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The Gospel According to Matthew

What a Wonderful Savior

December 17, 2017

Scripture Reading: Matthew 1:18 –
2:12

As you look over this Gospel of Matthew, you begin to realize that Matthew must have been a rather incredible person. He was a Jew, but he was a despised tax-collector. Called by Jesus to follow Him, Matthew was appointed to be one of the 12 Apostles. While you would think that a Jewish tax-collector might be quite savvy in regard to making money, even a quick overview of this Gospel shows that Matthew had a remarkable understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures.

No doubt he gained the bulk of his ability through the teaching of Jesus. We know that the Lord did teach His

disciples what the scriptures really meant. For example:

Luke 24:13-32 That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, (14) and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. (15) While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. (16) But their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

(17) And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. (18) Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" (19) And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, (20) and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified

him. (21) But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened.

(22) Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, (23) and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. (24) Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."

(25) And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! (26) Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (27) **And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.**

(28) So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, (29) but they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. (30) When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to

them. (31) And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. (32) They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, **while he opened to us the Scriptures?**"

We suspect that Matthew was also speaking of himself when he wrote:

Matthew 13:51-52 "Have you understood all these things?" They said to him, "Yes." (52) And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

Jesus trained His disciples, who had been raised on the Old Testament Scriptures, "for the kingdom of heaven." So Matthew was one who "brought out treasure what is new and what is old." His eyes were opened by Christ to understand the Scriptures, to see that they were about Christ, and to understand how Christ fulfilled those Scriptures. Really we could suggest that 13:52 is a statement of the theme of the Gospel of Matthew. It is a treasure book, showing us treasures of truth from both the Old and the New Testament eras.

Let's take some time now to do a kind of "drone overview flight" over this Gospel and survey some of its main features:

1. The genealogy – ch 1. The Abrahamic and Davidic credentials
2. His Birth and visit of the Magi chs 1b-2
3. John the Baptist. Matthew writes quite a lot about John and this is not surprising since he is the prophet linking the OT and NT. The last OT prophet who introduces the Messiah at the start of the New era. John's baptism, John's questions of Jesus, Jesus' tribute of John, and John's execution by Herod.
4. Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, succeeding where Israel failed.
5. The Sermon on the Mount – chs 5-7. Here is the King describing His kingdom, which He calls "the kingdom of heaven." There are some 31 references to the kingdom of heaven in Matthew. We will need to be certain that we understand what it is! It is the subject of the message Jesus

preached! The good news of the kingdom of heaven.

(Mat 3:2) "Repent, for **the kingdom of heaven** is at hand."

(Mat 4:17) From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for **the kingdom of heaven** is at hand."

(Mat 5:3) "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is **the kingdom of heaven**."

(Mat 5:10) "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the **kingdom of heaven**."

6. There are Gentiles in this Gospel to whom Matthew devotes quite a lot of attention. The Magi. The centurion in chapter 8 of whom Jesus said "I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel." Another gentile example is Jesus' telling Chorazin and Bethsaida that Tyre and Sidon were not as wicked as they. Jesus' healing of the Syrophenician woman. We are to go into all the world and make disciples of all the nations.
7. Of course there are considerable sections that record Jesus' conflicts with the Pharisees, culminating in chapter 23 where Jesus pronounces woes upon the

scribes and Pharisees.

8. Chapter 13 is a classic section of a collection of parables – the Sower (or soils), the Tares, the Mustard Seed, the Dragnet. All of these describe the kingdom of heaven.
9. The Olivet Discourse, chs 24-25. Here Jesus addresses His Second Coming and the final judgment.
10. And of course the account Jesus' trial and crucifixion, burial and resurrection, and it is Matthew who gives us the classic statement of what we call the Great Commission in the very last chapter, 28.

And all the way through, Matthew uses the Old Testament, over and over again, to demonstrate that this ONE, Jesus, IS the Messiah and that everything He did and taught is simply the continuation and fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures. This is Jesus, come to save His people from their sins.

Let's go back now to the last half of the very first chapter and listen once more to Matthew's account of the birth of Jesus:

Mat 1:18-25 Now the birth of Jesus

Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. (19) And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

(20) But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. (21) She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

(22) **All this took place to fulfill** what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: (23) "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).

(24) When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, (25) but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

A *virgin* birth. That is enough of a mystery in itself, but add to it the truth that this child's conception was "from the Holy Spirit," and you have

something that is beyond the human mind's ability to comprehend.

And it gets even more incomprehensible (Chapter 8 of the Westminster Confession):

The Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon Him man's nature, with all the essential properties, and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance.

So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.

