

A Call to Worship

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Date: 23 December 2018

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[0 : 00] I was talking this week with a guy from Brazil and he said to me, everything's changed now in Brazil. He said, Brazil's been a mess for many, many years.

We've got all the resources to be the richest country in the world, but it's the politicians who've just messed it up. But then he said, we have a new president who's just coming in and everything's going to be different.

He's going to fix the country. He's going to get rid of corruption. We are again going to be the most prosperous nation in the world. He had a lot of hope in his president.

My mom has a missionary friend in Ethiopia. And I don't know if you've actually followed the news of what has happened in Ethiopia. Probably most of you haven't. But actually, this year, in a country which has been devastated by war, impoverished, fighting with its neighbor Eritrea for over 20 years, this year they elected a practicing Christian president.

And in six months, he has ended the war. He has brought peace to the country. He's released prisoners. He's ended state censorship. And everywhere, hope is rising. The whole culture of the nation is changing.

[1 : 17] And people are saying it's miraculous, extraordinary what's happening. But at the same time, many in the military are furious that their power is being undermined.

And nobody really knows exactly how long all of this is going to last there. But whether we're thinking about Brexit, American politics, Hong Kong politics, wherever it is, we're all looking for a leader who's going to come and who's going to fix the issues.

Bring security. End kind of problems with immigration and healthcare and economy. We're all looking for a messiah who's going to bring in the freedom we're looking for.

That's what we all want. Maybe even in your company, you want a boss who's going to bring about peace and harmony and prosperity for your company. And you see, throughout the whole of the Old Testament all the way through to the New Testament that we're looking at today, the hope for the Jewish people was also that a leader would come who would end the divisions, end the violence, end the discrimination, the hatred, and bring prosperity again.

And the gospel of Matthew has been showing us that that Messiah everyone had been looking for has come. And he's been saying that from right back in the beginning when God had a plan for Abraham to bless every nation, through him, through one of his descendants, the whole world, from his family, then the nation of Israel had grown out.

[2 : 55] And from them, God had raised up a king from a tiny backwater place called Bethlehem, a king whose name was David, who was the greatest king of Israel.

He defeated his enemies. He brought peace. He brought prosperity and security. And then he went and messed it all up with adultery, with murder, with terrible fatherhood.

But God gave him a promise. And he gave him a promise that there would be another king who would come in his family line. Another David would come who wouldn't mess things up, who wouldn't have just a temporary reign and then die, but one who would reign forever.

That's the promise that we've been looking at so far in the gospel of Matthew. And Matthew is telling us the leader has come. The king has arrived in Jesus, born in the same town as David, in a supernatural way through a virgin.

And the question for each one of us now is how will we respond to him, whether you're Christian or not a Christian? How will you respond to him today?

[4 : 07] Because if I say there's a new president in Ethiopia or a new president in Brazil, you may be interested in politics, but I don't think you're saying, I need to respond with deep change in my life because you told me that, Chris.

Is anyone kind of feeling convicted about that? I don't think so. Because unless you're from that country, he's not your president. But if there is a God who created the universe, who created you and me and gave you breath right this very morning, the reason that you are breathing is because he has allowed you to breathe, who has marked on his calendar your birthday and your death day.

If that God who created everything has said, I have sent my king to come, I have come to reign and rule, then you and I have to respond to that because he is your president.

He is your ruler. And either we will respond in submitting to him in worship or we will respond with rejecting his rule. But none of us can stand here and say, oh, well, that's nice for you, but it's not for me.

Because he has a claim on our lives. And so Matthew is trying to say to us, this is not just some kind of made up story.

[5 : 31] Because he starts his passage here telling us that all of these things about Jesus happened in the time of Herod the king. He's talking about real history. We know Herod died in 4 BC.

So Jesus was born somewhere between 7 BC and 4 BC. They got the calendar wrong when they actually made the dates. So he's actually around then. And so what he's going to show us in this passage is three different responses to the arrival of God's king, Jesus.

And so we're going to look at the wise men. We're going to look at Herod. And we're going to look at the religious leaders. Okay. Are you ready? Okay. Good. Kevin is. So, wise men seek him.

Okay. If you've got the passage in front of you, we'll just kind of go through a little bit of this. It says, behold, wise men came from the east, came to Jerusalem.

And so this is a little while after Jesus has been born. Maybe a year or so. Because they've now moved. They've now moved into a house. And it says, literally, magi from the east.

[6 : 41] That's what the word wise men mean. And that's where we get the word magician from. And they come to the political capital, Jerusalem. And we don't know a lot about them.

