

The People Meet Their King

From the Series, “The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe”

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By Phil Brainerd

Introduction

William. It’s a common English name. According to records kept by the Social Security Administration, there are more than 2 million people in the United States who have that name. Two million! Because there are millions of people with that name, if I said just “William” to anyone living in the U.S., the first question they would surely ask would be, “William who? “

Now, if I went over to England and said that name, I might get a different response. You see, there’s a person over there named “William” who is very important. He’s known as “Prince William, the Duke of Cambridge”. He’s in line to become the king of England someday, following his Grandmother Elizabeth, and his father Charles.



Prince William

The people of Great Britain know him well. His mother, Diana, Princess of Wales, was a beloved, if not revered member of the Royal family. The royal wedding of Diana and William’s father, Prince Charles, was one of the biggest television events of the twentieth century. It was said to be a (quote), “fairy tale wedding” (unquote). After that wedding, news came of the first royal child, William.

After being born in a hospital qualified to serve royalty, as soon as he could appear outside, William was presented as an infant to the British people. Upon leaving the hospital, he was taken immediately to live in a palace. Everyone in Britain watched him grow up. He’s been interviewed on numerous occasions. He’s given speeches, many on TV. Like his parents, he too, had a “story book” wedding.

Everyone in Great Britain knows who William is. Everyone in Great Britain knows what he’s like. Everyone in Great Britain knows the man who will someday be their king.

We’ve been studying the book of Matthew. Matthew wants his friends to learn about someone, a king greater than a British monarch and greater than any earthly king ever to live on this earth. He wants his friends to learn about Jesus, the King of the Universe.

Jesus had all the credentials to be the Messiah, the great King of Israel. He had royal lineage – he was a descendant of King David. His birth was announced by angels. He was approved by world leaders, the Magi. He miraculously fulfilled ancient Hebrew prophecy.

However, this great king wasn't born in a hospital qualified for royalty. He was born in a stable. Angels may have announced his coming, but there were no doctors to help in his delivery. He wasn't presented to his people on television. In fact, he wasn't presented at all. The political King, Herod, an illegitimate leader, tried to kill him. So, his family had to flee to Egypt where the king lived for a time in exile. When he returned to his homeland, he lived in obscurity in a little-known corner of Israel.

We're currently in Matthew's book, chapter four. Jesus is around 30 years old. He was hardly known by anyone outside of a small circle. He was known by his family. He was known by his village. He was known by a preacher named John the Baptist and some of his followers.

However, Jesus caught the eye of someone very important. In a few sessions back, Mathew told us that Jesus met the greatest enemy of mankind, the Devil. He did battle with that enemy and won decisively.

In our last session, Jesus has become known by four men. Jesus has picked out his core leadership team: Andrew and Peter, James and John. These men aren't very well known, either.

Jesus has prepared for his role as King for 30 years. And yet, he's hardly known by the public. ***It's now time for that to change.*** It's time for Jesus to leave obscurity. It's time for him to meet the people he was sent to rule, the people of Israel. It's time for them to be offered the chance to follow the great king.

Let's read our passage.

23 Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. 24 News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them. 25 Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him. (Matthew 4:23-25)

We'll talk about today's passage with five points that all begin with the letter "P":

- I. The Primary People of the King.
- II. The Pulpit of the King
- III. The Proclamation of the King
- IV. The Power of the King.
- V. The Popularity of the King.

Let's start with our first point: The primary people of the King.

I. The Primary People of the King

Jesus went throughout Galilee... (Matthew 4:23(a))

Galilee, as we learned in our previous sessions, was the northern-most region of the ancient nation of Israel. It's very interesting that when Jesus, the great king, began the process of meeting the public, he didn't commit to the entire nation of Israel at first. He had a primary target: The people of Galilee.

Here are some important things to know about Galilee.

It was known for being a mixture of distinct people groups: The Jewish people and Gentiles ("Gentile" being a word for "the other nations"). In a previous session, we learned that Galilee was referred to as "Galilee of the Gentiles" (Matthew 4:15). There were some towns in Galilee that were primarily Jewish, but there were also towns established as colonies by the Romans. In between those two people groups were numerous travelers, because Galilee was situated between major regions of the Roman empire.

