

Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Session 4, Introduction to Matthew, Matthew 1 Podcast Audio Overview

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Welcome to our deep dive into the gospel of Matthew. Now, when you think of Matthew, you might think about, you know, Jesus's teachings. Right.

Or maybe his miracles. Sure. But today we're focusing on a surprising theme that kind of runs throughout the book.

Okay. It's the inclusion of the Gentiles. Right.

And this mission to reach all nations. Yeah, that's right. And it might seem a little counterintuitive at first.

Yeah. You see, scholars believe that Matthew was writing primarily to Jewish Christians. Okay.

Probably sometime after the year 70. But when you really dig into how he sets things up from the very beginning. Yeah.

The gospel's ending with the Great Commission actually makes a lot of sense. So how does he do that? Well, I mean, where do we even begin to see this theme of inclusion? Well, Matthew kicks things off with Jesus's genealogy. Okay.

Which was pretty standard for ancient biographies. Okay. But he adds a twist.

A twist. Which is a list of names, right? Right. Right.

A list of names, but with a few surprises tucked in. Yeah. Matthew specifically names four women.

Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. Okay. What's fascinating here is that they were either Gentiles themselves or had very strong connections to Gentiles.

Okay. I'm starting to see the twist. Yeah.

That's pretty unexpected in a Jewish genealogy, which is usually all about proving a pure lineage. Right. Why would Matthew include these women, especially in such a prominent spot? He's subtly preparing his Jewish Christian audience for a radical idea that God's plan has always included the Gentiles.

To fully grasp those, let's delve into who these women were. Tamar, for instance, was a Canaanite. Okay.

Rahab was from Jericho. Okay. And not only was she a Gentile, but she was also a prostitute who betrayed her own people to help the Israelite spies.

Well, that's a bold move for Matthew. Right. Especially considering how those professions were typically viewed.

Exactly. Yeah. Then you have Ruth, a Moabite woman, and Bathsheba, who was married to a Hittite.

These women weren't just random figures. They played significant, albeit sometimes scandalous, roles in Israel's history. Okay.

By including them, Matthew hints that God works through unexpected people and situations regardless of their background. That's a powerful point. Yeah.

It's like he's saying that God's plan is bigger than anyone could have imagined. Right. Right from the start.

Yes. And this theme continues in chapter two. Okay.

With the introduction of some key players. Okay. The Magi, King Herod, and the Jewish religious leaders.

Okay. The scene Matthew paints here is pretty striking. You have the Magi.

Right. Considered pagan astrologers. Yeah.

Traveling from a foreign land to worship Jesus. And then in stark contrast, there's Herod. Right.

The Jewish king reacting to Jesus's birth, not with joy, but with fear. Yeah. He even tries to kill baby Jesus.

Right. Echoing the actions of the Pharaoh in Exodus. Exactly.

Matthew sets up this deliberate contrast. Yeah. Supposed outsiders who recognize and worship the true king, while the supposed insiders, the ones who should be welcoming the Messiah, end up rejecting him.

So it's not just about who's in and who's out, but about recognizing Jesus for who he truly is. Right. These themes of unexpected inclusion, they don't stop there, do they? Not at all.

These subtle hints build towards more explicit examples of Gentile inclusion throughout Matthew's gospel. Okay. Think about John the Baptist, for instance.

Okay. He warns the religious leaders that God can raise up children for Abraham from stones. It's a powerful image that suggests lineage isn't the defining factor in God's kingdom.

Ah. So he's already undermining the idea that only those with the right bloodline will inherit the promises. Precisely.

And then there's Jesus himself. Yeah. Relocates to Galilee, a region known as Galilee of the Gentiles.

Right. Filling a prophecy from Isaiah. Right.

And let's not forget that Roman centurion whose faith Jesus praises. Yes. Saying it surpasses that of anyone he's encountered in Israel.

And how about Jesus's statement that many will come from east and west to dine with Abraham in the kingdom? Yeah. While the sons of the kingdom, those who assumed their place at the table, will be thrown out. Wow.

Matthew definitely isn't being subtle here. Yeah. He's directly challenging the assumptions of his audience.

Yeah. So what exactly does he mean by sons of the kingdom? He's referring to the Jewish religious leaders. Those who believe they had an automatic right to God's blessings simply because of their heritage.

Okay. But Jesus is turning that notion on its head. Yeah.

Showing that the kingdom belongs to those who truly believe and follow him regardless of their ethnicity or background. It's amazing how Matthew weaves this thread of Gentile inclusion throughout the gospel. Right.

