

God's Big Picture 6 Matthew –John The Present Kingdom

Introduction

In our busy world with so much information being presented to us, we can at times face the experience of 'information overload'. At such times we can focus our thoughts on things of lesser importance rather than on what is of the highest importance. This was true in the most extreme circumstances for a South Korean couple living in the city of Suweon, south of Seoul. They were arrested at the end of February on grounds of the neglect of care for their baby daughter who had died. This couple had both lost their jobs and according to a police officer involved in the case 'had lost their will to live a normal life'. They had a premature baby who needed small but regular feeds throughout the day to progress, but instead of caring for their offspring this couple became addicted to an internet gaming site. They spent twelve hour sessions online together raising a virtual daughter called Anima in the popular role-playing game Prius Online. In that game participants could interact with Anima and help her recover her lost memory and develop emotions. However, they had their own three-month old daughter who was left alone at home while they went out to a nearby internet café. We can understand their sadness at losing their employment. However, we could have expected that this would have resulted in even more time and affection being lavished on their baby daughter, but tragically the very opposite was true. [BBC News website 5 March 2010]

In the world today there are many interpretations of who Jesus is. There are people who claim He was simply a great teacher whose thought, for example, the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) was one of the greatest pieces of literature ever produced. Other people emphasise His concern for the poor and marginalised and suggest that we too should have similar concerns. A minority of writers have drawn attention to his preaching about the end times and stressed that this was the central focus of Jesus' message. Liberation theologians, based primarily in South and Central America, in a context of extreme poverty juxtaposed with extreme wealth, alongside Old Testament teaching on the Exodus from Egypt and the Old Testament's arguments for social justice, appreciate Jesus' cleansing of the Temple where He was correcting an economic injustice perpetrated at the heart of the Jerusalem Temple. They argue that we too should be similarly involved in direct action to overthrow oppressive social and economic structures as He did. Some Jewish rabbis value Jesus as one of the greatest rabbis and Muslims view Jesus as one of the greatest men ever to have walked on this earth. Their faith proclaims the virgin birth signifying the importance of His entry into the world. They proclaim Jesus a great prophet who at His second coming will overthrow all wickedness and usher in the new era once this world has come to its close. However, although there is some truth in what these perspectives on Jesus affirm they fail to do justice to the New Testament picture of Jesus and His important and central place in the kingdom of God, as revealed in the Gospels. C.S. Lewis [in *Mere Christianity*, 1952, p.55] once made this assertion: I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic –on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a

fool; you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. In our sixth study of God's Big Picture our focus is on the four Gospels and what they convey to us about God's Present Kingdom and its central focus on Jesus

1. The Preparation for Jesus in the Kingdom

(a) **Its Timing** In Galatians 4:4 Paul declared: *But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law, ⁵to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.* God's plan was on course for the salvation of His people and the extension of His kingdom in the world. (b) **Its Centrality** An era was coming to a close, but a new one was about to begin in the person of Jesus Christ. In the New Testament it is clear that Jesus is the central focus of its message. The Old Testament prepared for His coming; the New Testament centred on His life, death and resurrection and prepares us for His return in glory as the *King of Kings and Lord of Lords* (Revelation 19:16). Hebrews 1:1-3 declares: ¹*In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ²but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe. ³The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word. After He had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.* Paul in II Corinthians 1:20 wrote: ²⁰*For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.* The promises in the Old Testament are fulfilled in Christ. ³²*"We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers ³³He has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus.* Remember Jesus' message to His followers on the Road to Emmaus, after His resurrection. He gave them a whistle-stop tour of the Old Testament with a purpose as Luke 24:27 records: *And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself.* (c) **Its Forerunner** Mark in his gospel draws attention to this fact with his opening words concerning the ministry of John the Baptist (Mark 1:1-8). This courageous man of God came as a forerunner to prepare the way for Jesus. Mark quotes Isaiah 40:3: *A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.* It is possible that he is also referring to Malachi 3:1: *"See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to His temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the Lord Almighty.* The public ministry of Jesus began after John the Baptist was put in prison. Jesus aware that the formal ministry of that great prophet was now over and His own about to begin made this declaration: ¹⁴*After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"* (Mark 1:14-15). Matthew (Matthew 4:17) also draws attention to this fact. A new era had begun. In the person of Jesus a radically fresh understanding of God and His relationship with His people was about to be experienced.

