

Matthew 1-4 | “Who We Follow”
Preached on April 16, 2023 by Pastor Matt Brown

You can turn in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 1 to start out this morning.

That’s where we will begin, but I’ll be kind of moving through Matthew chapters 1-4 this morning, covering a large portion of Scripture. *[pause]*

Today we are starting a discipleship series, looking at the theme of discipleship in the book of Matthew.

One commentator when talking about the book of Matthew said that it “functions as a discipling manual”.¹

And that’s what you see if you read through the book of Matthew.

Even the final words of the book emphasize this theme by ending with the Great Commission. *[pause]*

So in this series, we will be seeing what a disciple is, the marks of a disciple, and what we are called to do as disciples. *[pause]*

At times we will look at large sections in Matthew, but other times we will zoom in and see its details.

And I truly believe it will be good for us.

We need to be sent back to the basics and yet also sent back to the radicalness of what it is to be a disciple and what a disciple actually does. *[pause]*

In many ways, American Christianity is very shallow, and has lost its sight on the radical call and cost of discipleship.

But also, American Christianity as a whole does not do well at disciple-making.

And that includes us to some degree. *[pause]*

There are others who think that Christianity is a “Sunday-only” thing.

They have a church box that they open up in their brain when they come to church, and then once the service is over, that church box is closed and other boxes are opened up in its place.

But does our faith only impact our Sunday’s, or is it supposed to radically transform, motivate, and drive every single aspect? *[pause]*

¹ Craig S. Keener, The Gospel of Matthew, page 51. Found at: <https://www.logos.com/grow/already-best-discipleship-manual/>.

This is why I believe it would be good for us to look at this theme as a church, so that we are fully living out God's calling on our lives as individuals and as a church. *[pauseeee]*

But before we actually get into what it looks like to be a disciple, I want us to first focus on *who we follow*. *[pause]*

When you think about it, it matters who you follow, doesn't it?

I forget exactly where I was, maybe it was at a courthouse for jury duty or something.

But I remember once that a group of us were told to go to a certain room.

Yet the issue was that we all didn't know where the room was. *[pause]*

So we started out for this room, and there was this one person leading in the front, and he seemed like he knew where he was going.

So what did we all do? We followed him. *[pauseeee]*

What did we know? He seemed so confident and assured.

Yet the problem was that he didn't know where the room was, either.

He *thought* he knew where it was, but he led us to the wrong room. *[pause]*

We eventually got to the right place, but it just goes to show that it matters who you follow.

We followed someone who didn't know the right way, and we were led in the wrong direction.

And this can happen in many areas of life. *[pause]*

Someone makes big claims, gathers a following, and people are led into a web of lies.

Someone is confident, but they confidently lead others astray, away from the truth. *[pause]*

That just goes to show that we must be discerning as to who we follow.

We can't just follow any person that's confident and talks loudly.

Rather, we must follow someone who is worthy to follow. *[pauseeee]*

You see, inherent in being a disciple is following someone else, for a disciple is someone who adheres to the teachings of another.

They are a learner and a follower, who seeks to live their life in accordance with another person's life. *[pause]*

So who is it that we as believers follow and learn from? Jesus Christ. *[pauseeee]*

The book of Matthew starts out (and really shows us throughout all of its pages) showing us who we follow.

And so before Matthew gets to the disciples, before he gets to what a disciple is to be and do, he shows us who it is exactly that we follow. *[pause]*

He describes to us his birth, early life, and beginning of his ministry in chapters 1-4.

And by doing this, Matthew is showing us that Christ is truly worthy to follow with all of our lives. *[pauseeee]*

In Matthew chapters 1 and 2, we see the birth and early years of Jesus described, and let me tell you, he was no normal child! *[pause]*

You see, a part of Matthew's purpose is to demonstrate Jesus' *identity*.

