

The Worshipped King (Matthew 2)

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[0 : 00] Thanks so much, Dominique, for that reading. Why don't we pray as we come into God's Word together?

Let's do that. Our Heavenly Father, thank you for your Word. Thank you that it speaks life to our souls. Thank you that this is not just any ordinary book, but this is an amazing record of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Help us to pay attention. Many of us are tired from watching screens all week. Would you be with us, Father? Speak to us through your Word today. Holy Spirit, we do want the Spirit to be working in our hearts right now so that we would make much of Jesus.

In His name we pray. Amen. Last week in chapter 1, I shared that we see in the names of Jesus, the three different names of Jesus in that chapter, how a faithful God keeps all His promises to us.

To give us a fresh start in Christ, to save us in Jesus, to be Emmanuel, God with us. That was chapter 1. Now this week in chapter 2, I think we see in the early life of Jesus, how a sovereign God protects the true King who is worth worshipping.

[1 : 18] Chapter 2 is all about the early life of Jesus, isn't it? But in these events, we see how a sovereign God works to protect the true King who is worth worshipping.

And so we're going to look at this chapter in two parts today. We're going to look at a King who is worth worshipping, from verses 1 to 12. And then we'll think about the sovereign God who protects Him, from verses 13 through 23.

A King who is worshipping and a God who protects Him. And now at first glance, this chapter seems like we've landed in, kind of in the middle of a film trilogy as it were, right?

But you think about it, there's a bunch of wise guys, there's a tyrant king, there's an innocent family on the run, all great elements for a movie trilogy.

And yet, just like all those middle parts of those film trilogies, it's not quite finished, it's kind of like a bridging chapter. There's more to come, as it were. And while Matthew's not a film director or a YouTuber by any means, he sure knows how to tell a story.

[2 : 27] I wonder if you noticed, as Dormini read it earlier, how Matthew has crafted this chapter to echo the stories of the Old Testament. And one way he does this is that he portrays Jesus, he alludes to lots of things, to Moses' story.

He kind of puts Jesus as the sequel to Moses, Moses 2.0, as it were. Last week we talked about some of the links to Genesis, and this week we're going to see some links to the events in the book of Exodus, the second book of the Bible.

And in Jesus' early childhood, they're relived in the most striking fashion. I mean, have a think about it this way. In both the Exodus account and in Matthew chapter 2, we have God's people under the rule of a foreign king, don't we?

We have this king who's a ruler who wants to be worshipped, and yet he's threatened by the birth of a Hebrew boy. And they try to get rid of him.

A young family then must flee from this attempt at ethnic cleansing. Can you see the parallels between the two? Matthew wants us to think about that. His Jewish readers would have clued in on some of these allusions.

[3 : 47] And I think he does this because he wants us to understand Jesus' birth, not just as a Christmas story that we put on a card and forget each year.

Ultimately, a story about Jesus' birth and his early childhood is ultimately a worship story. In our chapter, the phrase, worship him, is used three times.

Verse 2, verse 8, verse 11. Remember this. At the heart of the Exodus story, when Moses took out God's people, is a tale of two kings.

Who would be king? Pharaoh of Egypt or the God of Israel? And at the heart of the first Christmas story, I think, is a tale of two kings as well. Who will be king?

Is it going to be King Herod the Great? Or is it this king? King Jesus? And the question for us, PCBC English, is exactly the same.

[4 : 47] In our uncertain times, who is the true king worthy of our worship? Is it Jesus or is it something or someone else?

Chapter 2 is a worship story. And so I think if we approach it this way, there are lessons, there are challenges for us as well. Let me read from verses 1 and 2 again.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and they asked, Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?

We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him. It's interesting, isn't it? First up, if you read the text carefully, there's not three of them. And they're not really kings.

They're Magi. This is just the literal word in Greek. And we've got to try and work out what exactly Magi did. It seems like they were experts in stars and dreams.

[5 : 47] We see them linked to both things in this chapter, right? And they weren't Jewish people. They were Gentiles, non-Jews. People from the east, the text says. Some scholars reckon they were possibly from Persians, who had heard of the Old Testament prophecies.

