

# Matthews Answer

## WHO IS JESUS?

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### STUDY FOUR: MATTHEW'S ANSWER

#### SUMMARY:

- Jesus has the right to command our total allegiance
- Our response to the words of Jesus determines our ultimate destiny
- Jesus claims to be the Son of God
- Jesus is the King in the Kingdom

Having firmly identified Jesus as man by giving us his ancestry (1:1-17) Matthew immediately identifies him also as God: he is conceived by the Holy Spirit (1:18,20) and he comes in fulfilment of the prophecy "they will call him Immanuel" which means 'God with us' (Isaiah 7:14, Matt. 1:23). He then further names him as 'king' (2:2) and 'shepherd' (2:6), both of which are Old Testament roles of God, and records that the wise men 'bowed down and worshipped him' (2:11), something due to God alone. Like Mark, Matthew records the ministry of John the Baptist, in which the coming of Jesus is linked with the coming near of the kingdom of heaven, and during which both the Holy Spirit and God's voice from heaven identify Jesus as the divine Son (3:16,17).

From this point on, although sharing much that is similar, Matthew records more of the teaching of Jesus than Mark does. Whereas Mark puts before us the miracles of Jesus and more or less allows us to draw our own conclusions, Matthew allows us no such liberty. One after another **he records for us the messages of Jesus, messages focusing on the kingdom in which Jesus is the King, messages that teach us that he, the divine King, demands and commands our ultimate and total allegiance.** And all under that one word: 'gospel'.

To these messages we will now turn.

#### Jesus has the right to command our total allegiance

[1] As we saw in Mark, Jesus commanded Peter, Andrew, James and John to follow him (Matt.4.19). It was not immediately obvious what this following Jesus entailed. Perhaps it seemed at first that it was going to be a life of great excitement and popularity as they associated with this amazing, miracle-working person (4:23-25). Jesus however soon dispels the illusion. It is not a life of popularity and power to which he has called them, but to a life of poverty of spirit, of mourning, of meekness, of mercy, of purity of heart, and of persecution (5:1-10). Those who follow Jesus Christ will be persecuted because of him (5:11); those who honour him will suffer in the same way that the Old Testament prophets who honoured God suffered (5:12). So significant is Jesus that even to suffer because of him is the cause of joy and gladness, and of great reward. (5:12). **(Did you notice how easily Jesus put himself on the same level as God? The suffering of those who suffer for Jesus is on a level with the suffering of the prophets who suffered for God .)**

[2] Jesus commands an obedience which is from the heart rather than mere external observance of God's law (5:17-6:18).

[3] Jesus commands a priority list in which God and his kingdom are our greatest treasure (6:19-34).

[4] There were those who thought they would like to follow Jesus, in fact they came and offered to follow him. But Jesus put before them the costliness of being his disciple:

'Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.'

'Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.'

In these two responses to his would-be followers Jesus points out that following him can involve us, on the one hand, in the loss of physical and material comforts, and, on the other hand, in the denial and interruption of our normal human relationships. **He demands a commitment to himself over and above our concern for our own person, and over and above our concern for our relatives** (8:19-22).

[5] In 10:17-39 Jesus itemizes some of the high cost of being his disciple:

- religious persecution (17)
- arrest by secular authorities (18-20)
- betrayal by family members (21,35,36)
- hatred by all (22).

He calls on those who follow him to scorn this suffering, knowing that they have a heavenly Father who knows all about it (29,30), and knowing that, great though this suffering might be it is nothing in comparison with the dread fate that would be theirs if they were not his followers (26-28,32,33), the fate of those who refuse to acknowledge him.

[6] He calls us to love him so much that all earthly loves seem insignificant (10:37).

[7] He calls each one to 'take his cross and follow me', to 'lose his life for my sake' (10:38,39).

