

Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Session 14, Matthew 16-19

Podcast Audio Overview

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Hey everyone, and welcome to our deep dive into Matthew. We're going to be using a lecture by Dr. Craig Keener to guide us. He's a New Testament scholar and he's really well known for his, for really knowing a lot about the historical and cultural context of the Bible.

You're interested in learning about Matthew. So we'll be looking at a bunch of key themes like faith and forgiveness and what it really means to follow Jesus, you know, be a disciple. Yeah, it's really cool how Dr. Keener uses his knowledge of history and culture to help us understand these ancient texts better, you know.

Yeah, for sure. It really does add like a whole other layer of meaning. One of the things that really struck me from his lecture was the way he connected the transfiguration to that story about Moses receiving the Torah on Mount Sinai.

Like it's not just a visual parallel. There are all these little things that are similar. The six-day wait and the voice from above and the command to hear him.

I'm really curious. What do you think about that connection? Well, it's actually a pretty brilliant move by Matthew, by echoing those events from Sinai at the transfiguration. He's not just drawing a parallel.

He's really making a strong statement about who Jesus is and his authority. Remember that passage in Deuteronomy 18.15, where God promises a prophet like Moses, someone everyone has to listen to. Well, this is Matthew showing us that Jesus is that prophet and even greater than Moses.

Oh, I see. So it's not just like a neat visual. It's actually a really deliberate point about theology.

But Dr. Keener takes it even further. He suggests that Jesus is the glory that Moses saw on Mount Sinai. That's a pretty intense theological concept.

It is. It really is. It makes you think about what it means for Jesus to embody God's glory.

You know, something worth exploring further, don't you think? Yeah, totally. It's like Matthew's giving us these little glimpses into huge theological mysteries. Okay, so let's shift gears a bit.

We go from this like mountaintop experience to this story about the disciples kind of struggling. They're trying to cast out a demon, and they can't do it. And what's interesting is they've been able to do this before.

But this time, nothing. And Jesus says to them that their faith is too small. I've got to admit, that makes me feel a little uncomfortable.

Does that mean we have to have like this enormous faith in order to see God work in our lives? That's a pretty common misunderstanding, actually. It's not about having this like superhuman faith that can move mountains. It's more about the object of our faith.

The size of our faith doesn't matter as much as the size of the God we have faith in. In this story, the disciples were relying on their own abilities instead of trusting in God's power working through them. So it's more about surrendering than being strong.

It makes me think about those times when I'm trying to force things to happen instead of just relying on God. It's a challenge for all of us, right? Letting go of our need to control everything and just trusting God. Definitely.

And speaking of trusting God, there's that story about the temple tax. Jesus and Peter are asked if they'll pay it. And Jesus points out that he's actually exempt because he's the Son of God.

But then he pays anyway so as not to cause any offense. It seems like a pretty simple story on the surface. But Dr. Keener suggests that there's more to it than meets the eye.

Yeah, he makes a really interesting point about how this story relates to Matthew's emphasis on Jesus fulfilling the law. On the one hand, Jesus is showing that he's above the law. He doesn't have to pay, but he chooses to submit to it.

Not because he has to, but out of love and concern for others. That's a good point. And then, of course, there's the miracle itself.

Jesus tells Peter to find a coin in a fish's mouth, and he does. It's easy to get caught up in the amazingness of it. But are you saying the miracle isn't the most important part? Exactly.

The miracle shows us God's provision. But it's also about avoiding unnecessary conflict. It's a subtle but powerful way of showing Jesus's authority and compassion.

He could have easily just asserted his exemption and caused a scene. But he chose a different way. It makes you think about how we handle those situations where we might be right, but choosing to be right could cause more problems than it solves.

Yeah, it's a delicate balance, isn't it? Knowing when to stand your ground and when to step back for the sake of something bigger. So Dr. Keener also spent some time talking about church discipline, which I know can be a bit of a sensitive topic. He emphasizes that it should only be used as a last resort, and only in very serious situations, not for every little disagreement.

I think it's helpful how he explains this practice in light of the cultural context. Yeah, it's really important to understand that back then, synagogues weren't just places of worship. They're also like community centers.

And they even dealt with disputes among their members. So this idea of the community addressing serious offenses carried over into the early church. So it's not about being judgmental or controlling.

