

A Different Kind of King

Alright, good to see everybody. If you have a bible, turn with me once again to **Matthew 3**. If you're joining us for the first time this morning or missed **last week, we kicked off** a new teaching series where we are looking in-depth at the book of Matthew in the bible. If you weren't *here* for that, it might be worth going back at some point and listening to it online, because there was a lot that we unpacked last week that frames up the book of Matthew as a whole and some of the major themes in it.

But in short, **the major theme** we unpacked last week was something Matthew calls "the kingdom of heaven," or "the kingdom of God." And we said that the "kingdom of God" is a way of describing *God's rule and God's reign*," or put even simpler, it is "God's way of doing things" in the world. **The central claim of Matthew is that the long-awaited king has arrived on the scene, and that he has brought with him a distinct way of doing things.**

And in today's passage, we finally **get to meet** this *king*. Believe it or not, **as much as we covered last Sunday**, there is one *very important* thing we *didn't* get into, and that was Jesus *himself*. We heard John the Baptist *talk about* Jesus, but in the story we have not yet *met* Jesus in flesh and blood. **Today in our passage, we do.** And **as we do, I want you to pay really close attention to how Matthew, the author, introduces Jesus to us.** Because I don't know if you've ever thought about it this way, but **the way a character gets introduced into a story usually tells us a lot about who that character is, and what they're like.**

Just as **a few examples**, think of the character Walter White's introduction during the opening scene of the hit show *Breaking Bad*, where we find him frantically making a getaway in the RV, wearing nothing but a gas mask and a pair of whitey tighties, interspersed with cuts to two dead cartel members sliding around in the back of the vehicle. That tells you a lot, all at once, about who Walter White *is*. Or if you're into the show *Schitt's Creek*, there's *Moira*, the matriarch's, first appearance where she is weeping hysterically as she is forced to pack all of her possessions into bags. That tells you a lot about who *Moira* is and what she's like. To go with a classic, there's even Simba in the *Lion King*. In the first scene he's hoisted up as the future king, and in the second scene he's singing the song "I Just Can't Wait to be King." Which is now stuck in all of your heads for the rest of the Gathering—you're welcome for that. But *that* introduction also tells us a *lot* about Simba's character.

Generally speaking, **what good storytelling does** is that it strategically orchestrates a character's first appearance to try and tell you as much as it can about who that character is, and what they're like.

And the **book of Matthew is great storytelling**. It's not *only* great storytelling—it's also *Scripture*—but it is *great* storytelling. So **Matthew, the author, did not choose these two stories we're about to read at random** in order to introduce us to Jesus. He chooses *these* events that we're about to read because there are things in them that tell us so much we need to know about who Jesus is and about what he came to do. They are meant to tell us about Jesus' *identity*.

So we've already picked up on the fact that Jesus is the *king* everyone has been waiting for in the story. But that I think prompts **the question, what kind of king will he be?** **That's a very important question if you are going to be living under the rule and reign of a king, right? You want to know what type of king it is that you're living under.** And Matthew's answer is that **Jesus is going to be a very different kind of king**. And he's going to get into that *today*, by way of two stories: Jesus' *baptism* and Jesus' *temptation* in the wilderness.

So with *all* that in mind, **let's take a look** and see what Matthew wants to show us about the type of king Jesus is. Matthew chapter 3, starting in v. 13:

[13] Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him.

So we're a *sentence* into Jesus' introduction and already **there's a twist**. Because if you remember from *last week's* passage, this guy in the story named *John* has just finished describing for us what this future king is going to be like. And **according to John, this king was going to come in power**. He was going to "lay the axe to the root of the tree," come with a "winnowing fork in his hand," and throw the "chaff" into an "unquenchable fire." That's some powerful language. In John's mind, this king, when he comes, would be someone to be *reckoned* with. **He was going to make John himself look like a mere blip on the radar because of how thunderous his arrival was going to be.**¹

¹ See Matthew 3:11

But then today, beginning in v. 13, when we are primed and ready for this mighty king, he shows up, and the first thing that happens is that he asks *John* to baptize *him*. **This king, in a way, submits himself to the person he was supposed to be greater than.** That's at least a little anticlimactic, isn't it? The hope was that Jesus would come and be bigger and better and more powerful. And in many ways he is—but it sure doesn't read that way at first. It reads like someone made a mistake. Like things aren't playing out the way they were supposed to play out. In fact, I think *John* also feels that way about it, to some degree. Look at his response to Jesus' request in v. 14...

