

Tim: Hey everybody! I'm Tim Mackie, and this is my podcast, "Exploring My Strange Bible." I am a card-carrying Bible history and language nerd who thinks that Jesus of Nazareth is utterly amazing and worth following with everything that you have.

On this podcast, I'm putting together the last 20 years' worth of lectures and sermons where I've been exploring the strange and wonderful story of the Bible and how it invites us into the mission of Jesus and the journey of faith. And I hope this can all be helpful for you too.

I also helped start this thing called the BibleProject. We make animated videos and podcasts and classes about all kinds of topics in Bible and theology. You can find all those resources at BibleProject.com. With all that said, let's dive into the episode for this week.

[musical interlude 00:55-1:00]

So I invite you to grab a Bible and turn one on or open it up, whichever one of those that you do. And uh, open up to Matthew chapter 4. The Gospel of Matthew chapter 4.

Um, you have... you did the Spiritual Practice series, that John Mark just talked about. And then before that, you've been with baby Jesus for a while. And then you got to adult Jesus who faced his archenemy in the wilderness. And uh...tonight we're exploring Jesus comes onto the scene. He goes public, uh, for the first time in the Gospel of Matthew.

So I just want to read...it's about the second half of Matthew chapter 4. I just want to read it, the whole thing. It won't take very long. And it's really cool. And uh, we'll just...that's our mission to explore the second half of Matthew chapter 4.

How are you guys doing?

[pause for crowd]

Great. Good.

Let's start in verse 12. Matthew 4 verse 12.

"So when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: 'Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way of the sea beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people living in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned.' From that time on, Jesus began to preach, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.

“Now, Jesus was walking beside the sea of Galilee, and he saw two brothers, Simon, who's called Peter, and his brother Andrew. And they were casting a net into the lakes. They were fishermen. Jesus said, ‘Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people.’ At once, they left their nets, and they followed him.

“Now, going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. And they were in the boat with their dad, Zebedee, preparing their nets. And Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their dad, and followed him.

“Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news about the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people were brought to him who were ill with various diseases, people suffering severe pain, people who were demonized, people who had seizures and paralyzed, and Jesus healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, in the Decapolis, in Jerusalem, in Judea, in the region across the Jordan, and they followed him.”

Second half of Matthew chapter four, you could summarize by saying “Jesus is a boss.”

[laughter]

That's essentially what's happening here.

Um, okay.

So let's name, uh, something in the room that was happening. Um... There's a whole bunch of you who have grown up, or were raised in, or maybe you didn't grow up but you are very familiar with through years of connection to what I call Churchianity. It's the Western cultural form of the Christian faith and all its diversity. Ah, but these are very familiar stories. Um, Jesus, you know calling... Some of you have sung songs about this before, when you were little kids. Like Fishers of Men, there's one about that. Yeah? Anybody?

[pause for crowd]

You know that one apparently... There you go. I didn't learn it as a kid, but I know some people did.

So right, and calling people to follow him and sick people. And there you go. Those are like well-known stories about Jesus.

So the challenge there is when you come to a part of the Bible that you're already familiar with, you're in danger because you think you already know what's happening. And so you're... you're less likely to be expecting to hear anything new. And then there's a whole bunch of you, um, because it's Portland, and uh, because whatever, people invite friends, and there's people all over the map here in Portland. Some of you who are brand new to following Jesus, or you're

rediscovering what it might mean for you to follow Jesus right now in this season of your life. And you don't know these stories and you've... You kind of like that phrase: "I'll make you fish for people." You're like, that's catchy. Somebody should write a song about that.

But you've never...

[laughter]

You're...right? You've never, like, heard that before. Right? So...and so you don't know what to expect because this is all...this is all new to you. And everyone in between. Welcome.

[laughter]

Welcome.

So this is what we do as a community of Jesus, right? You come together and we try to surrender all of our preloaded assumptions and we just come expecting something new. A new word, a new insight, or for Jesus to become new to us all over again. And this story, I think, has the capacity for that in...in a way that's really, really powerful.

So here's what I'd like you to do. At least try and hear this story with new ears and read it with new eyes. I want you to use your imagination. I have a four and a six year old. Um, I think they're asleep. Yeah. They're asleep by now, which is great news for my wife.

[laughter]

And um...so there you go. But they... Man, their imaginations are so active. And we...then we grow up and become grumpy and we stop using them. So let's stop that right now. I want you to engage your imagination. Um...and I'll at least try and engage it by showing you a picture of a map.

Okay, so I want you to pretend, I want you to make-believe, that you're a Jewish fisherman or fisherwoman and you, uh... you..you love your people. I mean your family, but your people—the family of Abraham. And you love your land that you live on. You live on your ancestral land. This is a map.