It's about keeping the community healthy and making sure everyone is living by the same values. Exactly. And Jesus gives a very specific process for how to handle these situations, starting with talking to the person privately, then bringing in witnesses if that doesn't work, and finally bringing it before the whole church.

It's clearly not about small disagreements, but about dealing with serious violations that go against what the community stands for. Right. It has to be something pretty major.

Dr. Keener even talks about excommunication, and he explains that the most severe form was being completely cut off from the community, which sounds really harsh. But he points out that even within this process, forgiveness is still essential. He mentions Paul's letters where he disciplines people, but still tells the community to treat them as brothers and sisters.

Yeah, it's a reminder that discipline, when it's done right, isn't about punishment, but about trying to restore the person. The goal is always to reconcile and heal. Yeah, that's a really important distinction.

It's about holding people accountable while still showing them grace and love. Exactly. It's about realizing that we all mess up, we all make mistakes, and we all need forgiveness.

For sure. Speaking of forgiveness, Dr. Keener talks about the parable of the unmerciful servant, which really emphasizes the idea of extending grace to others. It starts with this servant who owes the king an insane amount of money, like 230,000 years' worth of wages.

Obviously, that's an exaggeration. What do you think Matthew is trying to say here? Well, it's a really effective way of showing just how much we owe God because of sin. There's no way we could ever repay that debt on our own.

It really highlights how completely dependent we are on God's mercy. And the crazy thing is that the king just forgives the whole debt. But then the servant who's just been forgiven this enormous amount turns around and demands repayment from another servant who owes him a tiny fraction of what he owed.

It's almost funny how quickly he forgets about the grace he was just shown. It's a powerful illustration of how easily we can withhold mercy from others, even after we've experienced God's amazing grace ourselves. It's ironic, isn't it? The king's mercy made him look honorable at first, but now it makes him look foolish because the forgiven servant doesn't show that same mercy.

It's a good reminder that how we treat others can actually give people the wrong idea about God. If we've truly experienced his forgiveness, it should completely change how we treat those who've wronged us. It's a challenge for us to look at our own hearts and ask ourselves, are we showing God's mercy in how we treat others? Or are we holding on to

bitterness and resentment? Yeah, it makes you think about all the ways we might be keeping people trapped in their past mistakes, even though God has set us free.

It's a powerful reminder of how transformative grace can be, both in receiving it and in giving it to others. Now, let's talk about Jesus's teaching on divorce, which was a very controversial topic back then. Dr. Keener explains that there were two main ways people interpreted Deuteronomy 24.1. One was very strict, and the other was more lenient, but Jesus basically sidesteps the whole debate by going back to Genesis and God's original plan for marriage.

Why do you think Matthew included this? What point do you think he's making? Well, I think Matthew is highlighting the fact that Jesus's kingdom isn't about getting bogged down in arguments about the law. It's about restoring what God originally intended, about moving toward wholeness and healing. So even though the Old Testament law allowed for divorce, Jesus is saying that wasn't God's ideal plan.

It was more like a concession to human weakness, just like the rules about things like polygamy and slavery. Exactly. And by grounding his teaching in Genesis, Jesus is defending those who are the most vulnerable, especially women who didn't have much power in divorce cases back then.

That's an important point. It reminds us that we should never use Jesus's teachings to oppress or marginalize anyone. But then there's the exception clause for unfaithfulness that Matthew includes.

Doesn't that contradict the idea of holding up God's ideal for marriage? I see it more as a balance between holding up the ideal and protecting the person who is wronged. It's not about having rigid rules, but about love and justice. It's about recognizing that human relationships are complex and responding with grace and truth.

That makes sense. It's not about condemning people, but about helping them move towards healing and wholeness. So we have this challenging teaching on divorce, and the disciples react in a very human way.

They basically say, well, if it's that hard, maybe it's better not to get married at all. And I have to admit, I've thought that myself a few times. And Jesus actually agrees with them.

He says that some people are better off not getting married, but the way he makes this point is pretty shocking. He talks about eunuchs. This would have been a very provocative thing to say to a Jewish audience, considering their culture and religious views.

It's definitely an exaggeration, but it really makes the point, doesn't it? It does. He's saying that some people are called to be single for the sake of the kingdom. People like John the Baptist, Paul, and maybe even Jesus himself.

It makes us rethink our assumptions about what it means to have a fulfilling life. It definitely does. It makes me wonder what it means to truly serve God, whether we're single or married.