Maybe they were passed down from Jewish people who were in exile and had lived among them. But what we do know about the Magi is this. They've come to find the king of the Jews.

And they've come, verse 2, to worship him. Now, all this is happening in the days of Herod the king in the ancient Near East.

There's a couple of Herods that our Bibles record and other Jewish historians record as well. And so it can get a bit confusing, right? But this Herod is Herod the Great.

He was king over Judea, the southern part of what used to be Israel, where Jesus was born at the time. And we know from other early historians that Herod is only king over Judea, though, because the Roman Empire, which was ruling everywhere at the time, lets him.

[6 : 59] So you see, Herod is, he's a king, yes. But he's still under a higher authority. And you know what? Herod has worked hard his whole life to make his name great, to start a dynasty, to start a line of kings.

And so that's why, to get his kingship, he had to kill off relatives to kind of win the throne for himself. And then now that he's king, through his life, he rolls out building projects.

He buys lavish gifts for other cities, tries to curry people's favor. All this is recorded in Josephus' histories. Herod is a king who wants to be loved and worshipped.

But there's one small problem. You see, even though Herod is called king of the Jews, say, by the Romans, he cannot change one thing. He's actually not a Jew.

He's actually an Edomite. He's actually descended from Esau, not Jacob. And so Matthew's readers would have known that Herod is nowhere close to King David's family tree.

[8 : 08] It was really important then, that genealogy in chapter 1. Herod is nowhere to be found near that genealogy. And so when these stargazing tourists from the east, they roll into town and they say, we're looking for the king of the Jews.

Not you, Herod, but we're looking for the king of the Jews that's just been born. How does Herod feel, you think? The text tells us he was disturbed.

It's a very strong word, deeply disturbed, I think. And Herod is probably thinking, what are they talking about? Who's this true king? Who's this person who's born?

Is he going to take everything I've built? Is he going to take my kingdom away, my dynasty that I'm building? And so what does he do? Verse 4, he calls for his religious cabinet, as it were.

Right? Gathers them together and asks them, where is the Christ to be born? Isn't it tragic then? The religious leaders, they can quote Micah 5 verse 2 without hesitation and tell them, yep, it's going to be in Bethlehem.

[9 : 15] And yet they would step no further to find this ruler. It's ironic, isn't it? In Matthew chapter 2, the Jews knew exactly where King Jesus would be born.

And yet it's the Gentiles that find him first. Well, now that he's asked his religious leaders, he then calls the Magi in secret. They've probably been in town for a few days, causing a stir, looking for this king.

And Herod then wants to know when the star they saw appeared to work out how old this boy is. And so in verse 8, he sends out the Magi saying, go, go, go and make a careful search for the child.

As soon as you find him, report to me so that I too may go and worship him. Yeah, right. Here's the thing. Bethlehem was just the next village down from Jerusalem.

So Herod could have gone and walked there himself to find this king. And yet, neither Herod nor his religious leaders bother to go.

[10 : 17] They don't follow the Magi to worship Jesus. I think there's a bit of Herod in all of us, isn't there? To love what's in front of us so much.

To love our name so much. To love how people think about us. That we worship all these small things. And we have no time or desire to go to the true gift.

We'd rather bow down to other lords than to go seek the Lord of lords, King of kings. And I think there's a bit of the religious leaders in us too, is there not?

Perhaps some of us who have grown up in church. We know our Bibles. We know the facts about Jesus. We hear it every year. We think we know our Bibles from Sunday school.

And from just showing up at church. And yet, what a tragedy. For religious leaders to know the facts. But fail to truly go and worship.

[11 : 20] And lay their hearts before the king. To bow before him as goodness and kindness. Friends, head knowledge about Jesus, evidently, is not enough.

And so, true worship, I think, is to say sorry. To repent. From thinking that what we know is enough.

What we know about Jesus is enough. We need to turn to this boy. To worship him as our king. That's what we need to do. This child, still learning to walk.

He one day walks to the cross. It's amazing that this boy who, probably at that time, was babbling his first words. One day he will cry out on the cross.

It is finished. And pay for sins. One day this kid, who probably needs his parents to feed him. He will feed us as the bread of life.