When the family of Abraham received their inheritance in the lands—modern-day Israel, Palestine, Israel, and the West Bank—but this is the tribal boundary lines of the family of Abraham. And so you're a Jewish fisherman or fisherwoman and you have a love for your people. You grew up on the stories and the poetry of the Psalms and the prophets and the stories about Moses and Joshua and Gideon and...and all of the stories take place in this land. And your whole imagination is filled with the stories of your past and of the God of Israel who rescued his people and so on.

Now, if you're a fisherman or fisherwoman, you only live in one place. And it's up in that region up in the... There's Jerusalem, this tiny circle down below. The Jordan River where John the Baptist was doing his thing. That's the circle in the middle. And then way up north is the region of Naphtali and Zebulun. Do you recognize those names from the story that we read?

Yeah. Yeah.

So those are tribal regions around the Sea of Galilee. So let's... Oh, a little bit better. So, okay...

So this is your zone. Let's say you live in the town of Capernaum and you're a fisherperson—fisherman or fisherwoman. And you love everything about your land, but you are very aware—you're very aware—that all is not well in the world or with your people whom you love.

Umm, and it's very clear why things are not well in the world. It's because you live in a militarized zone. You live in a region that, even though your ancestors have been living here as far back as you can remember, um, you're living under a military occupation of the Roman empire. And they've been here about 70 years—not that long in terms of the history of your people.

And you're reminded of their presence daily, when the troops make their security rounds on the borders around the Sea of Galilee. Um you... There's a lot of ancient towns of your people up in these hills in the region of Galilee. But there's also a town like Tiberius right on the coast or Sephorus right up there in the hills. And these are pretty new cities. These are cities that the Romans colonized. It's mostly ex-Roman soldiers, lots of Greeks and Romans.

None of them care about the history of this land or your people or the God that you give your devotion to every day, when you wake up and you say: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one."

And so you're aware that taxes keep going up. You know that your uncle who used to farm a piece of land near **Nain**, he had to recently sell his land. He actually couldn't afford to keep it anymore because the taxes keep going up. And so here's your uncle, he's now a debt slave working in the olive orchards that his great, great, great grandfather owned.

Things are not well.

But you hear a report, because you live in Capernaum, that there's a Jewish prophet who's from Nazareth. And he's making the rounds of all of these towns around Galilee with this really electric message that has everybody talking and everybody's in anticipation about this **Yeshua men Nazaret**—Jesus who is from Nazareth.

And he's gone and he's made Capernaum his home base. Did you catch that in the story?

And then he made Capernaum his home base and he's touring around and you hear that he's going to be in your synagogue, this coming Sabbath. He's going to be teaching. And so you arrive at synagogue on Friday night and Jesus is there. And you didn't get there early enough because there's like 300 people there. Only 50 can fit in the room. And so you're outside the crowds and you're...but you're making out what he's teaching inside. And...

Okay, how am I doing?

[pause for crowd]

Okay, I'm trying. I'm not a...you know, I'm not a fiction author or anything like that, but I'm trying.

Okay, so, um... What do... What do you... You're the...you're the fisherwoman. What do you hear?

What do you hear Jesus talking about?

This is just an average day. He's touring around, teaching, saying his thing. What do you hear him talking about?

[pause for crowd]

[laughter]

So, so pay... Thank you. That's very eager. I love it. You're responsive. Yes.

So...so how you answer that question...

It's worth asking the question and it's worth paying attention to your answer to the question, even though most of you didn't say it. Because how you answer that question tells you a lot about how you view Jesus in the present. It actually tells you sometimes very little about what Jesus actually said or did. It tells you more about how you perceive Jesus or how you've been raised or conditioned to perceive what Jesus was about.

Because many people would answer that question and be like, well, okay, what is Jesus known for? He's known for the golden rule. That's a famous one. He was a very memorable teacher. You know what I'm saying?

So like...

What's that one? The golden rule? "Do unto others—

[pause for crowd]

Yeah—"As you would have them do unto you."

Now, he's not the only religious teacher who said that, but he's kind of the one who's most well known with that phrase.

You might think...I might hear him say something like, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Or the more radical version of that, which was "Love your enemy and bless people who hate you."

You might think that you would hear him saying... He told stories, right? Brilliant short-storyteller. You might tell a story about mustard seeds or birds or sheep or something like that.

Right? So, but it's worth asking the question: what do you hear him talking about?

If you had to summarize everything Jesus ever said or did...

This is an even greater challenge. If you had to summarize Jesus' whole deal in one sentence, how would you do it?