But we do know that magi were an elite class of influential astrologers, priests, in probably what's called Persia or what is now called modern day Iran.

And so they're foreigners. They are pagans. They don't worship Israel's God. And we know there are three gifts that they bring.

But they almost certainly are not just three wise men. Because they probably have brought with them their servants, their wives, their children. There's probably a whole crew of them turn up. So if you see on your Christmas cards just three of them, just kind of draw in a few extra people.

Because that's probably what it was like. But the thing was Jews didn't hang out with magi. I don't know if you know, but actually there's a writings called the Talmud, which are a collection of Jewish writings.

- [7 : 44] And in them it says, he who learns a single thing from a Magian is worthy of death. They weren't on great terms, the Jews and the Magi.
- I mean, just imagine a group of fundamentalist Muslims coming into church this morning saying, Hey, we've come all the way from Pakistan because we had a dream about Jesus.
- Now that kind of thing is happening in the Middle East right now. But that's the kind of thing that they're talking about here. Everyone's going, wow, what's going on? And these foreigners are consumed with one question.
- Where is he? They've walked or ridden for over a thousand miles. Months they've been on the road. With one question consuming them. Where is he?
- Where is he who has been born King of the Jews? We've got to find him. You know, in Hong Kong, many people are seeking things.
- [8 : 45] Democracy. Where is it? Greater housing supply. Where is it? A loving relationship. Where is it? Tips to get rich. Where can I get them from?
- But these wise men, they had power. They had money. They had status. But the thing, the question they're asking themselves. None of those things mattered. They're saying, where is he? The one who has been born the King of the Jews.
- And they've been looking on their horoscopes. Looking at the stars. Just as they did every day. And they'd seen something extraordinary in the sky. Something that astrology didn't normally happen like this.
- Something that had propelled them to leave their homes. Because they're on a quest into the unknown to discover this king.
- And you know, they may have known about a prophecy from another pagan astrology in the Old Testament called Balaam. Who in Numbers 24 says, a star shall come out of Jacob.
- [9 : 48] And a scepter shall rise out of Israel. And they're going, we need to find him. You know, many people have a lot of theories about what the star was. It was a comet.
- It was Jupiter and Saturn kind of getting together. But actually, the problem with all the theories about what was going on with the star is, you don't normally use a star to travel five miles from Bethlehem to Jerusalem to find one little place.
- God's doing something supernatural. John Piper says this. The lesson is plain. God is guiding foreigners to Christ to worship him.
- And he's doing it by exerting global, probably even universal influence and power to get it done. Luke shows God influencing the entire Roman Empire.
- So the census comes at exact time to get a virgin to Bethlehem to fill prophecy with her delivery. Matthew shows God influencing the stars in the sky to get foreign magi to Bethlehem so that they can worship him.
- [10 : 52] Do you see what he's saying? God's going to move heaven and earth to draw people to Jesus. And the question for you and I is, how far away from Jesus are you this morning?
- Whether you're a believer or a Buddhist or an atheist, how much are you hungry and seeking the answers to where meaning, purpose, hope, salvation, a Messiah are found?
- Because if there is a personal God, as Christianity claims, then God has a claim on every other worldview, every religion. You can't say Christianity is a Western religion because God is a global God, not a Western God.
- And God says he's calling people from the East and he's calling people from the West all to come united, breaking down the divisions between the nations, united in worshiping his king.

And some people say, well, all religions are the same anyway. But God, if that was true, God would not go to such lengths to draw pagans out of their nation, to come all the way to worship his king.

[12 : 06] Because God knows religion is not enough to save you. Religion is not enough to save you. And Matthew is referencing here a passage in the book of Isaiah, 700 years before, which says, behold, darkness covers the earth, thick darkness the peoples, but the Lord will rise upon you.

His glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light and kings to the brightness of your rising. You see, as we heard earlier, all of us are in darkness because of our sin.

And we need light. And you've got to say, where's your light coming from this Christmas? You know, I spoke to an elderly lady, local lady, just earlier in this week.

And she said, I went to a Christian school, but my parents were Buddhist. And so kind of I became a Buddhist. But she said, since then, I've always been troubled by the question of what happens after I die.

And I get scared about it. So what I try and do is I just avoid thinking about it. I just avoid thinking about it. That's like the emperor's new clothes.

[13 : 23] Right? Where you just want to avoid saying, I'm not really naked. But actually, she needs to see the light so she can face the reality of the darkness of death with a hope which is greater than what she has.