You know, it makes you realize that sometimes those who think they have it all figured out, the ones who are so sure of their place. Right. Can completely miss what's right in front of them.

That's a great point. Yeah. And this theme of subverting expectations.

Yeah. It even goes back to the genealogy we talked about earlier. Okay.

Those women, Matthew included. They weren't just examples of Gentiles in the lineage. Their stories also challenged traditional notions of what it means to be part of God's plan.

Okay. Help me understand that connection. Okay.

How do these women's stories challenge those traditional notions? We'll take Tamar, for example. She disguised herself as a prostitute to trick her father-in-law into fulfilling his familial duty to her. Wow.

It was a bold move that defied societal norms. Yeah. And then there's Rahab.

Right. She was not only a Gentile, but also a prostitute who betrayed her own people to help the Israelites. It's almost like Matthew is deliberately highlighting the unconventional aspects of their stories.

Exactly. He's showing that God can work through anyone. Yeah.

Even those who society might deem unworthy or unacceptable. And remember Bathsheba. Yeah.

Her story is tied to adultery and murder. Right. Yet she becomes the mother of King Solomon.

Wow. These women, their stories are messy, they're complicated, but they're ultimately part of God's grand narrative. It's like Matthew is saying, look, God's ways are not our ways.

Right. He sees beyond the surface, beyond the labels we put on people. Yeah.

And he chooses to work through those who might surprise us. That's a great way to put it. And this idea of challenging expectations, it's central to understanding Matthew's gospel and this call to reach all nations.

So the genealogy isn't just a historical record. Right. It's actually laying the groundwork for the radical inclusion that we see unfold throughout the rest of the book.

Precisely. And it's not just the genealogy. Matthew is constantly highlighting instances where Jesus interacts with those who are considered outsiders or outcasts.

We already mentioned the Roman centurion. Right. But there's also the story of the Canaanite woman who comes to Jesus begging him to heal her daughter.

Right. And at first Jesus seems to dismiss her. He even uses a phrase that could be seen as offensive.

Right. Comparing Gentiles to dogs. Yeah.

It's a moment that can be really jarring for modern readers. It is a challenging passage, but it's important to understand the cultural context. Okay.

Jesus is using a common saying of the time to test the woman's faith. And she responds with incredible wit and persistence. Yeah.

Pushing back against those cultural barriers. She says, even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table. Right.

It's a powerful moment that shows her unwavering faith. And Jesus acknowledges that faith. Yeah.

Commending her and granting her request. It's another example of how Matthew is highlighting the faith of those who are often marginalized or overlooked. And let's not forget Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah.

Yes. It takes place in Caesarea Philippi. Right.

A city known for its pagan temples and worship. It's like Matthew is showing us that even in places where we might least expect it. Right.

God is working. Yeah. Revealing himself and drawing people to himself.

Exactly. Matthew is painting a picture of a God who breaks down barriers and defies expectations. A God whose love and grace extend to all people.

Regardless of their background, their beliefs, or their past. It's a powerful message. And it leads us to the culmination of Matthew's gospel.

Right. The Great Commission. Yes.

You know, we talked about the command to baptize. Right. But we didn't really delve into what baptism meant in this new context.

That's a great point. You see, in Matthew's time. Yeah.

Baptism was often associated with Gentile converts to Judaism. So. It was a ritual cleansing.

A symbol of repentance and turning away from pagan practices. So when Jesus tells his disciples to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Yes.

It takes on a whole new meaning. Absolutely. It signifies not just a turning away from sin.

But a turning towards a new allegiance. Okay. A new identity rooted in the triune God revealed through Jesus Christ.

It's like the old way of thinking. Right. Boundaries and distinctions.

Yeah. Swept away. And something new and expansive is being ushered in.

Yes. And this new reality. It's open to everyone.

That's why the mission is to all nations. It's a call to go beyond the familiar, beyond the comfortable. And share the good news of God's kingdom with everyone, everywhere.

And it's not just about sharing the good news. Right. It's also about teaching.

Right? Yes. Jesus tells his disciples to teach these new believers everything he commanded. What does that entail? I mean, we're talking about a lot of teachings here.

You're right. Matthew's gospel is rich with teachings. Yeah.

But one way to understand the scope of Jesus's commands is to look at the structure of the book itself. Okay. You see, Matthew organizes his gospel around five major discourse sections.

I've heard that term before, discourse sections. Right. But I'm not sure I fully understand what it means.

Think of them as extended teaching blocks. Okay. Each focusing on a different aspect of Jesus's message and mission.