[12 : 17] Broken for you and me. And so, verse 10. When the wise men saw the star, they were overjoyed.

When coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary. And they bowed down and worshipped him. And worshipped him.

That's Matthew's invitation to us. This is the example to follow. To marvel and worship Jesus like the wise men did. To offer our treasures. Our best before him.

I love that. There's no restriction on what country you come from. Or how rich or poor you are. How young or old. If magi from the east can worship Jesus as king.

And with what little they knew. What about you? What about me? Which king will we worship in our lives? Friends, we've heard about Jesus.

[13 : 15] A king worth worshipping in these first few verses. And now I want us to look more closely at what happens next. From verses 12 onwards.

We're going to look at our sovereign God who protects this true king. A sovereign God who protects him. You know what? For all intents and purposes, Jesus should not have survived beyond chapter 2.

And yet in this second half of the chapter, Matthew reminds his readers, God was in total control. He's the one who is writing the script. But in everything, his hand is at work.

And so I want to draw our attention to three things in this section that illustrates God's sovereignty. Three things. The ruler, the saviour, the mother. Firstly, I think we see God's sovereign hand over the wrath of a ruler.

Verse 13 on, we see the true intentions of Herod. He didn't want to worship Jesus. He just wanted to know where he was so he could search out and destroy this Christ child.

[14 : 25] There's an urgency, I think, in the angel's warning in verse 13. Get up! Escape to Egypt! For Herod is going to search for the child and to kill him.

And so Jesus the king becomes Jesus the refugee. And yet in these events, we see God's sovereign hand at work, don't we?

He's able to use an ordinary couple, like righteous Joseph, so righteous, and Mary to protect the boy Jesus, to protect their son.

You know, in a time and place when anything could have happened, God worked in history, worked through ordinary people who obeyed him to make sure that this boy king will outlive the crazy puppet king Herod.

Right? Because at the very end of it, Herod dies, Jesus survives. So we see God's hand in the wrath of the king.

[15 : 27] We see God's hand as well in the prophecies of our saviour. This section is a little bit of a purple patch of prophecies that Matthew pauses the action three times.

Verse 15, verse 17, verse 23. He pauses the action and then points out to his listeners how it all happened so that prophecies in the Old Testament might be fulfilled.

Now, I want to step aside here, just for a little bit, just so we can understand what the word fulfilled here in Matthew's gospel means.

Because you might hear someone say, well, that prophecy is not about Jesus. Is Matthew just making stuff up? He's just connecting random dots where they shouldn't be connected?

Look, the word prophecy in Matthew's gospel, it doesn't just mean happened as predicted. The word in Greek has actually a wider meaning than that.

[16 : 27] So to fulfill really means to bring something to completion. And so in the Bible, prophecies are sometimes fulfilled like weather forecasts.

It's just a direct line. There's a prediction and then it comes true. Think of Micah 5, verse 2, as we already looked at. The Messiah will be born in Bethlehem.

And then he is. That's a straight line prophecy. And yet sometimes in the Bible, prophecies are made and then they're fulfilled. But they're fulfilled like mountain ranges.

Remember last week we talked about Isaiah's prophecy in chapter 7, how back in King Ahaz's day, he got a sign that God would be with him.

How? He said, look, a virgin, a young woman is going to give birth to a child. That's going to be your sign. And so Isaiah's talking about something that actually happened in his time.

[17 : 23] Right? That's the first mountain. The mountain that Israelites could then see. But then behind that was another mountain. Right? One day, not just a young woman, but a virgin, Virgin Mary, would give birth to Jesus and really show that God is with us.

Do you see that? So there's a prophecy fulfilled once, the first mountain, and then another mountain behind it. And that's even bigger, even greater. So prophecies are sometimes fulfilled that way as well.

And then sometimes prophecies are fulfilled in the Bible more like namesakes. So sometimes prophecies work that way. They're more like namesakes. Let me explain it this way.

Have you ever been to Cambridge in New Zealand? A lovely town full of flowers. You can ride horses. Lots of farms. The settlers that first started Cambridge, they named it Cambridge because they thought wanted it to be an echo of its namesake, Cambridge in England.