2. The Presentation of Jesus in the Kingdom

(a) **Jesus is the Second Adam** The New Testament begins with an extraordinary feature—a genealogy in Matthew chapter One. We know that the Gospels had a primary evangelistic purpose so why begin in this way? After all no-one would write a book today in this fashion for people outside our faith! Matthew is making a statement about how Jesus fits into the history of the Jewish people for whom he is writing this Gospel. He begins his account with these words: *A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham...* Jesus is intimately bound up with your story, your history –so take a look at who He is and why He came, proclaiming God’s message in our midst. Luke also has a genealogy, but he gives us some exciting parts of the story before his long list of names, as he is writing not for Jews but a Gentile friend who is interested in finding out more about the Christian faith. Now we know that Matthew’s genealogy was selective in choosing particular ancestors to highlight to make a clear point. Luke also has a definite purpose to his list of names. He starts in Luke 3:23 with names of people alive in his lifetime: *Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph...* there is the probability here that this is Mary’s genealogical line. The Jewish Talmud (*Haghigha* 77.4, see W. Hendricksen, *Luke*, p. 225) refers to Mary as ‘the daughter of Heli’ and there is some manuscript evidence to support Luke 2:4 being read as: *So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because **they** [Mary and Joseph] belonged to the house and line of David.* Most significant of all in Luke’s genealogy is the last verse- he is working in reverse order of names – in Luke 3:38: *the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, **the son of Adam**, the son of God.* Jesus is descended from Adam. We all were –but Luke is emphasising that Jesus is the second Adam representing humanity. The Gospels go on to tell us that whereas the first Adam fell after one temptation (Genesis 3); the second Adam resisted three temptations in the first instance and continued resisting the devil’s attacks (Luke 4:1-13). The baptism of Jesus was not required because He was sinless, yet Luke’s placement of it next to his genealogy emphasises Jesus’ link with Adam’s race. Paul will take the association further in Romans 5:18-19 when he declares that Adam’s sin of wilful disobedience against God in Eden brought condemnation to humanity, but equally Jesus’ act of perfect obedience in His life and death on the cross brought justification for humanity. *Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. ¹⁹For just as through **the disobedience of the one man** the many were made sinners, so also through **the obedience of the one man** the many will be made righteous.* In addition in I Corinthians 15:20-22 (and 15:45-49): ²⁰*But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²²For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.* (b) **Jesus is the descendant of Abraham** Jews had an understanding of corporate solidarity with their race –something a lot closer to some Asian and African cultures today, in contrast to the Western individualism we are familiar with. Matthew has made this point very clearly at the start of his genealogy. Paul will make it explicit in Galatians 3:16: *The promises were spoken to **Abraham and to his seed**. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," **meaning one person, who is Christ**.* The promises to the nation given to Abraham are brought to fulfilment in the person and ministry of Jesus. This leads onto (c) **Jesus is the model Israelite** Matthew will take this further in Matthew 2:13-15: ¹³*When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."* ¹⁴*So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the*

prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son." This is a quotation from Hosea 11:1 used there of the Israelite nation. This in turn refers back to Exodus 4:22-23: *Then say to Pharaoh, "This is what the Lord says: Israel is my firstborn son,"²³ and I told you, "Let my son go, so he may worship me." But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son.'* " The interchange between the one and the many is so important in their thinking. The loss of Pharaoh's firstborn was the principal punishment on Egypt for Pharaoh's sinfulness. The ill-treatment of 'God's son' would have consequences. Suffering eventually gave way to the joy of deliverance and freedom. Jesus the model 'Son' would also suffer even up to death on a cross, but he would have the glorious deliverance of resurrection. What happened to the One Jesus –resurrection –will one day happen to the many –His people the church of both Jews and Gentiles who share the faith of Abraham (Romans 4:16). (d) **Jesus is the Son of David** (the King) In II Samuel 7:14, in that remarkable prophecy to King David of his descendants occupying the throne in the future, contains these words: God says: *I will be his father, and he will be My son.* This was symbolically true of these human rulers, but fulfilled literally in Jesus. Jesus is the head of His people, but also the King from the house and line of David. (e) **Jesus is the true tabernacle and the new temple** John 1:14: *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling [lit. pitched His tent] among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.* Whose glory was seen in a tent in another place? God the Father's glory was experienced by Moses and especially Aaron and the priests in the tabernacle, the giant tent in which the Israelites worshipped in the desert. It is now supremely seen not in a temporary place of worship but in a person –Jesus Christ! What about the temple in Jerusalem? John 2:19-21 states: ¹⁹*Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."*²⁰*The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?"* ²¹*But the temple He had spoken of was His body.* The worship of God was being redirected from the place where it was specifically through a priest in a holy building to through the person of Jesus, **the holy person** who grants us direct access to the Father in our prayers -hallelujah! There has been a primary building focus Jesus told the Samaritan woman yet the days are coming when the nature of worship would change profoundly: Jesus declared, *"Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem."* ²²*You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.* ²³*Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.* ²⁴*God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."* (f) **Jesus inaugurated the new covenant** at the Last Supper. Luke 22:19-20: *And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."* ²⁰*In the same way, after the supper He took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you.* The time for the fulfilment of the Jeremiah 31:31-34 prophesy about the new covenant came to pass at the Last Supper (g) **Jesus is the Saviour of the lost** Mark 10:45: *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.* " This was not just for the 'good' people in the Jewish nation it was even for the 'bad' people, like the tax-collectors. After Jesus' extraordinary encounter with Zacchaeus in Jericho and this man came to faith in Christ and restored the funds he had taken wrongly with interest and given half the remainder to the poor of the district. How did Jesus, in Luke 19:9-10, describe the outcome of this incident? ⁹*Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.* ¹⁰*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."* We can rightly sometimes think the disciples were too slow in 'getting' what Jesus said to them. However, this total transformation of everything they had known or experienced, in faith terms, was an extraordinary development that took time to work through.