To do this, he begins his gospel account with Jesus' genealogy. *[pause]*

To some, this is just a boring list of people's names, but look a little deeper and you see a glorious truth shine forth. *[pauseee]*

God had promised a Deliverer to crush the head of Satan after Adam and Eve sinned.²

We then see that Abraham is chosen and promised that through him all the world would be blessed.³

So the line of the Deliverer started very broadly as being through Adam and Eve, but then it got narrowed down to Abraham's line.

But then it gets more narrow once again as God promises that one of David's descendents would have an eternal kingdom.⁴ *[pause]*

So Israel was looking for a Messiah, a great Deliverer and King, and this king was promised to be a descendent of not only Abraham, but also of David. *[pause]*

So how does Matthew start out his gospel?

He says, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." *[pause]*

He then goes through exactly how Jesus comes from them by giving his genealogy and proving his direct link back to David and Abraham. *[pause]*

So right off the bat, Matthew is making a point, isn't he?

² See Genesis 3:15.

³ See Genesis 12:1-3.

⁴ See 2 Samuel 7.

This Jesus is none other than the promised Deliverer and King that you are hoping for!

He is a descendent in the promised line. *[pause]*

In the rest of chapter 1, Matthew describes the circumstances around his birth.

In doing so, we see that Jesus' birth was *special*. *[pause]*

Mary is said to have conceived from the Holy Spirit.

None of us could say that about our conception! *[pause]*

An angel comes to Joseph and announces this, showing us that this is an important and extremely unique thing.

Angels don't just show up and announce every conception of a child, but for Jesus' they did, for He is the Son of God, who was born as a human, taking on flesh. *[pauseeee]*

Not only is his special conception announced, but even his name shows His uniqueness...

He is to be called "Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." *[pause]*

This Kingly figure, born in the Davidic line, and conceived through the power of the Spirit, is none other than the Savior, who saves people from their sins! *[pauseeee]*

Humanity needed a Savior to save them from their sins.

For we were in our sins, under the penalty of death, and condemned.

If you think about it, our sin problem is the biggest problem that each person has (before Christ) because "the wages of sin is death".⁵ *[pause]*

Throughout Israel's history, they proved time and time again that mankind couldn't save themselves, for they just kept sinning.

The ones who had the most revelation and divine intervention by God couldn't succeed on their own.

We needed a Deliverer to save us from our sins! *[pause]*

Our sin problem seemed inescapable and it was on our own, but that's why we needed a Savior, and that Savior is Jesus, born of a virgin, and descendant of David. *[pauseeee]*

Not only is He called a Savior, but this Savior is also "God with us".

In chapter 1, verse 23, it says, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel' (which means, God with us)." *[pause]*

⁵ Romans 6:23.

This Jesus, the Savior, is God with us!

Just think about it - God came to us, and lived among humanity as one of us!

That's mind boggling if you truly think about it long enough. *[pause]*

God didn't leave us on our own and in our sins, but He came to us in the person of Jesus Christ!

Now that's love!

He intervened in history at the right time, as He sent His only Son to us. *[pause]*

In the beginning of chapter 2, you have the wise men come and visit with Jesus.

They acknowledge His kingship, arrive, worship him, and give him treasure.

This shows us that even people outside of Israel recognized his identity and worth, and worshiped him and gave him gifts. *[pause]*

Once again, this is no normal child.

What other child is searched for, worshiped, and given treasure by foreign wise men? *[pauseee]*

Chapter 2 also includes many details about Jesus being protected in his early years from Herod...

Herod wants to kill him after hearing of his birth, and yet through the sovereign control of the Lord, He is protected as a child.

An angel even comes and directs Joseph what to do and when to return. *[pause]*

This reminds us that no evil man could thwart God's Messiah and plan, but the Lord would protect Jesus for his mission.

Though the forces of evil tried their hardest, they were no match for God Almighty, for they couldn't even kill the child that they wanted to. *[pauseee]*

The final detail that I want to bring out in regards to chapters 1 and 2 is the amount of fulfillment passages in it.

Of course, Jesus being born from the lines of Abraham and David fulfills Scripture, but there's way more.

According to Matthew 1:23, the virgin birth is a fulfillment of prophecy. *[pause]*

You move into chapter 2, and you find that his birthplace of Bethlehem fulfills Scripture.