In both of these Jesus commands us to deny ourselves; to consider our wants, our desires, our ambitions dead, for his sake. We forgo what we want for what *he* wants. In other words we submit totally to him. Anything less, he says, 'is not worthy of me.' This radical commitment to which he calls us is the complete reverse of the disobedience of Genesis 3. There Adam forced his will over God's. Here we submit our will to Christ's. This is true repentance. **This is true faith: to believe that here in Jesus Christ stands the One who has the divine right and authority to tell us what to do; that here in Jesus Christ stands the God we rejected and rebelled against in Genesis 3, and to submit to this Christ as our Lord. Any lesser belief, any lesser commitment, is not worthy of him.**

This call to self-denial is repeated in 16:24-28. Jesus says: 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.' He goes on to explain that it is only in this apparent losing of ourselves that we actually 'find' our life. There is much that could be said here about the implications of this for what we understand as life. Sufficient to say that the life which Adam forfeited by his rebellion against the authority of God, is here, in our submitting to Jesus Christ, given back to us. As recorded repeatedly in John's Gospel, Jesus is 'the life' and the source and giver of life. As Paul states in Colossians 3:4 Christ *is* our life. In our giving up for Christ's sake that which we see as our life, Christ gives to us that which is really our life, the abundant, eternal life which was lost in Adam.

[8] In 13:44 and 45 Jesus gives us two little pictures of the incomparable value of allegiance to him. As we shall see below he is the King in the kingdom of heaven. Here in these verses he indicates that the kingdom of heaven, that is, *his* kingdom, is of more value than everything else we have. **To have Jesus Christ as our King is to have the ultimate treasure.**

[9] The rich young ruler came to Jesus wanting to know what he had to do to get eternal life. Though he had kept the commandments he still felt a lack. When Jesus told him to sell his possessions and give the money to the poor, and follow him, the young man went away sad. He did not value the kingdom of heaven more than his earthly riches. He was not willing to submit to this word of Jesus. He was not willing for Jesus to be his King; **but it is not possible to enter the kingdom while still in rebellion against the King.** This man, as Jesus well knew, was not seeking Jesus and his kingdom, he was not *coming to Jesus*. His quest was not motivated by any quest or desire for God and God's glory, but by a self-centred desire for his own eternal security. To put it bluntly, he couldn't care less about God; all he cared about was himself. For this reason Jesus put to him that unsettling demand, which focused him on the real choice: the choice between himself and Jesus (19:16-30).

## **Our response to the words of Jesus determines our ultimate destiny**

[1] Having told us in 7:1 'Do not judge, or you too will be judged' Jesus presents us with three situations, which all hang together, in which we definitely have to judge.

- The first of these is the choice between the narrow and wide gates (7:13,14). It is, in the ultimate sense, a choice between life and death; a choice between heaven and hell. One way is hard. One way is easy. On the one road there are only a few. On the other there are many. To enter the narrow gate is to choose life and heaven, but it is also to choose difficulty and loneliness. Immediately we choose this way we have passed judgement on those on the other way: by our choice we have declared them mistaken, we have declared them wrong, because no-one would choose this narrow, difficult, exclusive way unless convinced it was the *only* right way. To this point just what the "narrow way" is has not been identified.
- The second is a mixed picture of wolves in sheep's clothing and trees bearing bad fruit. Again we are forced to pass judgement. The question we face here is 'how do we tell who are true followers of Jesus and who are false followers of Jesus?' Jesus' answer to this question is 'by their fruit you will recognize them.' Contrary to the view of some people that 'fruit' equals converts or 'souls' won for the Lord, Jesus makes it quite clear that the fruit his true followers bear is obedience. He says 'Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven' (7:21). There are those who address him in the right manner, who prophesy in his name, who drive

out demons and perform miracles in his name, but his word to them is 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evil-doers!' (7:22,23). All of their profession and confession is meaningless verbiage if it not accompanied and verified by obedience.

- This leads into the third situation, in which the narrow way of the first picture and the second picture's obedience, or doing the will of the Father, are given specific, concrete identification. Jesus' third picture is that of the wise and foolish builders. He commences with 'therefore', connecting what he says here with what has gone before. 'Therefore' he says, 'everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who ... .' and 'everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who ... ' (7:24,26). We know the story: one house stands; one house crumbles. One man enters the kingdom of heaven; one man is refused entry. On what basis do we stand or fall? On what basis do we enter or not enter the kingdom of heaven? By entering through the narrow gate (7:13), by doing the will of Christ's Father in heaven (7:21), that is by hearing and putting into practice the words of Jesus Christ (7:24,26).