[14] *John would have prevented [this from happening] him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"*

In other words, he's going "uh Jesus, this is backwards." You were meant to come in power, not in weakness. You were meant to come in dominance, not submission. Why in the world would you need to be baptized by me? That doesn't make any sense at all. That is *not* what I told these people would happen, *at all.*" *But*, v. 15...

[15] *But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then John he consented.*

So what does *that* mean—that it "fulfills all righteousness" for Jesus to be baptized? Because we learned last week that baptism is a sign of *repentance*: it signifies a turning from an *old, sinful* way of thinking and a turning towards a *new, righteous* way of thinking. But Jesus himself doesn't have any sin he needs to repent of, so why in the world would he need to be baptized?

Well, I think this is our first clue into the different type of king Jesus has come to be. In this interaction, we begin to see that he *is* a king, yes—but he has also come as a servant. He has arrived with a striking amount of humility and deference—to God the Father who sent him, but also in many ways to those around him. Jesus will say later on that he came "not to be served, but to serve." I think that's a helpful way of summarizing his posture during his time on earth: that he came, in order to serve. And just so you know, that word serve is much softer in English than it was back then. The word "serve" back then was the language of a slave who waited on tables at his master's events. That's the posture Jesus takes during his time on earth.

So probably about ten years ago, I attended a pastor's conference in Atlanta. And at this conference, about 30 of us got to go to a private luncheon with one of the conference

mainstage presenters—a really cool opportunity. In our case, the lunch was with a guy named Francis Chan. Probably a lot of you have heard of him—he’s a popular speaker, author and church leader. He’s pretty “famous,” at least in the Christian world.

So when the lunch was over, pretty much every pastor in the room made a **bee-line to go talk to Francis Chan**, get a selfie with him, and I don’t know what else you do when you meet a Christian celebrity—get him to sign your bible or something? But all of them just got up, left all their food and trash behind at their table, and went to go fanboy it up with Francis Chan. I would love to say that I didn’t do that because I was more mature than all of them, but I sadly cannot say that. Everybody gets up, leaves their trash at their tables.

And while we were all waiting to talk to him, I **noticed out of the corner of my eye**, an older gentlemen in a standard Chick-Fil-A employee’s uniform, going around and collecting the trash that everybody had left on their tables. It stuck out to me a little, because Chick-Fil-A didn’t cater the lunch, but I just kind of ignored it and waited my turn in line. But later, as I left, I looked at this guy’s name tag, and in tiny letters just like any other Chick-fil-A employee’s name tag, it read *Dan Cathy, CEO*.

The man who was picking up everybody’s trash at this luncheon was the **CEO of Chick-Fil-A**. In case you’re wondering, last I checked, his net worth is somewhere around \$7 billion. Chick-fil-A was one of the primary *sponsors* of the conference we were at. Dan Cathy wasn’t there at the luncheon because his company catered it or because he was being paid to clean up after it—he was there because he was a special guest of the conference. So really, he was the only one of us at that luncheon who *deserved* to have a conversation with Francis Chan—he was the only one on the same “level” as Francis Chan. And yet there he was, *choosing* to pick up everyone’s trash while *they* talked to Francis Chan. And I bring that up because **it’s one of the best pictures I can think of where a person who had the status and position and authority to *not* be a servant, chose to take the *posture* of a servant.**

Philippians 2 tells us that Jesus, “though he was in his very nature God, did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped—but *emptied himself*, by taking the form of a *servant*.” So Jesus is and would be a king, yes—but he would also be a *servant*. And that is **why it “fulfills all righteousness”** for him to be *baptized by* John: **it’s the first marker of the humble, *servant* posture Jesus will carry with him his entire life—all the way to the cross.**

And I think what we read next in the passage actually *confirms* that. Look with me at v. 16:

[16] And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; [17] and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Now these words spoken over Jesus at this point obviously read to us as **some incredible, awe-inspiring, empowering words**, to be sure. But just like with many things in the book of Matthew, there's even more to it than that. These words spoken over Jesus here are **lifted directly from the book of Isaiah**, where they describe a figure called "the servant of the Lord." So **Jesus has shown that he is the servant of the Lord by being baptized, and now God the Father confirms that identity of servant by speaking it over Jesus** as he comes up out of the water. God the Father confirms: this is the *Messiah*, and it's also the *servant*. He's a king, yes—but he's a *servant-king*.