Because she needs God's king. She needs to see that Jesus who has died our death and has risen from death and has overcome it. That those who trust in him need never fear death.

Because he is the light. And he's trying to draw you wherever you've come from, whether you're Buddhist, atheist, I'm not sure what I am-ist. Wherever you are, he's trying to draw you to himself because he wants to bring you light in his life.

Are we seeking him? Are we seeking him? Wise men seek him. Secondly, usurpers reject him or tyrants reject him.

Herod the Great. You know, he was called great for many reasons, but the Romans called him the king of the Jews. I don't know if you know that. He was a man who was always looking to prove himself.

[14 : 36] We know from non-biblical sources, it's great, you find out about this guy, he's amazing. Josephus tells us, he was never fully accepted by the Jews as their leader because his mother was an Arab, his father was an Edomite, which is kind of like a half-Jew, a descendant of Esau.

But he was a smart guy. He was brilliant in military tactics. And so he plotted and schemed his way into the Roman Emperor's good books.

He even built a city called Caesarea, which is named after Caesar in Rome because he wanted to suck up to him. And then for the Jews, what he did, he rebuilt the temple and made it the most incredible architectural wonder because he wanted everybody to like him to prove that he was a great king.

But you know, he was always fearful of getting overthrown. He was so fearful that he got to a stage of paranoia where he murdered his favorite wife and his two sons.

So actually, the Roman Emperor at the time said, it's better to be Herod's pigs than his sons because at least Jewish people didn't eat pork. This is Herod.

[15 : 53] And finally, if you want to, I'm just giving you the picture. Finally, just before his death, when he knew he was going to die, he got arrested, hundreds of officials, and he asked for them to be executed the moment he died because he wanted somebody to be crying when he died because he knew that nobody else would.

He didn't want them to hold a festival instead. What a sad guy. And all of this tallies perfectly with Matthew's description of Herod because when he hears about the new king on the block, what's his response?

He says, when Herod heard this, he was troubled. Troubled. What is his response?

That word troubled is the same word as when you kind of stir up water. He's like churned up inside. He's afraid. He's fearful because he's under threat from this king.

And it says, all Jerusalem with him, which I think refers to all those in his court because all those who had positions of power depended on Herod and they were fearful that their kingdom might crumble with a new rival.

[17:11] You know, it's like when a new person comes into your office that the boss has hired and he's thinking of replacing you with them. Like, how friendly are you towards them?

Because your little kingdom is under threat at that moment. And what Herod does, he gathers information for a spying mission and he asks the same question as the wise men.

He goes, where is this king to be born? But his intention is completely different. The wise men wanted to find Jesus. Herod wants to get rid of him.

And so they tell him in Bethlehem, David's town, and so Herod then goes, says, go find this king so that I may worship him. This guy is manipulative.

[illegible]

[18:45] You know, I don't know the last time you got angry. A couple of weeks ago, we went to Ikea. I hate Ikea.

We wanted a cabinet. Four hours it took us to get a cabinet. Just one cabinet. Everything we asked for, we said, hey, can we have it a little bit taller?

I said, no. A little bit wider? No. Can we have shelves in there? No. Finally, we managed to get a date for it to be delivered to our flat. I took a day off. Fiona and I were there.

We were all ready. We had all our stuff. We were going to pack away. We spent ages just trying to clear stuff up. And the guys come, and they put the thing up. They put it on the wall, and they refuse to put the shelves in.

And I'm going, but we've paid for this. And they go, it's not our job. And they left. And I'm going, that wasn't in the plan, but okay, no big deal.

[19 : 47] And then I look around to find the pins that you can attach the shelf on. I couldn't find them anywhere. This was the one day that I'd taken off to do everything on this one day.

So I ring up customer service. And they say they should be on the shelf.

I checked. They weren't. And they said, we've got no deliveries coming today. And I said, that can't be possible. You're only 30 minutes away. And they said, no.

And I got off the phone. And all my kingdom plans for this one day that I had done were collapsing. So we rang them up again, this time a little bit more angry.

And you know when you start to, you've got to get your way. So you begin to manipulate a little bit the truth. Just to make sure they feel the weight of your anger. Right? And as I was getting more and more mad, I'm trying to hold my tongue.