Jesus goes down to Egypt as a child and then comes up out of Egypt, which is said to fulfill Scripture.

The parents weeping over their children being killed also fulfills what was spoken by Jeremiah.

And then Jesus goes to be raised in Nazareth, and that likewise, fulfills Scripture.

Even chapter 3 begins with a fulfillment passage by noting John the Baptist's ministry. *[pause]*

Surely we see something going on here with so many passages fulfilled, don't we?

God is bringing many of His promises to pass in Jesus!

He is intervening in history to work and to save His people.

Truly, Jesus is the one of a kind promised savior King!

And that's who we follow!...

I. We follow the promised savior King.

There's something about when someone promises something and they come through for you when you were in desperation. *[pause]*

Imagine falling into a hole and getting stuck so that you can't get out on your own.

Finally, someone comes by, sees your plight, and promises that they will come back with help. *[pause]*

You are sitting there in that hole waiting and waiting, hoping and hoping that this person will come through and fulfill their promise of getting help.

And then finally, after hours go by, they come back with all of this help that they easily get you out of that pit. *[pause]*

There would be nothing like that feeling of seeing their promise fulfilled and salvation arrive in the form of the aid of others. *[pause]*

That's an extremely imperfect and small illustration compared with what happened with the arrival of Christ.

We, as humanity, were in our own pit of sin and death and we couldn't save ourselves.

But God promised help, salvation, and a Savior to come.

Years went by and then in Bethlehem He fulfilled that promise in Jesus Christ.

He came! He arrived!

And Jesus was none other than the promised King, Savior, and Messiah. *[pause]*

His genealogy matched what God promised.

His birth and early life fulfilled so many promises.

And He certainly was one of a kind, as His birth and early life demonstrated. *[pause]*

These facts give us great confidence in who we follow!

We don't follow some random Joe off the street.

We don't follow an imposter or liar.

But we follow the promised savior King! *[pauseeee]*

Do you have confidence in who you follow?

Do you remember who He truly is? *[pause]*

The truth is that our thoughts and beliefs about who Jesus is directly impacts how we live.

If you think that Jesus is just a good teacher and that's it, then you will live as though his teachings were nice, but not like He's Lord of your life. *[pause]*

If you think that Jesus is just someone you can take or leave, then you will pick and choose which of the things He said that you want to follow. *[pause]*

If you have an incorrect view or belief about Jesus, you will not be a good disciple, if a disciple at all. *[pause]*

So many Christians like to talk about Jesus here and there, but they don't live in accordance with how He has told us to live!

He is not just some nice person to talk about once in a while, He is the promised savior King!

Knowing this and believing this should radically change our lives! *[pauseeee]*

True discipleship starts with a knowledge and belief in who Jesus is.

This is why in the Gospel of John, the disciples start following Jesus after people say things like, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" or "We have found the Messiah."⁶

It was all based on who He was that they gave up everything to follow Him. *[pauseeee]*

This is why Matthew starts the way he does because we must first have the right foundation to build on.

To be a faithful disciple we must start with *who* we follow. *[pauseeee]*

⁶ See John 1:35-51.

Do you hang on and desire to follow every word of Christ's, or do you find yourself picking and choosing which ones to follow?

If it's the latter, then reflect upon your belief and thoughts about Christ.

Do you truly live as though you follow the promised savior King? *[pauseeee]*

Christ has told us to forgive one another, even as much as seventy times seven.⁷

Yet why is it that we think, "I don't need to forgive, for just look at what they did to me and how many times they have done it!" *[pause]*

We certainly know the command to forgive one another, yet are we neglecting to remember who has commanded us to forgive?

We aren't living as though He is Lord and King! *[pause]*

Jesus told us that we would be hated by the world and would face suffering for His name.⁸

Why is it that we are shocked at the world's hatred of us, and expect a life of comfort and ease? *[pause]*

It's not that we don't know what He said.