Okay, so that's scene 1 of our passage. Scene 2 takes place in chapter 4. What we're going to read about next is what is commonly called the "temptation" of Jesus in the wilderness. And while it may seem like a very *different* passage than what we just read, it actually isn't. Some of you may know this, some of you may not—but the verse and chapter divisions in the bible were all actually added *later*—they're not *inspired*. So it's not like Matthew was writing the New Testament and going "now, let's see, what do I want chapter *four* to be about?" The numbering was added later, just for *us* to be able to *reference* parts of the bible more easily. So even though we're about to start a new *chapter*, that doesn't necessarily mean we're on to a new *topic*.

In fact, I think there are **quite a few reasons to group these two stories together**—Jesus' baptism and Jesus' temptation. But I'll just give you *one* reason for now. At the end of chapter 3, God the Father has just declared over Jesus, "this is my beloved...*what? Son*." He has just pronounced Jesus to be the son of God. Now if you look down in chapter 4, v. 3, what is the very first thing *Satan* says to Jesus? He says, "if you really are the...*what? Son of God*." So the story of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness is actually picking right up where the story Jesus' baptism left off. **Satan is about to test the very thing Jesus has just had spoken over him. Jesus has demonstrated his identity as the servant of God, the Father has spoken over him that he is the servant of God, and now the Enemy is going to test whether or not he really is the servant of God. Does that make sense to everybody?**

So do your best not to think of these as two separate stories in the bible, but instead as back-to-back events that *together* have something to teach us about the type of *servant-king* Jesus has come to be. So knowing *that*, let's take a look at chapter 4, v. 1:

[1] *Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.*

So before moving on, we probably need to talk for just a moment about the mention of *Satan* (or “the devil”) in this story. Because for many of us as modern Americans, the idea of personified evil feels a little mystical and superstitious—and therefore unbelievable. *Some of that I think is because our perception of Satan has often been so shaped by pop culture—movies, TV, and the like. Such that when many of us hear Satan mentioned in the Scriptures, our minds immediately imagine some sort of red creature with horns coming out of his head and carrying a pitchfork—like Will Ferrell on SNL back in the day, for those that remember that. Or bare minimum, we imagine some type of overly sinister, shadowy-looking figure.*

But truth be told, we are never given a description in the bible of what *Satan looks like*. Maybe because it's not relevant—or maybe because his appearance was actually nothing unusual, when he showed up. I mean, if he was some sort of obviously sinister-looking figure, it seems like the authors of the bible probably would've been like, “look out for that guy who looks really evil, and maybe don't listen to him when he shows up.”

Instead, the Scriptures just assume Satan's presence in the world. And at times, they actually go out of their way to tell us that he is cunning, crafty, and deceitful. So I think if that tells us *anything*, it's that *Satan's schemes are probably far less obvious than you and I would expect*. So to be honest, it probably works to his advantage that so many of us think his existence is silly and superstitious, because that means he gets to carry on completely undetected, as he effectively burns our lives to the ground.

But all that said, here we read that *Jesus is led out into the wilderness* to be “*tempted*” by the devil. Now, real quickly before we continue, I want to try and clarify something about that word “*tempt*.” So probably a better way to translate that is that he was *tested* by the devil. In fact, in other places in the bible this same word *is* translated as “*test*.” The reason I clarify that is because we generally only use the word “*tempt*” when describing

the desire to something *bad*. Right? Like I don't think any of us would say "I'm just really *tempted* to let that person in front of me in traffic." "I'm just really *tempted* to bake that person a cake and deliver it to their house." We don't use the word "tempt" that way—we use it to describe *bad* or *evil* desires.

And it's worth noting that **Satan here isn't** necessarily tempting Jesus to do *bad* things. The first temptation is for Jesus to "turn stones into bread." Is there any command in the bible against turning stones into bread? Nope. So it's not so much that Satan is trying to "get Jesus to do something bad," as it is **his attempt to divert Jesus off of his God-ordained mission. His mission to be a servant-king.**

So I think **the better word here** is that Jesus was being "tested." Because a *test* is *neutral*. Think about tests you take in school: the result of a test can be good or bad, because the only goal of a test is to reveal the character of the one *taking* the test: if you studied well, you get a *good* grade on the test. If you *didn't* study well, you get a *bad* grade (at least in theory). So what's happening here is a little deeper than just "getting Jesus to do something bad," as it were. **It's actually that the true character of Jesus is being tested and revealed. It's designed to show us what kind of king and son Jesus truly is.**