And like our eager beavers here...I love it, right? They like, you know... You guys know. You guys know, because we just read the story. You know that Matthew has already done the hard work for you. You're off the hook. You don't have to try and come up with a sentence because we've already read it.

[laughter]

Right?

Matthew has already given us the summary of everything Jesus said or did and what he was about. And it was in verse 17 right here of chapter four. "Repent."

Repent, which means stop. Stop. Everybody stop.

Something is happening that is going to force you to make a decision. And it's going to force you to reevaluate everything that you thought you knew about the world and about yourself and about God. And it's going to involve this radical reorganization of your priorities and values.

Repent, right?

Well you... I could just say repent, but that's what that...that's what it means, right?

And what...what is happening? What is Jesus bringing into reality that forces me to stop, look, and listen like that?

And it's right here. The kingdom of heaven has come near.

The kingdom of heaven has come near.

In this Bible that I have here in front of me, the gospel of Matthew takes up 30 pages. And if you read through looking for the thing Jesus talks about most, it will become crystal clear to you. Because the kingdom... Jesus talks about the kingdom 1.5 times per page on the 30 pages of the gospel of Matthew. That is nearly 50 times in these 30 pages. Just get out a calculator. You can do the math.

So if you read...actually read, like, what he talked about all of the time, it's very clear. Like this is what he was about.

And his one-off teachings have actually become the thing that he's most well-known for. It's kind of ironic, because, like, is loving...is loving people who hate you, is loving your enemy and saying a blessing on people who persecute you... This is actually fairly poor advice, if some other things aren't also true at the same time.

Are you with me?

That's actually a ridiculous way to behave, unless something has happened in the world that makes that the only logical response. And what is that, that is happening, that makes loving your enemy a sensible thing to do? And it's that the kingdom of heaven is here.

So let me just stop. For all kinds of different reasons, the kingdom of God arriving isn't the first thing that comes to our minds when we think of Jesus. And so let's just stop that right now. This is silliness that we would not think this. Silliness that it's not the first thing that comes to our mind.

So are you guys with me? When you think of Jesus...

This is being very pedantic, I'll be...

When you think of Jesus, think of...

[pause for crowd]

When you think of the kingdom of God...

[pause]

This is the thing that Jesus lived and breathed. It's the thing he talked about more than anything else. And it's the main heartbeat of his mission and his message. And everything else flows out from the fact that he believed and believed that he was bringing into reality the kingdom. The kingdom. The kingdom.

Which just begs the question: “what on earth is the kingdom?” Like what...what does it mean for a Jewish prophet to go around that region of Galilee 2000 years ago saying, “the kingdom of God is here,” or the kingdom of heaven. And you're going to see variation as you go throughout the gospel of Matthew over the next two years. You're welcome.

So, all right. And you're going to see a variation.

So the kingdom of heaven is a way...it's two sides of the same coin.

Heaven is talking about God in his transcendent royal position as author and king of all of creation. And so to say the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God, it's basically saying the same thing. But when you say heaven, Jesus isn't talking about somewhere you go. He's talking about somewhere that's coming here.

Do you see that? It's something that's happening here. And that was going to force... Everyone that comes in to have an encounter with Jesus, it's going to force you to stop, look and listen.

So what does it mean? What on earth does that mean?

And because if you're this Jewish fisherwoman or fisherman, all kinds of things are firing in your heart and in your mind when you hear Jesus say something like this. All these triggers are firing. And it's because your brain wasn't melted on Twitter and YouTube, if you're a Jewish fisherman or fisherwoman, right?

So your media was the Hebrew Scriptures. And you grew up on the poetry of the prophets and of the Psalms and the stories of the Hebrew Bible. And this phrase is extremely meaningful to you. It has everything to do with your life and those Romans marching around the lake and your uncle who went into slavery on his own land.

So to ask what the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven is about, what it means for it to come, is really to kick ourselves up out of the storyline of Jesus into the bigger overarching biblical drama—the whole storyline of the whole Bible, which is claiming to be the story of our world.

And so what is that story? So here's what we're going to do. We're going... I'm going to be like a tour guide. We're going to do a quick pit stop at, like, three key moments in the storyline of the Hebrew Scriptures. And then we're going to come back and read Matthew 4. And, oh my gosh, this is amazing—that kind of thing. Alright? You guys with me?

Okay, so...this is good. This is good. This will be helpful for you.

Some of you are going to be at a get together tomorrow night, or maybe this coming Friday night and you need some conversation starters. Let me help you with that. Bible trivia. Bible trivia is a great way to ostracize yourself in a room. Alright?

[laughter]

But nonetheless, this is a fun fact to know and just pull it out this Friday night. See what happens.