Do you see that? Just like Disneyland in Hong Kong is pretty nice. But it's not quite like the real thing, right? We know it's a namesake of the best one in the United States and California.

[18 : 41] And so over here in verse 15, when Matthew quotes Hosea 11, where it says, Out of Egypt I call my son. Look, someone who has an axe to grind as a Christian, they're going to point that out and say, Look, that is so not a prophecy fulfilled because Hosea is talking about Israel.

He's not even talking about Jesus. What's going on here, Matthew? Well, look, it is still a fulfilled prophecy. But it's fulfilled in this way. He's saying to his Jewish readers, just as God saw Israel as kind of like his only son, his beloved firstborn, God sees Jesus as his one and only son today.

You see? So, and actually saying that Israel really was a namesake of the true son, Jesus. Does that make sense? So this is how Matthew says that Jesus fulfills Hosea's words in chapter 11.

Jesus is a better type of Israel. He's a better namesake. But then what about verse 23? At the very end of our chapter, This is the one that atheists, friends, love to poke holes at, right?

Because there's actually nowhere in the Old Testament that these exact words appear like this. So what's going on? Is Matthew just making stuff up?

[20 : 16] This is tricky, isn't it? But friends, it's not impossible. Let me share two possibilities at what Matthew is trying to do here. One possibility, perhaps, is that Matthew, when he says this, he's referring more widely to what the prophets say about a righteous branch.

I wonder if you've recognized when Isaiah 11 talks about a branch, a righteous branch that will come from the stump of Jesse. It's talking about King David's ancestry.

Someone's going to come from David's line. A branch. Jeremiah 23 verse 5 talks of a righteous branch who will reign as king. These were Old Testament prophecies of some kind of branch that Israel should be looking forwards to.

And the Hebrew word for branch is pronounced at netzer, right? Nezer. So it kind of sounds like Nazarene. So maybe that's what's going on here.

Matthew's kind of borrowing a word from Hebrew and then taking it into his language. It's kind of like being a bilingual person. You take words from one language and use it in another.

[21 : 29] I still don't know what it means, but I've heard people say, Okay, they're whole friend. Yeah, whole friend. Like, obviously, friend is an English word, but it's got a new meaning when you use it in Cantonese.

Maybe that's what's going on here. Another possibility on why Matthew says this is fulfilled is that maybe Matthew's saying Nazarene because Jesus grows up in Nazareth.

And Nazareth is kind of a pretty old, lousy, backwater town. And so in that way, the prophets who spoke of the Messiah as someone who's going to be despised and rejected, like in Isaiah 53, maybe that's how Jesus fulfills that prophecy.

He'll be a Nazarene. He'll be someone who's despised and rejected. Because surely nothing good can come from Nazareth, right? Look, whatever the answer is, the point I want to make is that in all these prophecies, Jesus fulfills Israel's every hope.

Jesus is the 2.0 that they have been looking for. A better Moses. A better David. A better king who is also a servant. And so, despite appearances, God is working out his plans through Jesus.

[22 : 52] Matthew reminds us we worship a sovereign God who protects his son so one day he will fulfill all of Israel's hopes and all of our hopes when he goes to the cross for us.

God is sovereign in the wrath of a ruler. He's sovereign in the prophecies of our Savior. And yet at the center of this section, we still see God's hand over a mother's grief.

Let me read verse 16 to 18 for you. When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious. And he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity, who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.

And what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled. Our voices heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted because they are no more.

In a poem that John Piper, a Christian author, wrote, it's called The Innkeeper, he points this out so quickly, do we pass over these Christmas words.

[24 : 18] I wonder if you've read this and just skimmed past it. I think Matthew invites us to linger here. Because friends, Ramah was also a town nearby Jerusalem, just like Bethlehem.

And once upon a time, mothers wept here, like their ancestor Rachel, because Ramah was where all the exiles were kept. All the captured Jewish people were kept before they were deported and taken into Babylon.

Mothers wept there because, like their ancestor, they would never see their children again. And so Matthew, that's why Matthew quotes Jeremiah chapter 31, 15, because in the death of Herod's massacre, a town near Jerusalem is once again weeping bitterly.