So with that in mind, **let's read the account of** Jesus being *tested* in the wilderness. I'm just going to read all the way through to the end, and then we'll go back and talk in a little more detail. Pick it up with me in v. 2 of chapter 4:

[2] *And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he [Jesus] was hungry. [3] And the tempter (or tester) came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God [there's our phrase], command these stones to become loaves of bread."* [4] *But he answered, "It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." [5] Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple [6] and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you," and "On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone." [7] Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" [8] Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. [9] And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." [10] Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your*

God and him only shall you serve.” [11] Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

Okay, so there are **three different “tests.”** Three different *itches* that Satan makes to Jesus. And while they might all seem a bit different, I think there’s actually a *thread* that runs through each of them. So remember: Jesus has just been declared to be *the son* of God following his baptism. And Satan never directly *challenges* that status—in fact, **he assumes it.** His pitch to Jesus is simply this: **“Jesus, use your *sonship* to your own advantage. Use your *status* as the son of God in self-serving ways, instead of in *servant-minded* ways.”** That’s what Satan wants to get Jesus to do. So:

- He says, “Jesus, you’re hungry, right? So use your status as God’s son to turn these stones into bread. No need for the *son of God* to go hungry when he doesn’t have to.”
- He says, “Jesus, things in the kingdom are all about you, right? So throw yourself down from the temple, and have the angels rescue you. Surely God would rescue *you*, his *son*, right?”
- And finally, “Jesus, you have come to be king of the world, right? So what if I told you you could do all that and not have to suffer at all on the cross in order to make it happen? Use your *sonship* as a way to take the easy way out—bow down and worship me and it’ll all be yours.”

Do you **see the pattern?** **It’s to try and get Jesus to use his status as God’s *son* in ways that contradict the mission God has given him, and contrary to the type of *king* Jesus is.** So a lot of people think Satan’s objective in the world is to get people really involved in things like tarot cards and Ouiji boards. Or to like, go get their fortune read, and probably listen to hair metal, since it all tells you to worship Satan if you play it backwards or something. And I’m not saying Satan can’t be involved in any of those things—sometimes he is. For instance, **you don’t even have to play hair metal backwards to know that Satan is involved in it—you know that just because of how bad the music sounds.**

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But here’s my *point*: **it’s worth noting that in Satan’s tempting of *Jesus*, his strategy is far more “ordinary,”** far less *ominous* than all that. **Here, part of Satan’s method is just to get Jesus to be *selfish* and *self-oriented*.** He tries to get Jesus to orient everything in the kingdom around *Jesus’ own* immediate needs and comforts. **And I would bet that this is another strategy Satan loves to use on *us*: to try and get *us* to orient everything and everyone in our lives around *ourselves*. Satan would love few things more than for *us***

to spend the majority of our time insisting that everyone else meet *our* needs and cater to our preferences.

So when you operate, for instance, as if your spouse or your roommates are simply there to make life easier and more ideal for *you*, that could be demonic. When you settle into a low-grade frustration that your friends aren't the exact type of friends *you want* them to be for you at all times, *that* could be demonic. When you ghost your LifeGroup or your church because they didn't meet *your spiritual needs* the way *you* thought they should be met, that could be demonic. **And at the very least, when our lives are marked by self-orientation, you can be certain that Satan is very, very happy.**

And getting back to the story, it makes sense that Satan would try to get *Jesus* to operate that way. Because after all, in most kingdoms at the time, *kings* were *all about* self-orientation. They had *statues* of themselves put up, they had people bow down to them as *gods*, they had *parades* scheduled to *celebrate* their own importance. Kings at the time were very *good* at making much of themselves. Many kingdoms and governments *today* still are. *We have a president, at this moment, who cannot seem to stop talking about how good of a job he is doing and how great of a president he is (and that's not an endorsement or a criticism—that's an observation).* Don't email me about that—if you do, I will just respond with a link to his Twitter feed. But listen—**this is how kingdoms of *this world* function: they run on self-orientation. Jesus, however, is a different kind of king. He is a king whose mission it is to give up everything, including his very life to do what the Father has sent him to do.**

Now, believe it or not, *that's only one layer* to what's happening in this passage. There's actually a *deeper* layer to it as well. *Now don't panic—I know we've already been at this for a while, so the next layer won't take near as long to unpack. But there is another layer to it all.*

From the way Matthew tells this story, it is obvious that he is **presenting it as a sort of re-telling of the story of *Israel* from the Old Testament.** So a lot of you probably already know—there is a story in the book of Exodus about a time when God led his people out of slavery in Egypt, and then led them through the desert. “Desert” could also be translated “wilderness.” And *Israel* was in the wilderness for forty *years*, sort of like *Jesus* was in the wilderness for forty *days*. *Israel's* time in the wilderness immediately followed them passing through the *waters* of the Red Sea, sort of like how *Jesus* passed through the waters of *baptism*. What's even *more* interesting is that **at several points in**

the Old Testament story, the nation of Israel is referred to as God's "son" and God's "servant."