Because of this, there was a mixture of influence by various groups. For example, in our last session we met Peter and Andrew. They were brothers. The name given to Peter at birth was "Simon". The Jewish people would pronounce that name "Shimone", or "Simeon". That was the name of one of the twelve sons of Israel. So, it was a very Jewish name. Andrew, on the other hand, was a Greek name. The Greeks controlled the territory of Galilee before the Romans. Many people in that day still spoke Greek. That's why much of the New Testament was written in that language. So, in this family, there was Jewish influence mixed with Greek influence. We'll talk more about this international influence in later sessions.

For now, here's why this was important: ***The mixing of cultures was considered by some Jews to be a threat.*** On one level, this is understandable. The Jewish people had received direct revelations of God through Moses and the prophets. It's understandable that they would want to defend that. However, just like every other group of people on the planet, the Jewish people were human beings. Every group of human beings is vulnerable to pride: The sense that they're better than everyone else because well, just because.

To the south of Galilee were two groups. Directly south was the territory of Samaria. In that region, there was so much mixing and intermarriage that it was hard to find distinct groups. We'll talk more about them at a later time.

Further south was Judea, with the Jewish capital, Jerusalem. This was the home of those who believed that they, and they alone, held the complete and pure traditions of the Jewish people. Because of this, the people of Judah, and especially the leaders in Jerusalem looked down on places like Galilee. Galilee was considered a second-class place. Its residents were second-class citizens.

Here's something that is very important to understand. Jesus spent most of his life in Nazareth, a little town in Galilee. He grew up surrounded by second-class citizens. In fact, he himself was considered a second-class citizen.

When Jesus chose the first group of people who would meet him, his primary people, he chose people who were considered to be second class citizens. He didn't go to the "pure" people in Jerusalem.

We don't know with certainty why he did that. Let me speculate. In just a few weeks, we'll be looking at the Sermon on the Mount, considered by many to be the core teachings for disciples of Jesus. One of the things Jesus says there is, "Blessed are the poor in spirit". Sometimes, people who consider themselves to be "superior" don't feel a need to learn anything.

- They trust in their status.
- They trust in their learning.
- They trust in their intelligence.

People who are (quote) "inferior" (unquote) are often more likely to listen when God speaks to them, than people who feel pure and superior.

So, when Jesus chose the first people to meet him, his primary people, he chose the people of Galilee. A place full of people considered to be second class.

Here's something I want you to know: ***If you've ever been made to feel that you're second class, Jesus understands. In fact, you're his first choice.***

Let's move on. Let's talk about the pulpit of the King.

II. The Pulpit of the King

Most kings don't have pulpits. This king, Jesus does.

...teaching in their synagogues... (Matthew 4:23 (b))

The great king is in the process of meeting his people. We've suggested that the people in the region of Galilee may be more likely to listen than in Judah. But even among this people there are some even more likely to listen than average. Those would be the faithful Jewish people who have been long awaiting their Messiah. They would most likely be found in their Synagogues.

If a town was fortunate enough to have a synagogue, it was often the most prominent building. The Jewish people tried to build them on the highest point in a given vicinity. A large pole extended up out of the building to make it even more visible, not unlike a church steeple today.

The faithful met each week on the Sabbath, and sometimes other days of the week. Leaders would read from the Scriptures available to them in those days. That would include Moses and other great prophets. The Scriptures were then be interpreted by the leaders.

The synagogues were used for other purposes, too. Young Jewish men were taught their Scriptures during the week, along with reading and simple math. Matters of local law were decided through the synagogue. If someone broke a law, local leaders could determine that the lawbreaker could be fined, or even flogged. The most extreme cases would be handed over to the Romans. So, the synagogue was an important center for most Jews; especially the faithful who were awaiting their Messiah.