And so friends, we shouldn't pass by the emotion, the tone of verse 16 too quickly. Because in God's sovereignty, we don't know how his hand works, but it works like this.

God's light comes, yes, but it comes into a dark world. It comes into a world which is ruled by evil, evil kings and rulers and governments, happy to spill innocent blood to get our own way.

- [25 : 41] Right? We saw that in King Herod, massacring boys. And yet we insist on our own way too, in our societies, don't we? We talk of family planning and yet we murder children.
- We talk of euthanasia and yet we're really murdering older people who we don't want in our lives anymore. We talk of our sexual rights and yet so many people are enslaved against their will and trafficked to fuel this industry.
- And so many choices that we make in this society come at the cost of someone else. Our world is broken because, friends, we are sinful people and we love ourselves no matter who pays the price.
- So I want you to invite you to take a leaf from Matthew 2.16. To take a moment. Maybe write something down right now.
- Something that's going on in this world that would make you weep like Rachel. Because, friends, we need to linger and grieve.
- [26 : 59] I think maybe in our New Zealand bubble, we've shielded ourselves from a lot of the pain and sorrow of our broken world. We only have to look at the news, don't we? To see how many people are actually dying of COVID.
- The death and disease that this pandemic has caused. Or we think about the weeping and mourning of mothers in war-torn Yemen and Syria.
- Maybe for you, what's on your heart is the Uyghur people, locked up in China. Sterilised. Murdered. Forced to work against their will. Or maybe it's secret Christians, our brothers and sisters, all over the world, or in difficult places, and they have to hide their Bibles.
- They are tortured when they're caught for worshipping Christ as king. What is it that makes you weep like Rachel? Linger on it. Linger on it.
- [27 : 59] It's okay to be sad and to grieve. And yet, friends, it's in this grief and pain that we have, isn't it, that God enters our world. That God comes into our dark, dark world as a son born into poverty, who knows what it's like to run as a refugee, to not have a home, who is hunted like prey, who then lives an itinerant life, never, never becoming rich, always on the move, who heals the broken, who is mistreated, misunderstood, one day becomes a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.
- So it's okay to grieve. It is. It's okay to grieve at our world, yet we don't grieve without hope. Because even in Jeremiah 31, which Matthew quotes, God says weep.
- But then he also says there's hope. Let me show you. Let me read to you the two verses after verse 15 of Jeremiah 31. It says, A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping in great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted because they are no more.
- This is what the Lord says. Restrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears, for your work will be rewarded, declares the Lord. They will return from the land of the enemy.
- So there is hope for your future, declares the Lord. Your children will return to their own land. Jeremiah encourages Israel to grieve, but not without hope.
- [29 : 38] And likewise, I think Matthew 2, Matthew says, Grieve, but see your future hope. Because friends, amidst a ruler's wrath, amidst all the prophecies of Jesus, amidst a mother's grief, our sovereign God prepared a worthy king who will one day suffer for us.
- However bleak this world is and becomes, Jesus is still the true king. He is still worthy of our worship. When you and I lay all our treasures before him and no one else, there might be sorrow in our world, in our lives.
- Yet there is joy. Joy no one can take away, both now in our lives, and even more, forevermore, when Christ and us are reunited.

Because with God's story, right, it gets better. The sequel is better than what we have now. Part two is better than part one. Friends, it gets better with Christ.

Let's pray. Come, Jesus. Come, Lord Jesus. Come to our broken world again.

[30 : 57] We live in such difficult times, and though we know that only you know the hour of your return, we long for you to return. We love you.

We worship you. Forgive us when we have been caught up building idols, chasing gods that would never satisfy us fully like you.

Thank you that you came to this earth in such a broken time. You continued to survive and live, and yet you chose to die, to lay your life down for our sins.

And so we would ask that you would come back again, bring an end to all our suffering, that every pain and sorrow to cease. Would you reign in our hearts and reign on this earth again one day, soon as our Prince of Peace.

Help us to rejoice that one day you will be again, God, with us. And help us for now to give all our time, treasures, our gifts to you, for you are our true King.

[32 : 05] We pray these things in the mighty name of Jesus. Amen.