Israel was another son and servant that was tested in the wilderness. But **the main difference between the two** stories is that *Israel failed their* test. They came up wanting. *They were tested by being given limited food, so that they might learn that "man doesn't live by bread alone," but they failed that test...by grumbling at God and accusing him of not caring about them. They were tested by being in the desert with very little to drink, and they failed—by turning around and testing God in return. They were tested by being called to worship God and God alone, but failed the test by setting up other gods to worship.*

So Matthew, the author, is portraying Jesus as the one who came to do what Israel failed to do. He came to be what Israel failed to be. He came to pass the test that they ultimately failed. And in doing that, he once again shows us that Jesus is the *true* "son" and "servant" of God. **God has now used this test, put forward by Satan, to verify what he spoke over Jesus in his baptism. Jesus is the true son of God, as well as the servant king.**

And that's precisely where all of this connects to you and me today. **You see, it's not just that Israel failed** the test. *We failed it. We are Israel, in so many different ways. We are Israel when we fail to love our neighbor as ourselves. We are Israel when we put God to the test and worship other things in our lives as gods, instead of him. We are Israel when we grumble to God about all the ways he hasn't provided for us in the ways we think he should. And we are Israel when we choose to orient everything in our lives around our needs and our wants.*

So the truth is that **we too needed someone to come and succeed** where we failed. We need the true son of God to come and be "the one in whom God is pleased," because that tends to *not* be true of us on our own. And the message of the cross is that Jesus came to do exactly that *for us*. **He didn't just come to show us how to live—he came to live in our place.** To live the life that we couldn't, to die the death that we should've died, and to hand us in return, *life*. The "son of man came, not to be served, but to serve...and to give his life as a ransom for many." The ultimate act of servanthood that Jesus came to perform was his death.

So did you notice how—in those last couple verses—Jesus reacts much more *passionately* to the third and final test? The *first* two times, he just quotes Scripture to

Satan and continues on. In the third test, before he cites Scripture, he says emphatically, “be gone from me Satan!” *Exclamation point*. Why is his response different the last time around? *What about* that third test is so repulsive to Jesus that he tells Satan to get out of his sight?

My take is that in this final test, Satan is trying to keep Jesus from going to the cross. Satan knows that if Jesus goes to the cross, it’s all over. So he tries to give Jesus an easier way to “win.” And to that, Jesus says “be gone, Satan.” Because the thing Jesus came to do, that we couldn’t do—the thing he came to succeed in, that we couldn’t succeed in—is completed in him going to the cross. Him dying a sinner’s death so that we could be given a savior’s life. And the one thing that is utterly repulsive to Jesus is not going to the cross. He will not allow himself to even stomach the possibility of not giving his life for his people. He is our suffering, servant king.

So a question that gets asked a lot around evangelicalism is the question “what would Jesus do?” We tend to love that question. I mean we made it into bracelets at one point, right? And I think that is a very important question for us to ask. We are Jesus’ disciples—which means we want ultimately to become like him. So it makes sense that we would ask the question often, what would Jesus do? And in passages like this one, that would look like asking, “what does Jesus’ temptation tell me about the way I should fight temptation?” And that’s a helpful question to ask, to be sure.

But I also think it is essential that we first ask a different question. And that’s “what did Jesus do?” What did he do, for us? What did Jesus accomplish that only he could accomplish? What did he succeed in that, without him, we couldn’t succeed in? You see, before Jesus came to show us what to do, he came to become something for us, on our behalf.

So let’s learn from Jesus how to live—absolutely. Let’s learn from him how to live and how to love people and how to serve people and how to sacrifice for people and how to fight temptation. All of that is good and needed. But the ability to imitate him in all of that comes from receiving his life and his indwelling Spirit through the cross. And only through that, do we learn how to be the type of people he’s created us to be.

Let’s pray together.