3. The Picture of Jesus in the Kingdom

Each of the four Gospels was originally written for a particular audience to whom the Christian faith was being presented. They are all based on eyewitness accounts and records of Jesus' words, life, death and resurrection, together with its significance and their distinctive features enhance aspects of who He is and the message He brings to us. (a) **In Matthew's Gospel** This gospel was written by a Jew, initially for Jewish hearers and readers. Its overarching theme is that Jesus came in fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy; that His virginal conception and birth in Bethlehem were predicted ahead of time; that His life was lived in accordance with that message and that His death and resurrection were also the fulfilment of God's Word. A repeated refrain that occurs twelve times in this Gospel, for example in Matthew 1:22: *All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet...* It has been calculated that there are sixty-one quotations from the Old Testament in this book compared to thirty-one in Mark, twenty-six in Luke and sixteen in John's Gospel [Morris, *Matthew*, p. 3]. He alone (amongst the Gospel writers) reports Jesus' emphasis on His specific calling to ministry amongst Jewish people in Matthew 15:24: *I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.* Jesus does speak to Gentiles, but it is clear that this work was primarily for His followers once the new era of the Kingdom was inaugurated on the Day of Pentecost and this gospel is concluded with the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations with His message (Matthew 28:18-20). (b) **In Mark's Gospel** based on the sermons of Peter in the Roman world jumps straight into the ministry of Jesus. It is an action packed adventure. Events happened *at once* (Mark 1:18); *without delay* (Mark 1:20); *without delay* (Mark 1:21 Greek words omitted in NIV); *very early in the morning* (Mark 1:35); *immediately* (Mark 2:2 Greek word omitted NIV). The vocabulary of the NIV tones down the breathless pace of this Gospel. [Greek word εὐθέως translated as *immediately* or *without delay* occurs nineteen times in this Gospel; seven times in Matthew and three times in Luke and not at all in John.] The first half of the book focuses on who Jesus is and culminates in Mark 8:29: *Jesus asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ.* The second half of the book is dominated by the death and resurrection of Jesus as the suffering servant of God and His challenge that following Him would involve suffering and hardship for His followers (Mark 10:23-31). Mark 8:31 (also 9:31; 10:32-34) makes this very plain: ³¹*He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.* (c) **In Luke's Gospel** Luke writes his gospel for a friend Theophilus who is a Gentile. He describes a God who is active in His world concerned about rulers and their subjects, the rich and the poor, for example, (Luke 1:50-53). God provided salvation for the descendants of King David, ie the Jews (Luke 1:68-70), but also for the Gentiles (Luke 8:26-39) and Samaritans (Luke 9:51-56; 10:25-37); for the people on the margins of society –prostitutes and tax collectors (see Luke 14:15-24; 18:9-14; 19:1-10). No-one is beyond the grace of God. He also particularly emphasises the women who helped Jesus in His work (Luke 8:1-3). All people can be saved and all people equally have a responsibility to serve in God's kingdom. (d) **In John's Gospel** the most reflective one focussed on seeking to express the wonder of Jesus, the eternal Son of God whose glory we have had the opportunity to glimpse (John 1:14 see also I John 1:1-4). He illustrates this

gospel with an account of seven signs (miracles) with associated messages and their significance in the extension of the kingdom of God. The second half of the book is centred on the evening in the Upper Room the night before the crucifixion of Jesus. In John 13 Jesus reminded His disciples about the nature of Christian ministry of a calling to service, not a seeking to be served. He encouraged them with a explanation about the work of the Holy Spirit who would come to take His place in the lives of His followers, equipping and empowering them for service. After the resurrection He commissioned His followers with these words: *Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."* (John 20:21). His work on earth, in His first coming was nearly completed. He was handing on the baton to His followers to take the next stage of extending the kingdom through the enabling resources of the Holy Spirit. The new era of the Spirit would begin with a mere 120 people – who had the challenge of taking the Gospel of Jesus to the world. Were they up for the task? Would they be obedient to the call? In each generation of humanity these same questions arise and in the twenty-first century it is not Peter and James and John who must answer the call but you and me. May we honour the Lord in our generation as they did in their day, Amen.