So if you're reading through the story of the Bible and you are looking for where does the concept of kingdom, where does the concept of ruling or reigning, appear for the first time as you're reading through the Bible? Where do you find such an idea?

[pause for crowd]

Ooh, Genesis. Genesis.

Look at these Bible nerds among us. This is wonderful, right?

And what page exactly?

[laughter]

No, I'm quite serious. What page?

[laughter]

It's page one. Page one, depending on the size of the letter formatting in your Bible. So...

[laughter]

I have medium-size letter formatting, which means that it's at the top of page two. But in a smaller format, it would be on page one.

But it's in chapter one. That's the first story of the Bible.

And so, and the first... So the first story of the Bible depicts God. It's a portrait of God as a...as a royal artist. As...as a creative, wise being who's powerful enough to...to breathe and speak a world of order and beauty in a garden into existence out of the dark, watery, chaotic desert that the story begins with. And so the chaotic desert becomes a garden.

And then what God wants to do fundamentally through his act of creation is to share the...

And this...this is a very important story for my four and six year old to learn, right? That God is first and foremost, somebody who loves to share.

[crowd laughing]

And that's...that is something that you should absolutely take away. Clear takeaway from the story on page one of the Bible.

And because it's God orders this incredible, incredible world full of so much potential. But then what God does is something surprising. He's clearly the author and king of the whole thing, but what he wants to do is share ownership of this incredibly beautiful, complex world that he's designed.

And what...who are the unique creatures that get installed as the co-rulers over this?

Now, I know somebody... There's a certain pastor here who wrote a book about this. And so maybe some of you have heard this before but, whatever, you're going to hear it again.

So here it is on page one of the Bible—or two, depending on the size of your letters. Here's the famous passage right here.

“So God created humanity in his own image. In the image of God, he created them, male and female he created them. And God blessed them and said, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’”

You know, at the beginning of the gathering—right? It's one of the first things you did together. You all read a poem from the Hebrew Bible. What poem was it?

It was Psalm 8. And what was Psalm 8 about?

[pause]

Psalm 8 is a poetic reflection on this paragraph right here from page one of the Bible.

It's on the unique...the unique calling, the unique capacity of the human species among all the other creatures here on earth. There's something unique about the human role in the story of our world. And the humans have this responsibility to steward or oversee the world on God's behalf. And when they do that—when they do that—they image and represent God to the creation.

Now ruling is kind of an odd way to talk about that, but that's the lang...that's the language of kings and queens. King...that's kingdom language. Rule.

Are you with me?

Just like if you're in English, you would say, if you're... If you run, we would call you a...a runner, right?

So it's tricky because in English, we...

If you're a king, what's the thing that you do? We have a different word, but it's not in the language of these authors. If you're a king, then you king. If you're a king, then what you do is you king.

And that's what this word—you're a ruler. And we don't use...I mean, you rule the birds. How many of you after the gathering tonight are going to go out and say to the crows outside like. "I rule you," you know?

[laughter]

Like, come on, that's silly. That's silly. So what are we talking about?

We're talking about how human beings in...in a God-like capacity, we don't just inhabit this world of awesome potential and resources. We actually remake it everywhere we go. Like, chimpanzees use primitive tools. Yes, I understand that. But humans don't just live in the jungle. We, like, make a city out of the... Are you with me?

It's a very unique capacity of the human species that comes with great responsibility and a divine calling. A divine vocation, we're told, is connected to being those divine images here in the world. Royal...royal stewards of God's good world.

Now here's the thing is that we don't... If you're like a manager—if you work at one of the zillion coffee shops here in Portland as like a shift manager or manager or something like that—you would never say "I rule this place." You know? You might think you do, right? And your coworkers might think that you think you do, but you don't actually. So, right? Cause there's someone else who actually owns it and you rule it on their behalf. And that's precisely the storyline right here.

And so the story of the Bible begins. It's a story about kingdoms. It's a story about God as the king, but then he installs humans as these rulers who will rule the world on God's behalf. They'll take all of its raw potential and take the world in directions it wouldn't go otherwise.

But that calling, that vocation, is going to require humanity to make decisions—really, really significant decisions about what is good and what is not good. About good and evil.

And so this is the whole thing. This is page two now, right? The tree, right? That tree about good and evil. And so it's this choice. Are human beings going to allow God to be the one who

defines good and evil, and he has the knowledge and wisdom about good and evil, and we'll rely on that as we rule the world?

Or, are the humans going to seize the opportunity, seize autonomy, to define the knowledge of good and evil on their own terms. And redefine good and evil in a way that's best for me and my group, which might mean that it's at the expense of you and your group, but so be it.

And so how does the story go? Of course, you know, right?