Instead, we are neglecting to truly remember and live in light of who it is that told us that - the Word who became flesh.⁹ *[pauseeee]*

When you get to Matthew chapter 3, we start to see Jesus' adult life, and the beginnings of his public life and ministry. *[pause]*

John the Baptist is introduced, and he is this great prophet, who not only prepares the way for Christ, but announces His arrival.

His role was to prepare the way by preparing hearts for the coming of Christ.

So he announces, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Why? Because the King is coming onto the scene, so they better be ready. *[pauseeee]*

John the Baptist describes Christ as someone great, for John says that he isn't even worthy to carry His sandals.

He shares how He will baptize with the Spirit and fire, showing His power to give life and role as judge.

⁷ See Matthew 18:21-22. (Some translations say "seventy times seven" and others say, "seventy-seven times". Either way, Jesus' point is the same.)

⁸ See John 15:18-25.

⁹ A reference to John 1:14.

So the people must repent and be ready, for this great One is coming. *[pauseeee]*

Jesus then comes to John the Baptist and desires to be baptized by him.

But John is confused by this because He recognizes that he's the one who needs to be baptized by Jesus, not the other way around.

But interestingly, Jesus says, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." *[pause]*

The point is this...

It's not that Jesus repented and therefore needed to be baptized like the other people.

Rather, in order to identify with the people and to fulfill the righteous requirements of God, He had to be baptized. *[pause]*

Since Christ is our human representative, He had to identify with us fully and obey God's Law completely for us.

And that's what He's doing here.

He identifies with us as sinners, yet He's completely without sin. *[pause]*

His righteousness and perfection were on display, for right after, the heavens are opened, the Spirit descends upon Him, and God says, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." *[pause]*

If this isn't proof as to who Jesus is, I don't know what is!

The heavens opening shows divine intervention, for something unique is going to happen.

The Spirit descends upon Him, showing us that He is that promised Messiah, who was said that he would have the Spirit upon Him.¹⁰ *[pause]*

God speaks out of heaven, showing us that something important is happening.

And what God says of Him shows utmost favor, blessing, and relationship.

He is publicly announced as the Son of God, the promised King, and the Spirit-possessing Messiah for all to see. *[pause]*

So yes, He identifies with us, but He's surely not us!

He is the beloved Son of God, who the Father is always well pleased in! *[pauseeee]*

¹⁰ See Isaiah 42:1.

If it all stopped there, that would be enough, but this Christ also goes to be tested in the wilderness in chapter 4.

He is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested. *[pause]*

He doesn't eat for 40 days, and Satan tries to get him to do wrong.

But what does Christ do?

Even in the most extreme situation of being alone, extremely hungry, and in a harsh environment, he completely resists every one of Satan's attempts. *[pause]*

Remember that Jesus is both completely God *and* completely human.

So he felt the intensity of the hunger, the harsh environment, and the loneliness to the full degree that any human would, yet He still resists temptation.

He passes this test with flying colors.

He is tested and He proves that He is truly the Son of God. *[pause]*

Unlike Israel, who disobeyed in the wilderness, Jesus obeyed to perfection.

He is truly the beloved Son of God and promised One!

He triumphs over Satan, even in the most extreme testing.

He holds fast to the Father's plan, even though Satan tried to make his temptations sound so good. *[pause]*

He qualifies as our Redeemer, who never sinned!

He obeyed perfectly on our behalf!

And He knows what it's like to face intense testing and prevail. *[pause]*

All of this shows us who we follow!...

II. We follow the perfect, obedient Son of God.

We don't follow some imperfect, flawed sinner.

We don't follow someone who couldn't prevail and wasn't ever tested.

No, we follow the One who is truly the Son of God, for God the Father confirmed it, and His testing proved it. *[pause]*

Here in God's Word in the book of Matthew, the Lord is giving us proof after proof, evidence after evidence for the identity of Christ...

If His genealogy isn't enough, we have His miraculous birth and God-protected early life.

If that wasn't enough, we have all the prophecies that He fulfilled.

If that wasn't enough, we have John the Baptist's witness about him.