- [20 : 49] Getting a little harsher with my words. The tone of your voice. I'm getting churned up inside. Troubled. And I was imagining the slow, painful death in my mind of every IKEA staff member.
- Finally, we got a helpful customer service person. They said, hey, we can be over there in 30 minutes. We got, I mean, a miracle. And then they got over. The guy comes. He brings the pins to fix it.
- He turns over the shelf. And. And there were the pins. I looked at Fiona.
- Fiona looked at me and we went, oh. Why do I say that? I'm not normally an angry kind of person. But I can be a tyrant.
- When my plans are not going my way. Anyone like me? Three people. You see, I'm pleasant and lovely when you're doing exactly what I want.
- [21 : 58] But when you start breaking the rules of my kingdom. Or whether it's your spouse. Whether it's your colleagues. Whether it's your parents. Whoever it is. You know, we can end up twisting things.
- Manipulating things. Getting angry. Getting churned up inside. Because. Things are not going my way. Because why? I can be a little Hitler.
- A little Pol Pot. When I'm not in control. You see, that's because you and I are like Herod. Sometimes we respond with silence.
- Sometimes it's our body language. But inside, we're angry. Because I don't want in that moment for Jesus to be my king. I want to be king. I want to be on the throne of my life.
- And maybe some of you are saying, hey, I'm not like that. But you overwork. You can't say no to others. Or to prove to everyone else that you're a nice, successful person. Who should stay on the throne of my life.
- [22 : 56] But God is not into power sharing agreements. Do you know that? He wants to dethrone you from your throne. Because he's brought in another king.
- Who is far better than you and me as a king. And we will always bow to someone or something. And if it's not Jesus, then you'll always have a tyrant on the throne of your life.
- Who will actually end up hurting other people around. Wise men seek Jesus. Tyrants reject Jesus. Thirdly, religious leaders.
- He says, assembling all the chief priests. This is verse 4. And scribes of the people. Herod inquired of them. Where the Christ was to be born. You see, what Herod does when he hears about the new king.
- He brings in all the religious people. For answers. And these people. They know all about the Bible. Do you know? They have spent every single day.
- [23 : 56] Copying and memorizing. The scriptures. If you were to have a Bible quiz with them. You would lose every time. But the incredible thing here is.
- The priest. He asks them this question. Herod asks them a question. And they instantly give him the response. Because they know. Micah 5 verse 2. Where is he going to be born? He's going to be born in Bethlehem.
- In David's town. Because from Bethlehem will come a ruler. Who will shepherd my people Israel. He's going to be a different kind of ruler. He'll be a shepherd. He's not going to be like Herod.
- He's going to provide. He's going to care. He's going to protect. He's going to love. Like other rulers didn't love. He's not a tyrant. They know the answer. Like some of us in church. We know the answer is always Jesus.
- Right? At Christmas. We know. Hey. We sing these kind of songs. We do these kind of things. We know it's all about Jesus. But the interesting thing is.

[24 : 54] After this situation. What happens? The wise men. They're going to go straight to Bethlehem. To find Jesus. What do the religious people do? What do they do? They disappear.

We don't even know what happens to them. They're kind of probably so busy copying the Bible down. That they don't have time to go and visit Jesus. And the crazy thing is. You can be religious.

And think you're really close to God. They're only five miles away from Jesus. The wise men were thousands of miles away. But who is the only one who comes to actually visit and see Jesus?

It's the wise men. It's not the religious people. And you know. I think for many of us. We've grown up. Some of us in Christian families. Some of us.

We've done Bible studies. We've served in church. We do all these different things. And we go. Yeah. I know Jesus is king. That's great. But I'm actually more excited about my skiing holiday in Japan. than really about Jesus.

[25 : 52] If we're honest. Right? And the scary thing in this passage. Is Matthew mentions the chief priests and the scribes of the people.

Being gathered by Herod. And at the end of his book. In chapter 26 verse 3. He also mentions the chief priests. And the elders of the people being gathered together. And it's the same word Matthew uses here.

And when they're gathering together at the end of the book. Do you know what they're doing? They're plotting to kill Jesus. Just like Herod had done before.

Because what Matthew is trying to show you. Is religion cannot save you. In fact religion is dangerous. You can use religion as a place to hide from God.

Not to run to God. Did you know that? You know I spoke to one guy. He grew up in a church. Family was very devoted. And he said to me. Church for me has always been like a school.

[26 : 48] As long as you kept the rules. Read your Bible. Pray. Share your faith. Don't look at porn. Don't say bad words. You're okay. But if you break them. Then maybe you'll get kicked out.

So you've got to try and work really hard to keep them all. So you can stay in. That is not Christianity. The gospel says.

God is not interested in a tick list from you. He's interested in the worship of your heart. So let me ask you. How utterly surrendered to Jesus as king have you been in this last week?

