

Tom Coop
Matthew 1:1-17
March 12, 2017

“Blah, Blah, Blah ...”

Some of you may be wondering about the title of my sermon this morning. Others who heard me preach last week, may not.

The biggest complaint I got was that it was like trying to drink from a fire hose – and the result was all some of you heard was ... blah, blah, blah.

Well, since this Lenten season we are looking at Jesus through the lens of the different Gospel writers and Paul, I guess I get another shot at it this week ... and then the next ... and the one ... well, you get the idea.

Wish me luck???

Last week, we saw that the author of the Gospel of Mark presented Jesus to his audience as the “suffering servant”.

Jesus is the one who came and lived as we do, endured suffering and betrayal, doubt and fear, and meets us in our humanity.

He, then, is the one we can turn to in times of trouble and sorrow. He gets it. He’s been there.

We began with the Gospel of Mark because it is believed to be the very first Gospel written, as well as a primary source for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

But, as we have learned in Sunday School, Matthew's Gospel is the first book of the New Testament. Well, isn't that interesting?

If Mark was written first, why does Matthew take first place?

One of the reasons, is that the Gospel of Matthew provides a smooth transition from the writings of the Hebrew or Jewish scriptures (our Old Testament) to the writings of the New Testament.

Why is that?

Matthew is easily the most Jewish of the gospels.

He and his community come from a Jewish background, so he's big into a Jesus who quotes the Hebrew Bible, debates Torah with other Jews, and fulfills all kinds of Jewish prophecy (some of which I shared with you in our second scripture text).

Most scholars agree that the Gospel of Matthew was probably written sometime between 75 and 85 CE, after the Jewish War with the Roman Empire (66-70 CE), and the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE.

Or, to put it another way, about 15-25 years after Mark.

Matthew's Gospel is the story of Jesus told through the lens of Jews seeking to understand how to survive as Jews in this post-70 CE destruction.

It was also a difficult time to be a Christian Jew. Jews who followed Jesus as their Messiah certainly would have faced the temptation to return to their former lives and abandon Christianity.

In response to this temptation, Matthew wrote to remind them that Jesus was the true Messiah. Matthew's gospel was a story of encouragement, a story of comfort.

But, it was also a story of challenge because Jesus was not the Messiah King that many of them had expected, and the demands of this king were great.

In 1919 King Albert of Belgium was traveling across the United States by train.

He was something of an authority on locomotives, so for a ten-mile stretch he dressed as an engineer and ran the train.

At the next stop, the cheering crowd looked for King Albert but couldn't find him.

You see, they expected the king to look a certain way, and to act in a certain way.

So, they didn't realize that the tall man dressed in a flannel shirt and a railroad cap was, actually, the king of Belgium.

From one perspective, the Gospel of Matthew tells a similar story. It's the story of a king — Jesus, the King of the Jews.

But many in his day didn't recognize him because he didn't look the way people expected him to look, and he didn't act as they expected him to act. He was a different kind of king.

A different kind of king, indeed!

As we look at the Gospel of Matthew, it is interesting to note that some 600 of Mark's 661 verses are included in Matthew's Gospel.

That means that a full 90% of Mark's gospel is contained in Matthew.

However, the author of Matthew (by the way, most scholars don't think the Gospel bearing Matthew's name was actually written by the disciple Matthew)...

The author of Matthew did not, simply copy Mark, but expanded on Mark's text for Matthew's decidedly Jewish audience, as well as including other details not covered in Mark.

An additional 220 verses in Matthew are also found in Luke, but not in Mark.

Scholars contend that these verses come from a second source, a collection of sayings to which scholars give the name "Quelle", which means "source" in the German language.

I guess, since the discovery was made by a German ... he got naming rights. But most scholars today shorten it to just Q.

So, we can say, 56% of the text in Matthew came from Mark, 24% is also included in Luke (but not Mark) that's the "Q" source, and only 20% is unique to Matthew.

So ... Matthew took lots from Mark, some from Q, spiced it up with a bit of his own commentary, and—voilà—a biblical masterpiece was born.

Just so you know, what I just shared with you, most people don't get unless they go to seminary!

Try sharing that with your friends and neighbors. They'll be very impressed, I'm sure!

The Gospel of Matthew begins with the verse, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Mt 1:1).

From this first verse of his gospel, Matthew defines his purpose.

That's why I had Edith read portions of Jesus' genealogy, according to Matthew.

Initially, I had the whole genealogy in the bulletin – all 17 verses.

But as I read through them, all I heard was, "Blah, blah, blah..." so I shortened it ... and left just enough to give you the right flavor. You can thank me later!

The genealogy was written to show Jesus to be the promised Messiah. Matthew begins by establishing Jesus' kingship by showing Jesus being a direct descendent first of David (through who's line the King, the Messiah would come), and finally of Abraham (the father of the Jewish people).

Right off the bat, Matthew wants his audience (and us) to know that Jesus is super special.

And so, he includes things that would impress his Jewish audience

Let's review:

Right genealogy? Check.

Conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit? Check (1:18).

Dad receives dream visitation from angel of the Lord? Check (1:20).

Born of a virgin? Check (1:25).

Wise men from the East travel to worship him and bring gifts? Check (2:1-2).

Totally fulfills multiple prophecies? I read some of them. Check (1:22-23). Check (2:15). Check (2:17). And check (2:23).

It is vital to his Jewish readers that Matthew has done this work, because nowhere else is Jesus so well presented as the one whom God had promised.