We have the Sermon on the Mount, which sets forth the ethical standards of the kingdom. Okay. Then there's the mission discourse where Jesus sends out his disciples to proclaim the good news.

We also have a section devoted to parables. Right. Those stories Jesus used to illustrate spiritual truths.

I'm starting to see the pattern here. Yeah. So each section unpacks a different dimension of what it means to follow Jesus.

Exactly. Then there's the discourse on community. Okay.

Where Jesus teaches about relationships within the church. And finally, the discourse on the end times, where he talks about the future of the kingdom and the final judgment. So teaching new disciples everything Jesus commanded involves unpacking all of these different aspects of his message and mission.

That's right. It's about helping them understand not just what Jesus said. Yeah.

But also how to live it out in their daily lives. And it's not easy. I mean, some of Jesus's teachings are pretty radical.

They are. Turn the other cheek, love your enemies, go the extra mile. Right.

These are challenging teachings to say the least. They are. And you know, when I first started studying the gospels, these were the teachings that I struggled with the most.

Yeah. It's so easy to get caught up in the shoulds and the oughts of faith. To focus on following the rules perfectly.

Yeah. But these teachings, they remind me that it's not about striving for perfection, but about surrendering to the transformative power of God's grace. That's such an important point.

It's not about our ability to achieve this impossible standard of righteousness. Right. But about allowing God to work in and through us, shaping us into the image of Christ.

And that transformation. Yeah. It happens through a process of discipleship, of being formed and nurtured in community.

Yeah. Of learning to walk in the way of Jesus. It's like that famous quote: what you would have become, you are now becoming.

Discipleship isn't about instant perfection. Right. It's about a lifelong journey of becoming more and more like Christ.

And that journey. Yeah. It involves wrestling with those challenging teachings.

Yeah. Allowing them to shape our hearts, our minds, and our actions. So it's not just about head knowledge.

It's about embodying these teachings, making them a part of who we are at the core. Exactly. It's about allowing the love of God, the love that is revealed in Jesus Christ, to permeate every aspect of our lives.

Yeah. Our relationships, our work, our interactions with the world around us. And that brings us back to that key theme of Matthew's gospel.

Okay. Love. Right.

Because love is at the heart of it all, isn't it? Yes. Love for God and love for others. And Matthew emphasizes this connection over and over again.

Yeah. Remember that passage in chapter 25, where Jesus talks about the judgment of the nations. He says, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.

It's such a powerful statement: caring for the poor, the sick, the imprisoned. Right. It's not just about doing good deeds.

It's an expression of our love for God. Exactly. And this kind of love.

Yeah. It's not always easy. It requires us to step outside of our comfort zones to see beyond our own needs and desires.

Yeah. And to embrace those who are different from us. Yeah.

Those who might even be our enemies. Yeah. It's radical.

It's countercultural, but it's at the heart of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Right. And it's something we can't do on our own.

We need God's grace to empower us to love like that. Absolutely. And that's why the call to discipleship is both a challenge and an invitation.

It's a challenge to step out in faith. Yeah. To surrender our own ambitions and embrace the transformative power of God's love.

And it's an invitation to experience that love in a deep and profound way. Yes. To be filled with that love and to let it overflow into the world around us.

It's an invitation to be part of something much bigger than ourselves. Yeah. To join God in his mission of reconciling the world to himself and to be agents of his love and grace in a world that desperately needs it.

Speaking of that mission, we talked about the teaching aspect of the Great Commission. Right. But there's also that command to go and make disciples of all nations.

What does that look like in our world today? Yeah. I mean, the world has changed a lot since Jesus gave that command to his disciples. It has changed a lot since then.

Going probably meant physically traveling to different regions and cultures. Okay. Spreading the message by word of mouth.

But in our interconnected world, the possibilities for going are endless. We have technology that allows us to connect with people all over the globe. Right.

To share ideas and stories. Yeah. And to build relationships across geographical boundaries.

So going doesn't necessarily have to involve packing your bags and hopping on a plane. Right. It's more about a posture of the heart.

Yeah. A willingness to step outside of our comfort zones and connect with those who are different from us. To share our faith and to build bridges of understanding.

That's right. And you know, it doesn't even have to be about explicitly sharing your faith. Okay.

It can be as simple as being kind to a stranger, offering a helping hand to someone in need, or speaking up for those who are marginalized or oppressed. It's about letting our actions speak louder than words. Right.

About embodying the love and grace of Christ in everything we do. So that others might see him reflected in us. Exactly.