How valuable and precious is Jesus to you? How much do you love him? And the honest answer for all of us is not surrendered enough.

I've not loved him enough. I've not wanted to worship him as he is precious enough. And so your tick list is not enough.

[27 : 54] And whether you're a Christian or not. What God is looking for you today. Is to come to him. With open hands and to say.

Father I have sinned against you. I come in confession to Jesus saying. I've tried to be on the throne of my life. But I want you to be king of my life.

Change me. Forgive me. Make my heart anew. So I want to love you with all of my heart. I want to seek you like those wise men. Burn in me that hunger for you.

That is a daily process of repentance. Whether you have started. Whether you're like the wise men. And you're miles away from God. Or whether you have been in church all your life. That is what God is asking you today.

But here's the challenging thing. If time after time you refuse him. You go like the religious people. I'm too busy right now to pursue Jesus. I'll get serious about Jesus when Christmas is over.

[29 : 00] What happens is step by step. Your heart begins to get cold as ice towards Jesus. So that eventually what he asks of you will sound like a threat to you.

Forgive those people. You go, no way. Come and serve and love the people around you and your family. You go, have you known what they've done to me? And actually as you do that, you're getting hostile to Jesus.

Because you don't want him to rule in your life. At the beginning of Jesus' life, Herod was plotting to kill Jesus. At the end of his life, it was the religious people.

And you know, the incredible thing is this. At the end of Jesus' life, there was another ruler. Who, just like Herod, agreed to sacrifice Jesus because he wanted to stay in power.

Even though he knew that Jesus was innocent. Because that's what we all do as humans when we're on the throne. But Jesus is a different kind of leader.

[30 : 06] While everyone else was clinging on to their own power and throne. He said, I am the good shepherd. And I come to lay down my life for the sheep.

He did not cling on to power. He gave up power. So he became a servant of us. For you and for me. Because he's a different kind of king.

He knows we don't love him enough. He knows we are often tyrants in our lives. And yet, in spite of knowing that, he came. And he came to die for you.

He said, I've come to save you. To bring freedom and forgiveness for you. In spite of you. And do you know, where was Jesus crowned king?

On the cross. What was the sign behind him? It said, the king of the Jews. And with a crown of thorns around his head. Because you see, God's king is different from every other king.

[31 : 15] And he's the only one. For those of us who want to be king of our lives. He's the only one who's actually worthy to be crowned king in your life. Because the only one who truly rules.

Not as a tyrant. But as a God of love and grace. And compassion and forgiveness. And. He died to save you from your rule. So no matter how great.

You think you are. No matter how messed up you think you are. He wants to draw you to himself. Just got one last thing I want to say.

How do we respond to Jesus today? How do you respond? You can be like Herod and reject him. You can be constantly troubled in your life.

You can be like the religious leaders and just try and ignore him. Or you can be like the wise men. You can be like the wise men. Who come and worship him. Because it says going into their house.

[32 : 17] They saw the child with Mary his mother. And they fell down and worshipped him. Then opening their treasures. They offered him gifts. Gold and frankincense and myrrh.

These were great people. They were the scientists. The intellectuals. They were wealthy in their time. And yet they come down. And they see Jesus.

A little tiny baby. And they're willing to humble themselves. And fall on their knees. In worship before him. Let me ask you.

Everyone is a worshipper. Do you know that? You're a worshipper. What you worship is what you subscribe ultimate value to. If you want to worship.

Your career is going to eat up your life. Destroy your relationship. Leave you lonely. If you worship your body. Every time you see someone more attractive than you.

[33 : 20] Every wrinkle you see is going to devastate you. If you worship. Your family. When they don't respond to you the way you want them to. It's going to break you.

And it's going to hurt you. But when you worship Jesus. He's offering you joy. Because he says. When they saw the stars.

They rejoiced. Exceedingly. With great joy. That is a redundant sentence. He could just say they rejoiced.

Period. You get the message. But what he's saying is. This Christmas. Jesus. Is not offering you. The same happiness that I get.

Because Liverpool are top of the league at the moment. He's not offering you. The same happiness. That you get. When you take the turkey out of the oven. And it's cooked perfectly.

[34 : 18] He's offering you. An abundant. Overflowing joy. That is not dependent upon your performance. That is outside of your circumstances.

That is only found when you get off your throne. And you worship. God's king. Jesus Christ. Christ. The one who's worthy. Of your worship.

And humbly bowing before him this morning. God's king.