From this trilogy of little pictures Jesus makes it quite clear: **our eternal destiny hangs on our response to his words.**

[2] In Matthew 10 Jesus sent out the twelve disciples to preach that 'the kingdom of heaven is near.' Among the instructions he gave them is this: 'If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town' (v.14). He then went on to point out that it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for the town that rejects them. This thought will be stated again later, but let us note here that if Christ's words, even when spoken by the disciples, are rejected, the result is unbearable judgement.

[3] We come in chapter 11:20-24 to Christ's rebuke and reprimand of the unrepentant cities. Most of his miracles had been performed in Korazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. As we have seen already in Mark's Gospel the miracles were indisputable pointers to Jesus Christ's divine identity. For this reason Jesus pronounces "woe" on these cities. The Old Testament has told us of the gross wickedness of Tyre, Sidon and Sodom, and of their destruction by the judgement of God (Isaiah 23; Amos 1:9,10; Genesis 19), yet, Jesus says, if he had performed his miracles in those cities they would have repented long ago and remained to this day. So, says Jesus, it will be more bearable on the judgement day for those cities than for the cities refusing him. **They refused merely God's messengers: these are refusing God's Son.**

[4] The same point is made in a different way in 12:39-42. Here, when the Jews request a miraculous sign, Jesus rebukes them, telling them that the only sign that will be given them is the sign of the prophet Jonah, by which he inferred his death and resurrection. [Note that the resurrection proves Jesus is the Son of God (Romans 1:4).] He then goes on to tell them that the men of Nineveh, who repented at the preaching of Jonah, and the Queen of the south, who travelled from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon, will rise up on the day of judgement and condemn the current generation. This is because Jesus, to whom they refuse to listen, is far greater than either Jonah or Solomon. **Rejection of the message of Jesus is the ultimate calamity because he is the ultimate messenger.**

A supplementary point follows in 12:43-45. When we first read this we wonder 'Why on earth is Jesus suddenly talking about evil spirits? What does he mean by this?' In the light of the preceding verses (39-42) we can understand that Jesus is not teaching us about evil spirits at all, but using a story about evil spirits to illustrate the terrible state in which his hearers, having heard his word and refused both it and him, stood. To have heard *his* word, and refused to listen to it, is to lay themselves open to even more error and condemnation than before. For now, **not only are they misunderstanding all of the revelation of God which they had both in nature and in the Old Testament Scriptures, they are also rejecting God himself, as he here stands before them and speaks to them in the person of his Son.** Their final condition, says Jesus, is worse than their first. **In rejecting him and his message they have made their final rejection of God, beyond which there is no salvation.**

[5] The parable of the sower (13:1-23) is all about our response to the 'message about the kingdom' which Jesus preached. He starts his explanation of the parable by saying 'when anyone hears the message about the kingdom ... ' then goes on to describe four different responses:

- Those who hear the message and do not understand it. Here there is no response at all except refusal and rejection (19).
- Those who hear the word and at once receive it with joy. Here, Jesus says, there is no root. There's no depth. The hearing and the receiving and the joy are superficial. There has been no counting of the cost, no thinking through of the implications, no real understanding of who Jesus is, and what it means to follow him. There has been a hearing and receiving of the *words* but not of the *meaning* or the *significance* of the words. "Quickly" says Jesus, there is a falling away. What had appeared to be a receiving of Jesus' word, was soon shown to be otherwise.
- Those who hear the word, but it is choked by 'the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth' and does not produce the required response. The message is heard, but earthly concerns outweigh heavenly concerns, and material prosperity outweighs spiritual wealth. Jesus and his message are put aside in favour of human, earthly pursuits (22).

- Those who hear the word and understand it. Here is the only right response. The word of Jesus, the message of the kingdom, is both heard and understood. Its significance is probed, its implications are considered, and it is taken on board (23).