Human... What humans... The humans are depicted as starting an alternate kingdom where they've seized autonomy. It's a hostile takeover, right? So God's the king, but then he appoints these rulers and then they take... Oh, it's like the shift manager thinks they become the owner, right? And then they take over and they begin this alternate kingdom. And this is the basic plot conflict of the Bible is of the age of human kingdoms that have redefined good and evil on their own terms.

So Jesus, his term for this age of the human corrupt kingdoms, he calls it "this age" or "the age of the world." Paul calls it "the age of sin and death." It goes by all these different names in the Bible, but it's the...it's the...the realm after the hostile takeover.

And so the whole plot conflict of the Bible is what is God going to do about this hostile takeover? And what he does, and he sets in motion a plan to reassert his kingdom, to reassert his rule over the kingdoms of the world.

And the first way God does this in the biblical story is he singles out one family and he's going to form them as a new people and as like an alternate—a contrast kingdom, a contrast community—and reveal to them what it means to truly become human in a way that doesn't redefine good and evil on our own terms, but does it according to God's wisdom.

And who's the key head patriarch and matriarch of this new family? Abraham and Sarah, Abraham and Sarah.

And they're to train their family in the way of the Lord to do justice and righteousness of this alternate kingdom.

And so here's... God begins to form this family, this alternate kingdom, but then here's what happens. The family gets really big and they end up...

This is the second key moment on our tour of the Old Testament. It's taking longer than 10 minutes, but that's okay.

So the second key moment is the family grows and then they end up in slavery to one of the biggest, baddest kingdoms of this world that you've ever seen in the story so far. What's the kingdom and what's the king?

[pause for crowd]

Egypt and Pharaoh, right? And so...

And Pharaoh is larger than life in this story. He represents everything that's wrong with the collective human...human kingdom. And so he's a power hungry, murderous king. He's redefined good and evil so that killing...killing babies in the name of building huge storehouses is good instead of evil. And so he's grinding the family of Abraham into the dust through slavery.

And so what does God do? God reasserts his kingdom over Pharaoh. He raises up a deliverer, Moses, and he confronts Pharaoh and he says, "you can't do this in God's world. You need to humble yourself and you need to set these people free."

And Pharaoh's like, "you don't know me."

You know...right? You don't...

Well, actually...actually what he says is, "I don't know you. I don't know the God of Israel. Why should I care? I make the...I call the shots around here."

And so he takes off the boxing gloves and so does God. And the story is really, really intense. And it's intense because it's...it's the...it's the conflict of the divine and human hostile-takeover kingdoms.

And who wins this conflict?

Okay, so Pharaoh ends up on a road of no return. He's so intoxicated by his own power and prestige, he destroys himself in his effort to win. And so he's crushed in the waters of the sea and the slaves are liberated and freed.

And here we're at a moment in the story of the Bible... This is...

If you haven't been ostracized at this get together on Friday from throwing out the first Bible trivia, then try this one because this one will be good, right?

And so this is... When in the story in the storyline of the Bible is God called a king for the first time? Where is God depicted as a ruling king and called a ruling king for the first time?

And it's right at this moment in the story.

After the Israelite slaves have been freed, they pass through the sea on dry land, and they sing the first worship song of the Bible. It's called the Song of the Sea in Jewish tradition. And here are the opening lines and then the very last line of this poem from Exodus chapter 15.

“And then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to Yahweh. ‘I will sing to Yahweh. He's highly exalted. Both horse and driver, he's hurled into the sea. Yahweh is my strength. He's my defense. He has become my salvation. He's my God and I will praise him. He's my father's God and I will exalt him.’”

That's the opening paragraph of the poem. And the last line of the poem is...?

“Yahweh reigns as king forever and ever.”

Now, okay, that's interesting as a general truth about God. But the whole point is how has God proved his royal authority in the story that you just read? That the king of this world has reasserted his reign by forming an alternate people and confronting evil and its destructive effects on people, liberating these people and inviting them to live under his reign and his rule.

This is what it... This is what it looks like when God asserts his kingdom.

What does it mean that God's kingdom has come near? It means the king is forming a new people, liberating them from the kingdoms of this world, confronting evil.

Are you with me?

This is just...

This is the story. This is what it means for God to become king.

When God becomes king, people are rescued and evil is named and confronted and dealt with.

This is... This is ...

If you're the Jewish fisherwoman or fisherperson, this is...you live and breathe these poems and these stories.

Now, last stop on the tour.

God invites the Israelites to come to a mountain where they get married to God. They enter a covenant relationship. And the terms of the covenant—this relationship—are very clear. They start with 10. They're quite famous, called the 10 Commandments. And then come 603 more, which is many more terms, right? Again, but what God is trying to make very clear what it means for this ancient Israelite tribal farming community—right?—to live as an alternate kingdom among the ancient Near Eastern kingdoms.