If that wasn't enough, we have His baptism, the Spirit descending on Him, and God the Father's announcement of who He is.

And if that wasn't enough, we have His intense temptation that He resisted completely. *[pause]*

How could we walk away from this account and not bow the knee in worship?!

He is truly the perfect, obedient Son of God! *[pause]*

That He would come to this sin-cursed world and face threats on His life even as a child is astonishing.

That He would humble himself and be baptized by John the Baptist to identify with us sinners is astounding.

That He would even willingly face intense testing in the wilderness to obey in our place is staggering. *[pause]*

The One who is great and mighty, and who is the Judge, was willing to come, identify with us, and obey in our place. *[pauseeee]*

He identifies with us completely so that He could do what we couldn't do!

He not only took our sin on the Cross and paid for it, but His righteous life is credited to our account at Calvary!

He not *only* died for you, but He lived the life you couldn't live for you. *[pause]*

Oh, the lengths that He took to do all of this for us!

Even to be intensely tested in a wilderness with no food by Satan himself.

This is who we follow!

The One and Only perfect, obedient Son of God!

As one song says, "All hail our Savior, praise Him forever, Jesus has overcome!...There's no one like our God!"¹¹ *[pauseeee]*

Yet sometimes we act like Christ doesn't know what it's like to face what we face.

¹¹ "Christ in Me" by Bright City.

How dare we think that! *[pause]*

When we give into temptation, we are only feeling part of the weight of it, for we give into it.

But He faced the full weight of temptation, for He didn't give into it!

As Hebrews says, "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."¹² *[pause]*

He can sympathize with us, for He faced what we face, but perfectly handled it all!

He cares about us, and knows what it's like to go through life in a sin-cursed world.

He lost loved ones, He was mocked, He faced trials, He felt emotional and physical pain, He was betrayed, and abandoned by friends.

That's who we follow - the One who went through all of that, yet perfectly obeyed God's law. *[pauseeee]*

The book of Matthew starts out by showing us that...

The One we follow is the promised Christ!

I want each of you to just pause and reflect upon your heart.

Do you truly remember and believe who it is that you follow?

Do you truly believe that He is the promised savior King?

Do you truly believe that He is the perfect, obedient Son of God? *[pause]*

That's where discipleship must start, and this is what a disciple must continually be reminded of. *[pause]*

Maybe for you, you aren't a true disciple of Jesus.

You haven't repented of your sins and turned in faith to Jesus Christ, who died for your sins and rose again.

You haven't truly understood who He is. *[pause]*

I plead with you to see who Christ really is!

Ask God to help you to see Christ as the one and only Savior, who is the only way to be saved from your sins.

And then bow the knee of your heart and trust in Him alone. *[pauseeee]*

¹² Hebrews 4:15.

Maybe for others of you, you're here today as a disciple of Jesus.

But do you continually believe and remind yourself of *who* you follow? *[pauseee]*

You know, sometimes we read of Jesus' 12 disciples and we think, "Come on, how could they be fearful of the storm when Jesus is in their boat?"¹³

Don't they remember who they follow? Don't they remember all the miracles He already did?"

Yet that's exactly how we live, isn't it?

One day, we are trusting Christ with everything, the next, we are filled with all kinds of worry.

But let's not have Christ-amnesia - let's always remember who we follow!

May who He is and what He has done always be on our minds! *[pause]*

When we are feeling the guilt of sin, let's remember that we have a Savior, who took care of that guilt.

When we are feeling hopeless, let's remember that the promised One has come so that we could have utmost hope.

When we are facing temptation, let's remember the One who fully resisted temptation.

And when you truly reflect upon who you follow, even the most mundane days are transformed by the reminder that the One you follow is the promised Christ.

He is Lord, He is King, He is Savior, and God.

And that means that every day, even the seemingly mundane, is not meaningless, but it is a day that we can follow our Lord and Savior and live for Him.

For we know that He has dealt with the most eternal problems of our lives - sin and death.

And He is with us and He shows us how to live in even the most ordinary days of our lives.

¹³ See Matthew 8:23-27.