## Jesus claims to be the Son of God

[1] In Matthew 11:25-27 we are given a glimpse of what was constantly before our eyes in John's Gospel: the relationship between Jesus and God, and Jesus' claim to be the exclusive revelation of the Father. He sees his relationship with God as that of Son to Father. We must remember that John has pointed out to us that Jesus' expression of this relationship brought the immediate charge of blasphemy from the Jews. Jesus himself sees three things issuing from this relationship:

- 'All things have been committed to me by my Father'. In these words Jesus expresses his position of supreme authority and rank in the Father's household or kingdom. Elsewhere, as we see in other studies in this series, this position is described as 'sitting at the right hand of God', 'the firstborn', 'King of kings and Lord of lords'.
- 'No one knows the Son except the Father'. This is confirmed in 16:17 where Jesus tells Peter that it was his Father in heaven who had revealed the true identity of Jesus, the Son of God, to him. It is expressed by Jesus in 11:25, where he praises his Father for revealing the truth to 'little children'.
- 'No one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.' This is an exclusive statement similar to many made in John's Gospel. Irrespective of what we might think we know about God, **Jesus makes it quite clear that to know God, apart from Jesus Christ, is an impossibility. The *only* way to know God is through the revelation of Jesus Christ.**

[2] Having made this stupendous, exclusive claim about himself and his relationship to God, and his revelation of God, Jesus goes on to make what has become one of his best-loved appeals:

'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light' (11:28-30).

At first this seems incongruous and contradictory, coming after Christ's bold claim of the previous verses, and being preceded by his many demands for self-denying allegiance to him. What he has just stated about his relationship to the Father does not sound 'humble'. What he has previously demanded of his followers can hardly be seen as 'easy' and 'light'. So often we ignore the context in which this invitation is given; we drool over its promise of 'rest', we grasp eagerly for the 'easy yoke' and the 'light burden'. We fail to consider the impact of the three commands: 'come to me', 'take my yoke upon you' and 'learn from me.'

**There *is* a coming, and it is a coming to him who has just identified himself as the Son of God. There *is* a yoke, and let us not forget that a yoke puts one under the control and authority of another. There *is* a learning, in which we cast out all of our own preconceptions and misconceptions about God, and hold only to that which Jesus reveals to us.**

It is only to those who come to Jesus, the Son of God, that the promise of rest is given. It is only to those who submit to his 'yoke', his authority, and who reject all but his revelation of God, that the promise of 'easy' and 'light' is given.

### Why is this?

It is because he is the Son of the Father. In coming to him we turn our backs on all of our human strivings to find and to know God. In coming to him we are liberated from all so-called gods that are not God, the service of which holds the whole world in deep bondage. In coming to him we come to the One who is the source and giver of life, who is himself life, who, when we come to him, takes out of our hands the need to save and preserve ourselves in this world and the next, and does it for us. In this is the rest; in this is the easy and light burden: that when we come to Jesus, the Son of God, we let go of everything: our ideas about God, our efforts to secure our eternal destiny, our right to control and order our own lives. We come to him, we submit to his authority, we learn from him - Jesus, the Son of the Father. And he gives us rest.

[3] In Matthew 16 Jesus forces his disciples to put their understanding of his identity into words. When Peter confesses 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God' Jesus replies 'Blessed are you ... for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.'(17) It is this confession, that Jesus is the Son of God, that is the rock, or foundation on which the church of Jesus Christ is built (18); it is this confession, that Jesus is the Son of God, that releases people from the 'gates of Hades' (18); and it is this confession that Jesus is the Son of God, that is the 'keys of the kingdom of heaven', by which we enter the kingdom of heaven (19). **By proclaiming Jesus Christ, the Son of God, we unlock the doors of heaven.**

[4] Jesus portrays himself as the 'son' who is sent by the 'landowner' and rejected by the tenants (21:33-46). In this parable of the tenants Jesus teaches that he is the Son of God; and that rejection of this Son will result in rejection by God and exclusion from the kingdom of God.

[5] In 22:41-46 Jesus teases the Pharisees with a riddle about the true identity of the Christ. He points out that it is not enough to see him merely as 'the son of David' for David himself calls him 'Lord'. If he is David's 'Lord' he cannot be merely David's son.