And so that's what all of these laws, ancient laws, in the Bible are designed to do for Israel. And if they do this, they will be faithful to the covenant and they'll be like the city on the hill, as the prophet Isaiah said.

And how did Israel do at this?

[pause for crowd]

Right? So essentially, the people that God rescued out from under Pharaoh's slavery become like Pharaoh. Alright? The kings of Israel just become lesser versions of Pharaoh—little mini-Pharaohs. And they drive the family that God has formed right into the ground and they're taken off into exile in Babylon.

And so that's where the story of the Bible kind of comes to its climax and its open-ended closure, which is, what is God going to do now?

The people that he rescued to form the new people who would live under his reign, they don't want to live under his reign either. And so who wants to live under God's reign? And how is God going to assert his reign over this doubly rebellious human—?

Are you with me?

So this is why the Old Testament is so long and complicated, by the way.

So you end with the hope of Israel's prophets. That one day God's going to come and fix this. He's going to bring his kingdom. He's going to reassert his rule over Israel, over all of the nations, and he's...he's going to fix this.

And so you have a poem like this in the book of the prophet Isaiah, and you'll just...just watch how all the pieces come together.

It's a little... It's...

The poem tells a little story. It's like there's a... a night watchman on the walls of a city and the city has been defeated by its enemies, Babylon, and we're looking for any sign of good news or hope. And then the watchman sees a messenger running over the hills and the messenger is coming. And here's how the poem begins.

“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news! They're proclaiming peace. They bring good news. They proclaim salvation and they say to Zion”—that's the city of Jerusalem.

What do they say?

“Your God reigns as king! Listen! Your watchmen lift up their voices. Together they shout for joy. When Yahweh returns to Zion, they will see it with their own eyes. Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem. Yahweh's comforted his people. He's redeemed Jerusalem's great image.”

It's like, Yahweh's rolled up his sleeves.

“He's bearing his holy arm in the sight of the nations and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.”

So you live by this hope if you are a fisherperson.

And the moment you come to that crowded synagogue in Galilee, all of this lights up. All of this lights up.

And there's a new Pharaoh, right? There's actually many of them. There's been many of them through history since that Pharaoh over Egypt. And the newest manifestation of it is in those Roman soldiers that you see marching around and the king to which they give their allegiance who lives in Rome. His name is Caesar Augustus.

And you hear Jesus start talking about “the kingdom of God is here.” And...and this is electric. Jesus certainly didn't get crucified for telling people to love each other.

You know what I'm saying?

Like, “Do good to others as you want them to do to you.”

“Kill the man!”

You know what I'm saying, like...?

[laughter]

So obviously Jesus didn't get publicly executed by the Romans for being a moral teacher, which is how our culture insists on reducing Jesus—to simply being an important moral teacher in the history of...of religions. But this is not how Jesus presented himself or talked about himself for what he was doing.

He presented himself as being the one who was reasserting God's rule over the nations and over the people—over the people of Israel.

This is what Jesus gets crucified for—for claiming to be the king of his people and the king of the nations. And that's exactly what Jesus is doing.

This is a loaded... It's loaded politically. It's loaded sociologically. It's loaded in every way you can imagine. And Jesus is just touring around the towns of Galilee.

Are you with me?

And it's just like, what on earth?

So if the story of the kingdom of God is about a king, who's the king in Matthew?

So if the first thing a king does is form a people, what does Jesus do next? He takes a walk around a lake, like you do if you're a king.

[laughter]

I guess, right?

It's such a wonderful...

This is perfect biblical storytelling style where it's like this cosmic drama, right, of the nations and God will lay bare his holy arm before the nation.

"I think I'll take a walk around the lake today." You know—

And he's going to start forming a people, yeah? And so who did...

Does he go to Jerusalem and start brokering, right, with the leaders and the chief priests and does he...all that? Is that how he brings his kingdom?

No, he takes a walk along a lake and he runs into some fishermen. And how does he present himself to them?

I mean, it...it lacks tact—

[laughter]

You could say...

He just walks up to them and just says, "You guys, follow me."

Now, if I were in one of the zillion coffee shops here in Portland... If you were, it's like tomorrow morning and just like somebody barges in the door and just like "Everyone, follow me!"

[laughter]

Right? And you would... What would you think?

You would think there's like, there's a fire, there's an emergency, there's somebody...right?

Or you would think they're a religious nut and like, no, I'm not going to do that. I'm not...I don't know who you are. I'm not going to follow you.

Are you with me?

Like this... This has the...

This has the feel of presumption. And that's precisely right.