If a teacher of note passed through, it was common for that teacher to be invited. Such was the case with Jesus. He often spoke in other locations such as private homes, and sometimes out in the fields. But Matthew says that Jesus sought out the most faithful of the Jewish people in exactly the places they would most easily be found.

This was a pattern followed by the early disciples of Jesus as they went out into the world. The apostle Paul would often go into a gentile city and search out the synagogues. He would then teach there. After that, Paul and other disciples would reach out to the gentile population.

To this day, the faithful have gathering places where they meet to hear God's words proclaimed. Today, we in the Christian faith believe that those places are called churches. If you don't have a church that you attend faithfully, consider finding one. If you're in Bergen country NJ, please consider our church: Trinity Church of Teaneck. You can learn how to find us on our web site: www.TrinityTeaneck.org.

The reason this king needed a pulpit was that he had a message, a proclamation. Let's look at that.

III. The Proclamation of the King

...proclaiming the good news of the kingdom... (Matthew 4:23 c)

Once Jesus was allowed to stand in the pulpit of a synagogue, he proclaimed a message: -The good news of the kingdom. Previously, John the Baptist proclaimed, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." Now, Jesus made it clear: The fact that the kingdom is near is good news!

Many of you have seen the movie, "The Wizard of Oz". If you remember that film, you know the scene where Dorothy lands in Munchkin land. Her house squashed the Wicked Witch. All of a sudden, a large light appears. Beautiful music plays. Out of the light steps Glinda, the good witch of the North. She walks up to Dorothy and asks, "Are you a good witch, or a bad witch?"

Apparently, in Oz the various magical beings announce their roles.

In America, we've all heard the phrase, "good news of the Gospel" for a long time. We've heard it for so long we take it for granted. What if the coming of the kingdom was bad news? What if the great king arrived and the world found out that he was very angry? Maybe he was about to bring another event like the great flood to wipe out the world?

But no. The great King brought good news of his kingdom. Here it is: The doors of the kingdom are wide open. They are open to everyone. They are certainly open to the Jewish people who waited faithfully for their Messiah. They will be open to the gentiles as well.

There is only one requirement: Be willing to repent of your sins and declare allegiance to the king. There is no price that you must pay: You don't buy your way in. Not with good works. Certainly not with money. It's free. That's good news.

The news gets better when you compare the kingdom of heaven to the kingdom of this world. The kingdom of this world is a mess. A real mess. The kingdom of this world is filled with disease and pain. It's full of attackers and invaders, both human and spiritual. It's full of death. But no resident of the kingdom of heaven need fear these things. That's because the great king has great power. Jesus, the great king is about to show that power to everyone.

Let's read about the power of the king.

IV. The Power of the King

and healing every disease and sickness among the people. (Matthew 4:23 (d))

Healing is another topic that we take for granted. We heard that Jesus did it, but we don't think about what allowed him to do it. Today, we have modern medicine. I can't tell you how many times I've felt ill and gone to the doctor. The doctor gives me some pills, and I feel better. Sometimes I feel better quickly. Sometimes, it takes a while. We all have similar stories.

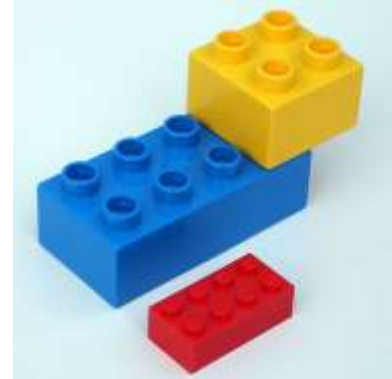
However, there are also times that people don't heal. They visit the doctor, the doctor prescribes medication, and nothing happens. Then the doctor tries again. And again, nothing. Some people never get better. They learn to live with pain. Tragically, some people die.

We're told here that many sick people came to Jesus. He healed every disease and sickness. **Every disease and every sickness.** And he didn't just heal people. Matthew will give examples in the coming chapters. People usually healed immediately. This was not "Take two aspirin and call me in the morning."