[6] During Christ's trial the high priest said 'Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God' (26:63). Let us note in passing that the high priest assumes that the Christ, the Messiah, is the Son of God. If Jesus admits to being one, then he is automatically the other also. In his reply Jesus affirms his divine identity in four ways:

- 'Yes, it is as you say.'
- 'you will see the Son of Man' - another divine title.
- 'sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One' - the position of exaltation and power.
- 'and coming in the clouds of heaven' - he is the coming King.

Immediately the high priest rips his clothes and announces the charge of blasphemy: he has no doubt about the significance of Jesus' words. The verdict is easy; the penalty a foregone conclusion: on such a charge, having so obviously claimed to be God in such clear and unambiguous terms, Jesus is condemned to death.

## Jesus is King in the kingdom

[1] In the parable of the weeds (13:24-30,36-43) Jesus is speaking of the kingdom. He begins with 'The kingdom of heaven is like ... ' In his explanation he indicates that the kingdom is the kingdom of 'the Son of Man' (41) and also the 'kingdom of their (the righteous) Father.' By this we can understand that whenever Jesus speaks of the kingdom of heaven, which he does frequently in this Gospel, he is, at the same time, speaking of *his* kingdom, and the Father's kingdom. They are both one and the same. **Jesus Christ, the Son, is King, in the same way that God, the Father, is King.**

[2] Jesus, the Son of Man, is the coming King. This is his message in Matthew 24 and 25. He tells us, among other things:

- His coming will be visible to all (24:26,27).
- His coming will be accompanied by upheavals in the physical world (24:29).
- His coming will cause distress to the nations (24:30).
- His coming will be in the sky, and with power and great glory (24:30).
- He describes his coming as the coming of "your Lord" (24:42).
- Because he is coming his faithful and wise servants will always be ready for him (24:45-51 and 25:1-13). They consider him and his kingdom too important to let themselves be slack and unprepared, no matter how long he is in coming.
- At his coming he will assess whether we have lived for his glory and honour, or whether we have sought to preserve and secure ourselves (25:14-30).
- He will come as the King who sits on his throne as judge of all the earth, and announces the eternal destiny of every human being (25:31-46).

[3] In 28:18-20 we have Jesus' final words. He does not call himself 'King', but he does say 'all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.' On this basis he commands his hearers to 'make disciples of all nations ... . teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.'

Matthew introduced his Gospel with 'A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David' (1:1), which right at the beginning raises the thought of kingship. Immediately after recording Jesus' birth Matthew records the question 'Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?' (2:2). Both John the Baptist and Jesus, as they did in Mark, here summarize their message as 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near' (3:2, 4:17). Whereas Mark showed us by the miracles that Jesus is the Lord of all, Matthew, adding to those same miracles Jesus' teaching, presents Jesus to us as the King of the kingdom of heaven (which, by the way, we must never relegate solely to the future: it is operative wherever Jesus is).

As we have seen in this study Jesus, the divine King, calls us to costly and total allegiance to himself. He demands first place on our priority list. He commands our whole hearted obedience. Our response to the words of this divine King decide our eternal and ultimate destiny. Again the choice is put before us as it was in Mark as we viewed the miracles, as it was in John as we listened to Jesus debating with the Jews. So here we are challenged to make the same decision as we listen to Jesus' teaching: do we accept this man as the one he claimed to be - the Lord, the Son of God, the King of heaven - and in that acceptance, accept also his word which commands us to submit ourselves to him? Or do we refuse both him and his word, and in that refusal refuse also admission into the kingdom of heaven? This is the question Matthew's gospel puts before us.

We read of those who placed  
A crown on Jesus' head;  
And dressed him  
In a robe of royal red.  
A kingly staff they gave,  
Then knelt and said:  
'Hail to the King!'

Their mocking tones we judge,  
Their scorn disdain;  
And in contempt we hate  
That crown of pain.  
But from our lips  
Comes mockery again:  
'He is the King!'

We say the words, but  
Where is truth made known?  
Confession's truth  
Is in obedience shown,  
Gives Christ the right  
To wear the royal crown:  
'I at your feet, my will,  
My rights, lay down,  
O Christ, *my* King.'  
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