I mean, this is a story about Jesus walking around like he owns the place and just summoning to...

"I'm the king. I'm bringing the kingdom of God. Hey you! Follow me."

And what does it mean to follow the king and become a part of this new people? I mean, so it means this radical reorientation of their lives, but look at the... There's the first two, they just leave and Jesus says, "I'm going to send you to fish for people."

But then look at the second pair. Who are they with in the boat? There was their dad, right? This is like, this is the family business in the family boat. And King Jesus waltzes on to the scene and says, "Follow me." And he forces them—right?—to this decision.

There's something in the moment happening that forces them to have a radical reorganization of all their priorities, of everything they thought they knew about their identity and the story that they were living in and their values and what's most important in life. All of it gets challenged by Jesus and he summons them.

How you guys doing? I mean, this just...

This is very powerful how the story presents Jesus. He's a boss, as I said.

Okay, so let's pause and let's come to the last movement here.

In our culture right now, to tell stories about religious leaders who walk around like they own the place and who walk up to people and say, "Follow me" and demand that your whole life gets totally reorganized around that person—how do we feel about these individuals in our culture?

[laughter]

Are you with me?

Like we have extreme suspicion, especially if there are credit card numbers involved. You know what I mean? Like we have extreme suspicion. We get allergic—right?—to religious people claiming that somehow in their thing, they're taking over the world.

Are you with me?

Can you think of any political religious groups on the world...on the world scene right now who claim that their God is reasserting his reign over the world and everyone must submit?

These are...these are dangerous, dangerous words, aren't they?

But then again, it depends on the kind of kingdom. If what it means to submit is if you don't submit, we're going to kill you, right? We're going to chop your head off or something like that. That's one thing.

But it forces you to ask, "Okay, so, but what does it mean for this man to go around saying that he's king and to summon everybody to follow him? What if... If he's forming a people, what does it actually mean to live under this king's reign?"

And this...this is the whole thing right here. This is all of it.

The kingdom that Jesus came announcing and the kingdom that he embodied in this radical reorganization of our value system is so unlike any other human organization in the history of the human race. It just doesn't have any categories whatsoever.

Because what does it look like when Jesus takes over the world? That's what this story is going to be about. The gospel of Matthew. What does it look like when Jesus takes over the world?

And in the next paragraph that jumps into all of the next chapters of the book, he's given it to you in a nutshell. And then he's going to tell you the nutshell is right here. And then he's going to unpack the nutshell and open it up over the next few chapters.

And here it is. What does it look like? Let's just...let's put it in one nice sentence because Matthew has done it for us.

What does it look like when Jesus starts taking back the world?

It looks like Jesus going around teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. Teaching and proclaiming.

So the kingdom that Jesus brings is so opposite of what anybody believes or how anybody lives that it requires an enormous amount of explanation and teaching, right?

If I have an AK-47 and I say, "I'm bringing the kingdom of God. Submit!"—it's very clear what I mean. You know what I'm saying?

But for Jesus, he has to...

Half of his mission was constantly having to explain that his kingdom doesn't operate like any other kingdom you've ever inhabited or been introduced to before.

And so look what Matthew's done to us here. Jesus goes around teaching and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom.

Now I wonder where in the gospel of Matthew I could find just, like, many, many chapters of Jesus teaching about what it means to live under his reign in the kingdom of God.

Oh, right. Exactly! It's called the next three chapters of the gospel of Matthew.

Are you with me?

He's raised the question: "Well, what does it mean to live under the reign of this king? And what does it mean for Jesus to take over the world?" Oh, here's what it looks like.

If you have a Bible that treats the words of Jesus in red, you're going to notice lots of red after this very paragraph right here. And there's a reason why. And everything Jesus is going to say about this kingdom is going to be totally counterintuitive to you.

He's going to say... He's going to say things like, "Here's how power works in my kingdom. Those who think that they're important and who think that they have the most to offer in serving Jesus, you're actually definitely the least important and the most ignorant in my bunch. I still love you though. And those of you who have the least to offer and who are the least important and the most shamed among you, these are the people that I'm most proud of." He calls them the poor, or the poor in spirit.

Jesus says, "In my kingdom, what it looks like to assert your reign and rule over someone is to serve them and to constantly be looking out for their best interests, even if it's at the expense of your own best interests."

This is how... It's called, it's the first are last and the last...

Are you with me?

It's just this complete upending of our views of power, of status, of value, and of significance.

And he doesn't just stop there. What Jesus is going... He's going for the root issue of what it means to define good and evil.

And Jesus... You're just going to read it as you...as you...

Welcome to the next three months of your Sundays is crawling through—alright?—Matthew chapters five, six, and seven. And just watch Jesus is...he had this effect on people.