What does it take to do this? **It takes power.** How much power? To answer that question, we need to talk about how people become sick, and how they normally heal.

Let's go all the way down to the level of a cell in our bodies. According to the web site "Medical News Today", a typical human body can have as many as 40 trillion cells. Yes, that's "Trillion" with a "T".

Let's think about just one. A single cell is fantastically complex. To get an idea of how complex, let's build something. We'll use Lego, a well-known toy. Legos are little plastic building blocks. I always like to say that if you haven't played with Legos, you've likely stepped on one or found one caught in the cushions on your sofa. Incidentally, if your children have ever played with Legos, you'll be finding them in all kinds of odd places around your house for a long time.



Lego Pieces

Let's use the most basic Lego blocks. They're about a half inch, and they have four knobs on the top. They come in four colors: Red, Blue, White, and Yellow. We'll use ten. Are you ready? Take a white one. Connect it to a blue one. Then red. Another red. Two yellows. A blue, a white, a red and a blue. Let's say that I spoke this to you, rather than having you read this article. Would you be able to remember ten links? Maybe you don't have to keep this in your head? You could write down the information I just shared. If you did that, you would have what architects call a blueprint. With such a blueprint, you could make not only the object I just described, but many more just like it. You would of course need to be familiar with Lego toys and how they're put together. The Legos don't assemble themselves.

In our example, we have not come anywhere near the complexity of a single cell, much less the human body. The human body has a blueprint – it's called the genome. A typical genome has (ready for this?) 3 billion base-pairs of DNA. This plan allows a single egg cell in a mother's body to divide and multiply into billions and then trillions of cells. Each blueprint creates a unique human being.

When an illness occurs, some cells get damaged for some reason. Maybe the cell is attacked by an invading organism? Maybe there's a genetic deficiency? Perhaps there was an injury? Maybe the cell was damaged by a poison, a toxin of some kind?

When a cell is damaged, the human body has mechanisms that detect the damage. The body then finds the blueprint for the cell and then makes a new one. This happens all the time in our bodies – we don't notice it. Sometimes, though, the number of cells that are damaged is significant. The number grows to a level where we feel pain. This is called, "getting sick". When this happens, additional mechanisms come into play. Time is involved. If those mechanisms work, we stop feeling pain - we get well. But sometimes, the number of cells that get damaged rises above what our body can repair. In that case, we have a chronic illness. If the damage involves muscle cells or nerve cells, we can have paralysis. Or, we can become deaf or blind. Sometimes, the damage is so great, our bodies break down completely. We die.

Today, our best scientists are only beginning to understand the construction of our cells. In some cases, we can use that knowledge to create medicines and therapies to help us when we're sick. But we're nowhere close to understanding the massive complexity of the human body.

Now, let's go back to the time of Jesus. The field of medicine is very primitive. People came to Jesus who had chronic pain. Some were paralyzed. Some were blind, some were deaf. Some had terrible diseases like leprosy. Some had neurological problems that caused seizures. Others had illness that no physician could understand. Again: Jesus healed them all.

At the time Jesus walked in Israel, the population there was already measured in the millions. There were millions of human bodies, each with up to 40 trillion cells. All those cells were arranged according to a blueprint, unique to each body. For Jesus to give instant healing to a sick person, he would have to know which of the trillions of cells were damaged. He would have to know how they were damaged. Invading organism, genetic problem, or toxin. He would have to find the blueprint for each cell to either fix them or create new ones. He would then need to know how to reassemble those cells in the proper place, in the proper order.

Today, we're often impressed with our scientific knowledge. But, in the two thousand years since the time of Jesus, we have collected nowhere near the knowledge we would need to do this. Today, no human, or even team of humans could do what Jesus did. There is no machine; no medication, no therapy that could heal any affliction instantly.

This required power. Immense power. No human who lived before or who has lived since has had that kind of power. ***Jesus did things that only the creator God could do.***

Previously, there were prophets who could ask God to heal someone, and God healed them. After Jesus lived, he could give his followers the ***authority to heal***. However, they healed by invoking the name of Jesus, not by healing themselves.

