic identity comes as an inheritance of the Davidic kingship over Israel.

As such, he establishes the identity of Christ's Church as the true people of God, who now find their unity in service to Jesus despite previous racial, class, and religious barriers. His Gospel provides necessary instruction for all future disciples, Jew and Gentile, who form a new community centered upon devotion and obedience to Jesus in the middle of significant opposition from the Jewish establishment.

His Gospel has 7 major themes.

1. Portrait of Jesus.
2. The bridge between the Old and New Covenants.
3. Salvation – from the particular (Israel) to the universal (all nations).
4. The new community of faith.
5. The Church is built and maintained by Jesus' continuing presence.
6. The Great Commission.
7. Jesus' five discourses serve as a manual on discipleship.

Structure

Matthew divides his Gospel in five sections which are centered around the five major discourses of Jesus. He does this intentionally as an emulation of the Pentateuch. This establishes Jesus' Teachings as a new Torah (Scripture) and Jesus himself as a new and greater Moses. Each of these five discourses ends with, "When Jesus had finished saying these things", or something to that effect.

1. Chapters 1-7 - The Sermon on the Mount
2. Chapter 10 - The Mission Instruction to the Twelve
3. Chapter 13 - The Parables of the Kingdom
4. Chapter 18 – Life in the Kingdom
5. Chapters. 24-25 – The Mount of Olives discourse on the End Times

Context

The Jews waited for a leader who had been promised centuries before by the prophets. They believed this leader -the Messiah (anointed one) would rescue them from their Roman oppressors and establish a new kingdom. As their king he would rule the world with justice. In their minds, he would come as a conquering hero.

However, many of the Jews overlooked prophecies that also spoke of this king as a suffering servant who would be rejected and killed. It is no wonder then, that few

recognized Jesus as the Messiah. How could this humble carpenter's son from Nazareth be their king?

They totally missed the fact that Jesus was and is the King of all the earth.

Conclusion

Matthew had lived a life of wealth and leisure. He didn't care about anyone but himself. He did what was expedient under Roman occupation and carved a place of luxury for himself.

Then comes Jesus and shakes him out of his self-centeredness. Jesus had looked at him and not seen a despised tax-collector. Jesus had seen the real man behind the position and the wealth. Despite his wealth and comfort, it was painful for Matthew to be rejected by not only his fellow Jews, but even by his own family. Wealth bought clothes, food, a nice home and protection from the Romans. What it didn't buy was respect, friendship, love or acceptance.

Jesus saw beyond his façade and called him to follow him. Jesus was not embarrassed to be seen with him. Jesus genuinely cared about him. No one had ever shown him this kind of attention and love. This touched something deep inside of Matthew and he got up and left everything behind to follow this man who had seen the real him.

Have you ever looked beyond the mask of those around you and seen them with Jesus' eyes?