It's about understanding that God is our ultimate priority and living our lives in a way that reflects that, no matter what our relationship status is. Okay. One last story before we wrap up this part of our deep dive.

It's that really sweet story about Jesus welcoming the children. We see the disciples trying to keep the kids away. They're thinking Jesus is too busy for this.

It's kind of like when the crowds tried to quiet the blind men. It's like they're trying to manage Jesus's time and decide who's worthy of his attention. It's a classic example of missing the point.

Jesus's kingdom is about embracing those who are often overlooked. Exactly. And it's a powerful reminder for us today.

Who are the little ones in our lives? You know, the people who are easily dismissed or ignored. And how can we reflect Jesus's love for them? That's a great question to think about. It challenges us to see the world through Jesus's eyes, to recognize the value of every person.

And to show compassion and care to those who need it most. That's a great place to stop for now. We've covered a lot of ground in this first part of our dive into Matthew.

From that amazing scene on the mountaintop at the transfiguration to Jesus welcoming the little children. But there's so much more to explore. Join us for part two as we continue to learn about the cost of following Jesus.

And what it really means to live as his disciple. Yeah, it's going to be good. See you there.

Looking forward to it. Welcome back to our deep dive into Matthew. So we're picking up where we left off, talking about what it means to follow Jesus.

And Dr. Keener really gets into the nitty-gritty of what it costs to be a disciple. One of the stories that really stuck with me was the one about the rich young ruler. This guy seems to have it all.

Wealth, status. He's even kept all the commandments. But he walks away from Jesus feeling sad.

It's a pretty powerful moment. What do you think Matthew is trying to show us here? Well, it really shows how the things we're attached to can keep us from fully embracing the kingdom of God. This young man is holding on so tightly to his possessions.

And ultimately, that's what prevents him from following Jesus. Dr. Keener makes this interesting connection between the story and what we talked about earlier. About humility and childlike faith.

He says that the rich young ruler's inability to let go of his wealth shows that he doesn't have true humility. It's like he's trying to earn his way into the kingdom by following all the rules. But he's missing the point, which is surrender.

That's a really good insight. It's not about what we achieve or what we own. It's about recognizing that we need God and surrendering to his grace.

And that childlike faith, that willingness to let go of our self-sufficiency, that's what allows us to enter the kingdom. This idea of radical surrender comes up again when Jesus talks about leaving everything behind to follow him. He tells his disciples that anyone who loves their family or possessions more than him isn't worthy of him.

I know some people think that's kind of a harsh statement, but what's your take on it? It's definitely challenging, but I don't think Jesus is saying we need to hate our families or hate material things. It's more about recognizing that our ultimate loyalty belongs to him. It's about putting our relationship with Jesus above everything else.

And that can be really hard, especially these days, with all the emphasis on success and security and comfort. It makes me think of the parable of the workers in the vineyard, which is another one of those stories that makes you kind of scratch your head. You have these workers who are hired at different times throughout the day.

And at the end, the landowner pays them all the same wage, even though some worked way longer than others. On the surface, it doesn't seem very fair. Right.

That's exactly the point. It challenges our human ideas about fairness and justice. Jesus is showing us that God's grace isn't about earning our salvation or getting what we deserve.

It's about recognizing that we're all receiving his undeserved favor. And we should be happy about that. Not compare ourselves to others or think we're better because we've been following Jesus longer.

It's a radical concept, and it definitely goes against our natural instincts. It's funny you mentioned natural instincts. Yeah.

Because right after this parable, we have this scene where Jesus predicts his death and resurrection for the third time. And it's pretty clear the disciples still don't get it. Yeah, they're still stuck in their earthly way of thinking.

They think Jesus is going to set up a physical kingdom and overthrow the Romans. The idea of him suffering and dying is just totally alien to them. And then we had that conversation with James and John, who are trying to get the best positions in Jesus's kingdom.

It's almost funny how clueless they seem to be about what's actually going on. Yeah, it reveals their ambition and their desire for status and power. They're still thinking in terms of worldly success, even after all that Jesus has taught them about humility and serving others.

It's like they're fighting over who gets to sit next to the king, while the king is preparing to give up his life. It's such a stark contrast. But Jesus uses this opportunity to teach them about true greatness.