This was power. This was the power of the king - Power that could only be wielded when the Creator God visited the face of the earth. This was not just an earthly king. This was the King of the Universe.

In some cases, that power was expressed in authority. The Bible teaches that we share our world with forces that we can't see. In some cases, the forces have personality. We call them angels and demons.

We'll get into this topic in detail at a later time. For now, we'll recognize that we have different types of people reading. Some believe in the possibility of these forces. Others are skeptical. For those who are skeptical, let me suggest a way to think about this.

Many of our friends enjoy science fiction – That’s often abbreviated to “Sci-fi”. Most people who like sci-fi believe there is intelligent life out in the universe. If you were to ask, “Could some intelligent beings have visited the earth?”, most sci-fi fans would say “sure”. If you were to ask, “Could they disguise themselves as people and wander around among us?”, the sci-fi fans would say, “it’s possible”. If you were to ask, “Could they make themselves invisible?”, once more, the sci-fi fans would say “it could be so.” However, if you say, “There are intelligent beings who live among us who are invisible. The Bible talks about them. They’re called ‘angels and demons’”, well, the sci-fi people would say, “That’s impossible. Get out of here you crazy religious people!” It’s funny, when you say “Aliens”, you can have all kinds of phenomena that involve angel-like beings. If you say “Bible”, all this becomes unbelievable.

Could we ask our skeptical friends to open their minds to the possibility that there are things in our universe that we can’t explain with our current understanding of science? Could we ask you to accept just the possibility for now that angels and demons exist? Their existence would explain a lot of mysterious phenomenon in our world.

Once again, this topic will come up again later as we study Matthew’s book. For now, let’s say that part of the power of the king is expressed in authority. He can command those forces at will. Part of living in the kingdom of this earth is the fact that this earth is broken. It allows things to happen that aren’t allowed in the kingdom of heaven. This includes demonic activity. When demons attacked people, and if those people came to Jesus, Jesus merely ordered the demons to leave. They always did.

Jesus performed these actions a lot. He healed every disease. He freed people from every kind of bondage, whether physical or spiritual. Because of this, you can imagine that Jesus became popular. For our last point, let’s talk about the popularity of the king.

V. The Popularity of the King

Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him. (Matthew 4:25)

People had never seen anything like this. Was Jesus the long-awaited Messiah? Was he the great king? No one had ever shown anything like the power he showed. No one had proclaimed a message like he proclaimed. Understand, the ancient world had no cars, busses, trains, or planes. Thousands of people walked from all over Israel to meet the man who might be the great king.

Let’s pull this all together.

Conclusion

So, the great king came out of obscurity to meet his people. He proclaimed the good news of the kingdom. He showed incredible power by healing their diseases.

Sadly, we don't see that power on any regular basis in our world today. Here's why: Great numbers of people heard the message of Jesus, the great king. Many followed him. But there were more who didn't follow. They were content to live in the kingdom of this world. They rejected their king. When they did that, they rejected his kingdom. Had they accepted the king, the kingdom would have come right away. Because they rejected the kingdom, its arrival has been delayed. We all continue to live in the kingdom of this broken world.

Fortunately, the message of the heavenly kingdom lives on. The kingdom is still there, waiting to come. The king is still the king. He is as powerful as ever. He showed that power by dying for the sins of the world and rising again. He has ascended into heaven. Someday, he will come back. We are all warned to be ready for that day.

Are you ready? If you are in any way uncertain, contact us. Again, we're Trinity church of Teaneck, NJ. You can find out how to get your questions answered by visiting our web site: www.TrinityTeaneck.org. You can meet the great king. Let us tell you how.

If you are ready, if you're a follower of Jesus, be encouraged by the words of the apostle John. In the book of Revelation, John describes the day that Jesus returns to restore his kingdom:

3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'" 5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" (Revelation 21:3-5)

The King has come. He has met his people. Though many rejected his kingdom, he will return someday. That day will be a very, very happy one for those who have met him, and followed him.