He would...he would...people would encounter him and they would find their deepest motives and fears and values exposed before him.

No one walked away from Jesus unchanged, as you're going to see in story after story after story.

And...and Jesus in these teachings, he's going to force every single one of you to deal with the core issues, the darkest parts of your character, because Jesus is convinced that the human...the renewal of the human condition and the healing of the human race has to do with facing the dark, dark evil that we have all given into and the lies that we've all bought into about what's most important and our identity and what it means to be significant in the world.

And he's going...he's going to open up all of that. And I guarantee that at least once in the next three months, as you crawl through the Sermon on the Mount, he's going to make each one of you really uncomfortable and likely angry, because he's going to be talking about your bodies and about sex and about relationships and about marriage or about singleness or about your money, or what you do with the people that you like the least in your life and the unreconciled relationships and the...

How you doing?

Alright? And he's...

What it means is to bring all of this to Jesus and allow his mercy, allow his love and his wisdom to redefine reality for me, as I live under his reign. He won't allow any part of our lives to escape the gravity—right?—of his wisdom and creative love.

And that's just his teachings.

Notice what else Matthew says is what it looks like when Jesus asserts his reign and rule over the world. It looks like healing.

And so right after you read all of the teachings about life in Jesus's kingdoms, you're going to be introduced to nine stories in three triads. Nine stories of Jesus encountering someone who's extremely vulnerable, who's sick, whose body is giving out. People who are publicly shamed by what's happening with their bodies or what's happened in their stories. And these are the people

that King Jesus moves towards. This is Jesus embodying his idea that in his kingdom, it's the poor that are the most important.

And so what it looks like for King Jesus to become king is to confront the effects of evil and all...all of the gaps, all of the people who get ostracized at your get-together this Friday night because they're not cool and they're not significant. And all those people that happens to in their communities, these are the people that Jesus finds.

And they walk away from their encounters with Jesus, with their hearts utterly inflamed with his love and with their bodies transformed by the encounter and with their heart.

Are you with me?

Nobody walks away from their encounter with Jesus unchanged.

And so this is what it means for Jesus to become king of the world.

He's going to tell you this...

Now this...this is really cool.

So in Matthew 4:23, he's going to tell you, "Hey! Dear reader, this is what it looks like for Jesus to become king. This total reorganization of your value system. Complete life, heart, mind, body transformation, especially for the most vulnerable among you."

And then he's going to finish the whole composition by repeating the same exact sentence again at the end of chapter nine.

He's going to tell you what he's going to tell you. Then he's going to tell you. Then he's going to tell you what he told you.

[laughter]

Welcome to Matthew chapters...chapter five through nine.

This is like Matthew's...

If you want to know what Jesus was all about in a nutshell, these are the chapters of the New Testament you want to go to. If you want to know what it looks like to live under the reign and rule of Jesus, this is where you go.

How are you guys doing?

So let me... So let me land the plane.

These...these stories aren't designed to just tell you something interesting that happened 2000 years ago. This community, along with communities of Jesus all over the planet that met together today, these stories are designed to bring you into a living encounter with the same Jesus who called those fishermen by the lake. And the same way that he waltzed right into their lives and just summoned them to follow him. And that summons was actually the best news that they could have ever heard.

In the same way he waltzes...he's here in our midst. Like, what it means for this community to be here is...is we believe that Jesus is risen from the dead and that he's alive and that he's real. And that he's still calling to people and still inviting people right now to live under his reign.

And so you have, you know, we have a choice. We have a choice every single day.

Nature and nurture, right? We're all born with certain temperaments and dispositions. And then we're all raised with a certain set of habits about what it means to be a human and what I'm after in life and what it means for me to be important and significant.

And Jesus is going to force us to bring all of that to the table and just reorganize it around his summons to us to live under his reign.

And so I don't know what that means for you. That's way above my pay grade right now, right? But Jesus knows.

Like, you know the decision that's in front of you right now.

You know the...the relationship that is unreconciled, is just hanging there in your life, unresolved.

You know the issue with your body or with your money. And it's a habit. It's a practice that you formed and you've...and you have become convinced that that's a normal or healthy way to be a human being. And in the kingdom of Jesus, he's going to tell you with love and firmness, you're destroying yourself and you're destroying people around you.

You need to be liberated and you need to come under the loving, grace-filled reign of King Jesus.

And so it's this paradox, which is coming under the authority of this power of Jesus, is actually the best news you and I could hear. Amen?

And so I don't know what that is for you. We're going to have a time right now where we can allow the spirit of Jesus to circle our midst and to speak to us and to bring to mind the ways that we need to submit to his loving rule all over again. Amen?

Let me close with a word of prayer.