He says that anyone who wants to be great has to become a servant. And anyone who wants to be first has to be a slave. Another example of those upside-down kingdom values.

Exactly. True greatness isn't about power or position. It's about humility and service.

It's about putting others' needs before our own, just like Jesus did. And speaking of putting others first, there is that story about the two blind men in Jericho who are calling out to Jesus for mercy. I really like how Dr. Keener points out that they're not just physically blind.

They also represent people who are spiritually blind, searching for meaning and healing. It's a beautiful picture of Jesus's compassion. Even though the crowd tries to shush them, Jesus stops and listens to their cries for help.

It reminds us that we shouldn't ignore or push away people who are hurting. Instead, we should be showing compassion and offering help. And then he asks them that really important question.

What do you want me to do for you? It seems obvious they want to see. But Dr. Keener suggests there's more to it than that. He's suggesting that Jesus is inviting them to express their faith, to recognize their need for him.

It's not enough to just cry out for help. We have to be specific about what we're asking for and why we need Jesus. And their response is so beautiful.

Lord, we want our sight. It's simple, but it shows so much faith. And Jesus immediately heals them.

It's a powerful reminder that Jesus is still healing and restoring broken lives today. He's willing and able to meet our deepest needs if we come to him with humble hearts. And this story kind of leads into the next big event in Matthew's gospel, Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

It's almost like he's showing his power and compassion before he goes up against the religious leaders. It's like there's this big contrast being set up, right? On one hand, you have Jesus healing the blind, showing his mercy and power. And then he's heading towards this confrontation with the authorities, which is ultimately going to lead to his death.

It's a key moment in the story. And it sets the stage for all the dramatic events that are about to happen. And we're back for the last part of our deep dive into Matthew.

Things are going to get pretty intense from here on out. We've reached that big moment: Jesus entering Jerusalem. It feels like the calm before the storm.

There's all this excitement and anticipation, but also this underlying tension. Dr. Keener points out how Matthew uses imagery from the Old Testament to really set the scene. It is really interesting how he does that, like how Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey is a direct reference to Zechariah 9.9, which talks about a humble king coming to Zion.

Matthew's really intentional about showing that Jesus is fulfilling those old prophecies. So he's not just any king. He's the king, the Messiah everyone's been waiting for.

Exactly. And the crowd's laying down their cloaks and branches and shouting, Hosanna, which means save us. It all adds to that messianic imagery.

But it's kind of ironic because people don't really understand what kind of king Jesus is going to be. They're expecting someone who will defeat the Romans, a military leader. But Jesus' kingdom is something totally different.

It's a kingdom with totally different values, a kingdom of humility and service, which is definitely going to clash with what those in power expect. For sure. And that clash between expectations and reality is going to play out in what happens next.

So Jesus enters Jerusalem, and the first thing he does is head straight to the temple. Dr. Keener talks about how the temple was like the heart of Jewish religious life, but it had become corrupt, full of greed and hypocrisy. Can you tell us a bit more about that? Sure.

It's important to understand the context. The temple was a place of worship, but it was also a place of business. People would come to exchange money and buy animals to sacrifice.

And there was a lot of taking advantage of people going on; the money changers and merchants were ripping people off. So when Jesus flips the tables and drives out the money changers, it's not just a symbolic gesture. It's a direct challenge to the religious authorities.

Exactly. It's a powerful statement about what true worship should be. It's not about outward rituals or empty sacrifices.

It's about having a heart that's aligned with God's will. Jesus is calling them out for their hypocrisy and their abuse of power. And this kind of sets the stage for a whole series of confrontations between Jesus and the religious leaders.

They keep trying to trap him with their questions, but Jesus outsmarts them every time. It's like this intellectual battle, and Jesus always wins. Yeah, it's fascinating.

These conversations show how much Jesus knows and how wise he is, but they also show how much the tension is growing between him and the authorities. They're threatened by his authority and how popular he is with the people. And they really want to discredit him.

It's that classic power struggle, right? People in power often resist anyone who questions the way things are, and Jesus is definitely a disruptor. He's not playing by their rules. Exactly.

He's exposing their hypocrisy and undermining their authority. One of the most memorable confrontations is the one about paying taxes to Caesar. They're trying to back Jesus into a corner, hoping he'll say something that will either get him in trouble with the Romans or make the Jewish people turn against him.

It's a clever trap, but Jesus sees right through it. His answer is so smart and so subversive. Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.