In the other Gospels, we see Christ differently. Remember from last week? Mark shows him as the suffering servant.

Luke (next week's star) shows us a much more personal Jesus through the events of his days, chronicling all the facts and details of his life.

And John, shows us Christ as the son of God and demonstrates his deity for us.

These three (Mark, Luke, and John) all present Christ to the Gentiles, or to the Jews and the Gentiles, but Matthew's Gospel is focused on a predominantly Jewish audience to allow them to accept Him as their King.

Matthew actually contains more fulfilled prophecies pertaining to the Messiah than any of the other Gospel records.

At least 60 references and 40 quotations, such as "that it might be fulfilled" and "thus it was written by the Prophet," appear --more frequently than in any other gospel.

Indeed, Matthew quotes from almost every book in the Old Testament.

Also, as you read Matthew's Gospel, you will notice that Matthew does not explain Jewish culture like the other three Gospels do, which also adds to the argument that he is writing to Jews.

Bottom line, Matthew's purpose in writing to the Jews was to show them that Jesus of Nazareth was the expected messiah and both his genealogy and his resurrection (from his very beginning to his very end and beyond) were legitimate proofs of this.

In Matthew, Jesus is the promised Messiah. That's his big identity in the whole gospel story.

But the word "messiah" has a different meaning for Matthew and the people reading his gospel than it does for us today.

For them, Jesus would have been a Jewish messiah, sent by God specifically for the Jewish people.

Jesus is just the logical next step in God's plan for the world and his chosen people.

That's why Matthew's Jesus is so, well, Jewish. He's the great-great-great-great...grandson of the original Jewish patriarchs.

His every move fulfills one Hebrew Bible prophecy after another.

And very interesting, his Gospel has parallels to the story of Moses, the greatest of the Hebrew prophets.

Remember? A baby forced to flee his home; an evil ruler killing all the first born. Check it out in Exodus!

And so, Matthew portrays Jesus as a second, greater Moses.

Just as Moses gave his law from Mount Sinai in the Old Testament (the Ten Commandments), Jesus preaches his new laws in a sermon he gives from a mountain, more like a hill actually (the Sermon on the Mount).

Like Moses, the young Jesus hides in Egypt from the wrath of a vengeful king.

Jesus is tempted for forty days and forty nights in the wilderness, while Moses and his people wandered the wilderness for forty years.

And if you look closely, you will see that within the Gospel of Matthew we find five blocks of teaching, not unlike the five books of Moses in the Jewish scriptures.

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

The blocks are easy to locate once you know the literary clues.

At the beginning of each of these sections, Matthew gives us signals such as, "Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying..." (Mt. 5:2).

He follows this with the teachings of Jesus and then adds as closure other signals such as, “Now when Jesus had finished saying these things...” (Mt. 7:28).

Many scholars see in this a deliberate plan to create a parallel to the first five books of the Old Testament.

But, Matthew is not only looking to his Jewish past; he's also focused on the future.

Specifically, the future of this new up-and-coming church. And Matthew's got loads of thoughts about how to get this thing started.

Need a rock to build your church on? That Peter sure looks like a sturdy guy.

Wondering if you should forgive a fellow believer up to seven times? Try aiming a little higher, slacker. How about 70 times 7???

Matthew's gospel is the only one that goes into detail about the emerging Christian church, and the only gospel to even mention the church. He gives rules for being in a Christian community with others.

His stories are also chock full of encouragement for the early church. Sure, there are tough times ahead. Sure, everyone in the church "will be hated by all because of [Jesus's] name".

But, fear not. Your reward in heaven is coming. Just hold on for the end of time, folks.

Now, let's take some time to do the "so what" test. The "who cares" test.

Matthew's Jesus is ever the teacher, making sure his disciples understand the lessons he is trying to teach (unlike Mark, where the disciples are dumb as a rock).

It is important that we see that this is more than simply intellectual comprehension of the teachings of Jesus.

It is important that the disciples then (and we today) understand the teachings of Jesus so that we can actually live them out.

And that we understand that Jesus is a king, not only a servant, but a king we can give our allegiance to.

Looking through Matthew's lens, we see Jesus in the light of what God has done before him.

God has revealed God's self in the Law and the Prophets, and now God is making God's self known anew – in the flesh – in the personage of Jesus.

After enduring four hundred years of prophetic silence, God's people must have wondered whether or not he had deserted them.

After centuries of regular communication from God, the people found themselves without a genuine prophet or spokesman for God.

However, the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus reminded God's people that he had not forgotten them.

God hadn't forgotten—He remembered His people. Matthew makes that clear. It was true then, and it is certainly true today.

Do you ever feel as though God has deserted you or that he sits in silence in the face of your requests? Matthew's Gospel should be an encouragement to you.

As we read through the pages of Matthew, not only do we see Jesus Christ revealed as Israel's King and Messiah, but his coming to earth as God in the flesh also should remind us of his deep love for us.

The promise is that now resurrected and ascended, Jesus will always be with us, even to the end of time.

I think sometimes we take that lightly. But we should not. It should give us comfort, especially in trying times as these.

Matthew's audience (and we who read this Gospel today) can take comfort in the "bookends" the author uses, and take comfort in God's promise of presence.

In the opening chapter, we read:

"And they shall name him Emanuel, which means, 'God is with us'"
(Mt. 1:23).

And then as the story closes:

"And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the ages" (Mt. 28:20).

What an amazing expression of the **Good News** – God is with us.
Jesus is with us.

Thank you God!

Amen...