It's about being the hands and feet of Jesus in the world. Yeah. Extending his love and compassion to those around us, whether it's our next-door neighbor or someone on the other side of the globe.

And it's about being open to the unexpected ways God might call us to go and make disciples. It might be a mission trip, a volunteer opportunity, or simply a conversation with a coworker who's struggling. The point is that going is not a one-size-fits-all proposition.

It's about being sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. And allowing him to guide our steps to open doors and to connect us with those who are seeking truth and love. And it's about trusting that God can use us in all our imperfections and limitations.

Right. To be instruments of his grace in the world. Yes.

Because ultimately it's not about our efforts or our abilities, but about God's power working through us. Yeah. We are simply vessels, clay pots carrying the treasure of the gospel.

So as we wrap up this part of our deep dive, what's one key takeaway you'd like to leave our listener with regarding this idea of going and making disciples? I think it's this: don't limit your understanding of what going means. Be open to the unexpected ways God might be calling you to step out in faith. Yeah.

To connect with others and to share his love and grace with the world. It might not look like what you imagined, but it will be an adventure worth embarking on. You know, it's interesting how we often think about going as this big outward action.

Right. But you're right. It starts with the posture of the heart, with being open to God's leading in our everyday lives.

Exactly. And that openness to God's leading. Yeah.

It ties back to something we discussed earlier. Okay. Obedience.

Right. Remember Joseph; he's a great example of someone who, despite his own confusion and maybe even fear, chooses to obey God's call, even when it doesn't make sense. Right.

Imagine being told to marry someone when everyone thinks they've been unfaithful. Yeah. That takes a tremendous amount of faith and trust in God's plan.

It does. And Joseph's story is a powerful reminder that obedience isn't always about blind faith. It's about surrendering our own will to God's will, even when it's difficult or costly.

And that kind of surrender, that willingness to say yes to God, even when it's hard. Right. That's at the heart of discipleship, isn't it? Absolutely.

And it's not a one-time decision. It's a daily choice to follow Jesus. Right.

To align our lives with his teachings and his mission. And that mission, as we've been exploring, involves both teaching and going right. Yeah.

It's about sharing the good news of God's kingdom and inviting others to join in that mission of love and grace. Yes. And it's a mission that requires both courage and compassion.

Courage to speak up for what's right, to challenge injustice, and to share our faith even when it's unpopular. And compassion to listen to those who are hurting, to offer a helping hand to those in need. Yeah.

And to love those who are different from us. It's a beautiful and challenging calling, one that requires us to constantly be growing and stretching ourselves to become more like Christ in our thoughts, words, and actions. And that growth, that transformation, it happens through a process of discipleship, of being formed and shaped by God's word, by prayer, by community, and by service.

It's a lifelong journey, one that requires us to be humble enough to admit when we're wrong. Right. To ask for forgiveness and to rely on God's grace to sustain us.

And you know, I think one of the most encouraging things about Matthew's gospel is that it shows us that God can use anyone, regardless of their background, their past, or their perceived weaknesses, to be part of his mission. Right. From the flawed characters in Jesus' genealogy to the disciples who often messed up.

Yeah. Matthew reminds us that it's not about our perfection, but about God's power working through our imperfections. Exactly.

And that's a message that I think we all need to hear, especially when we feel inadequate or overwhelmed by the challenges of following Jesus. You might be thinking, this sounds really hard. How can I possibly live up to this calling? And you know what? You're right.

It is hard. Yeah. But that's where grace comes in.

Right. God's grace is sufficient for us. It empowers us to do what we could never do on our own.

And that grace is available to everyone who is willing to humble themselves and receive it. So as we wrap up this deep dive into Matthew's gospel, what's one final thought you'd like to leave our listener with? I think it's this: don't underestimate the power of small acts of obedience, love, and service. You don't have to have it all figured out.

Right. You don't have to have a grand plan. Simply be faithful in the small things, in the everyday moments where God is calling you to be his hands and feet.

Because those small acts of faithfulness, those seemingly insignificant choices to love and serve, have a ripple effect. They touch the lives of those around us, and they contribute to the bigger story that God is writing in the world. It's like those mustard seeds Jesus talks about, small but powerful, capable of growing into something much larger than themselves.

So let's be those mustard seeds. Let's embrace the unexpected adventures that God has for us. Right.

And let's trust that he is working through us, even in the smallest of ways, to bring his kingdom to earth as it is in heaven. Yes. Thanks for joining us on this deep dive into Matthew's gospel.