It's a statement that recognizes both our responsibilities as citizens and our ultimate loyalty to God. It's a balancing act that people are still grappling with today. Definitely.

It speaks to the tension of living in the world, but not being of the world. We have obligations to our governments, but God is our highest authority. Then Dr. Kiener goes into some of Jesus's final teachings, including those parables about the kingdom of heaven.

He talks about how those parables are often mysterious and have multiple layers of meaning, inviting us to really think deeply about what God's reign is all about. Yeah, those parables are like little glimpses into the mysteries of the kingdom. Yeah.

They're not supposed to be easy to understand, but they give us these hints about God's grace, his justice, and his way of doing things, which is often the opposite of what we expect. One of the parables that's always fascinated me is the one about the 10 virgins. It's a reminder that we need to be ready for Jesus's return, but it also makes you think about what it really means to be ready.

It's not about just looking the part or going through the motions. It's about having a real relationship with Jesus. It's about having the Holy Spirit alive and active in our hearts, which comes from staying connected to Jesus and letting his word change us from the inside out.

It's a sobering thought that we can't just coast along on our past experiences or good intentions. We need to be actively seeking God and growing in our faith. Absolutely.

And that ties back to the whole idea of being a disciple. Following Jesus isn't just a one-time decision. It's a journey of ongoing transformation.

It's about surrendering to him and letting him shape our hearts and minds. And then we come to the Last Supper, where Jesus gives us communion. It's such a powerful moment full of symbolism and foreshadowing.

The bread and the wine represent Jesus's body and blood, given for the forgiveness of our sins. It's a tangible way to remember what Jesus did for us and how deep God's love for us is. And it's something we still do today, connecting us to Jesus and his sacrifice.

It's a beautiful way to remember and participate in the mystery of his death and resurrection. It feeds our souls and strengthens our faith. Dr. Keener then walks us through the events leading up to Jesus's arrest, including his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane.

It's a scene that shows us Jesus's humanity in such a raw and real way. He knows what's coming and he's struggling with it. But even in his pain, he submits to God's will.

Not my will, but yours be done. Such a powerful example of surrender and obedience, even when facing unimaginable suffering. Absolutely.

And it points to the ultimate sacrifice that Jesus is about to make. He's giving up his life for us because of love. The trial and crucifixion are really tough to read.

But Dr. Keener reminds us to think about the historical context. Jesus is being falsely accused and condemned. He's a victim of political and religious schemes.

Yeah, he's basically a scapegoat. The religious leaders are using him to hold on to their power. And yet, even while he's suffering, Jesus still shows compassion to those around him.

He forgives the people who are killing him, and he comforts the women who are grieving for him. It's a powerful example of love and forgiveness, even in the face of terrible pain. It makes us think about how we react to people who hurt or betray us.

Can we forgive even when it's undeserved? And then we get to the most important part of the story, the resurrection. It's the climax, the peak of the whole narrative. Matthew describes the empty tomb and how Jesus appeared to his disciples.

It's a moment of victory and hope and new life. The resurrection is like the foundation of the Christian faith. It proves that Jesus conquered sin and death.

And he gives us the promise that we will be resurrected too. It changes everything, right? Completely. It transforms the disciples from a defeated group of followers into bold witnesses of the risen Christ.

They go from hiding in fear to proclaiming the good news with courage and boldness. Dr. Keener ends his lecture by talking about how relevant Matthew's gospel still is today. It's not just a story from the past.

It's a call to action. It's an invitation to be part of God's kingdom, to live by its upside-down values and to follow the risen Christ. It's a challenge to let go of our selfish desires and to devote ourselves to serving others.

It's a call to be instruments of God's grace and mercy in a world that desperately needs to experience his love. So as we finish up this deep dive, I think the challenge for us is to really think about these stories and teachings and ask ourselves, how can we apply these to our own lives? Are we willing to follow Jesus even when it's hard? Are we willing to give up comfort and security to follow him more fully? Those are great questions to think about. The gospel of Matthew shows us the incredible power of God's kingdom and invites us to be part of its story.

It's a story of hope, of redemption, and of love conquering death. And it's a story that's still being written in our lives today. Thanks for joining us on this deep dive into Matthew.

We hope you found Dr. Keener's insights helpful and encouraging and that you'll keep exploring this amazing book for yourself. We'll see you next time.