Rather often we will hear people – even people who claim to be Christians – insist that God surely is not so narrow-minded as to allow for only ONE way of salvation. Think of all the cultures and races and nations in this world, these people say. To insist that Jesus is the only way of salvation

is to deny all the other religions of the world and force the religion of western civilization on the whole world. It is the evil of religious colonization, they insist. You have heard this sort of thing I am sure.

But such people fail at many points in their thinking, and one of the primary points where they go wrong is that they fail to understand just WHO Jesus is. And therefore they fail to grasp just what kind of a Savior is required for the salvation of sinners.

Here He is, the eternal Word made flesh. Conceived and born in the womb of a young woman, yet without human father, so that God became man. The God-man. All of which was absolutely necessary if we were ever to have a Savior. No human being, born as a descendant of Adam, would ever be able to die for anyone's curse and sin except his own – and that death would not be meritorious to save even him!

And so we ask such people when they make these objections to Christ as the only way of salvation – “just how many such saviors can you name in the history of the world?” There is ONE God. One Creator. He has given us the perfect Savior, His only begotten Son, who is sufficient for the salvation of the world. Point us to any other like Him! You cannot. This is GOD with us, come down among us to save us

from our sin. Why is this good news so repugnant to you?

In the preface to his commentary on Galatians, Martin Luther wrote of the thinking process of the sinner, even when such a sinner is brought under conviction of his evils:

“Thus human reason cannot restrain itself from the sight of the active or working righteousness [ie, self-made righteousness by works], that is, our own righteousness; nor can it look up to see the passive or Christian righteousness but relies altogether on the active [works] righteousness, so deeply is this evil rooted in us.”

That is to say, the reason the world hates Christ, the reason all of this gospel is folly to the natural man, is because such a person can only produce and embrace a religion that is worldly, earthy, the principles of which are in agreement with what Paul calls “the elementary principles of the world” –

Gal 4:3-9 In the same way we also, when we were children, **were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.** (4) But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, (5) to redeem those who were under the law, so that we

might receive adoption as sons. (6) And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" (7) So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. (8) Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. (9) But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again **to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world**, whose slaves you want to be once more?

In other words, *God with us* means *God must save us, apart from any of our own doings.* That is, fundamentally, the world’s objection to Christ.

It is not so much that the world wants multiple saviors, but that the world does not want God’s Savior, Jesus Christ. Therefore the good news is bad news to the wicked unless the Lord by His Spirit draws the sinner to Himself.

700 Years Before

Let’s turn back the pages of biblical history then and go back to the days of the prophet Isaiah, about 740 BC. Here we have him sent by the Lord to the wicked king of Judah, Ahaz. The king

of the northern kingdom of Israel (Pekah) had teamed up with Rezin, king of Syria to come against Judah and take them out. Ahaz and the people quaked in fear:

Isa 7:1-16 In the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, son of Uzziah, king of Judah, Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah the king of Israel came up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but could not yet mount an attack against it. (2) When the house of David was told, "Syria is in league with Ephraim," the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind.

(3) And the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out to meet Ahaz, you and Shear-jashub your son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Washer's Field. (4) And say to him, 'Be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands, at the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria and the son of Remaliah.

(5) Because Syria, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has devised evil against you, saying, (6) "Let us go up against Judah and terrify it, and let us conquer it for ourselves, and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of

it," (7) thus says the Lord GOD: "It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass. (8) For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin. And within sixty-five years Ephraim will be shattered from being a people. (9) And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah. If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all."

(10) Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, (11) "Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." (12) But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test." (13) And he said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? (14) Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. (15) He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. (16) For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted.

This is by no means an easy chapter to understand.

- What does it mean to eat curds and honey? Is that a sign of plenty or of living off the land in

times of devastation?

- Who was this child, in Ahaz time? Isaiah's or Ahaz'? And was this a literal virgin birth?

What we can be certain of however is that by Christ's teaching of Matthew and the other Apostles, and by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in Matthew as he wrote this Gospel, Matthew knew that Isaiah's words were a prophecy of the virgin birth of Christ 700 years before He came. Through the same prophet, we are also given more incredible information about the coming Messiah:

Isa 9:6-7 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (7) Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

What other "savior" can any man point to like this? What degree of blasphemy and ingratitude in must be in God's eyes to so despise His only begotten Son given for our sin!

Luk 1:30-35 And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. (31) And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. (32) He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, (33) and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." (34) And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" (35) And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy--the Son of God.

Luk 2:10-11 And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. (11) For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Messiah. God. Son of David. King. Son of the Most High. An eternal throne from which to reign over and eternal kingdom. What other savior would man ask for? All of them are dead and in the ground. Their kingdoms have come and gone.

We need an eternal Savior without beginning and without end whose kingdom, of which we are citizens, is everlasting. And we have Him. His name is Jesus, and He saves His people from their sin.