

# In the Gospel by Matthew

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The sermon emphasizes the essential Lordship and authority of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Gospel of Matthew, calling Christians to submit to His command.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 119:99, Matthew 1:1, Matthew 5:1-2, Matthew 5:21-43, Matthew 8:9, Matthew 10:3, Matthew 21:43, Matthew 28:16-20

**Topics:** "Authority of Christ", "Lordship of Jesus"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the centrality of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, focusing on His mission, meaning, and message. He highlights that the Gospel of Matthew serves as the foundation of Christianity, showcasing the authority of Jesus as the King and the importance of recognizing His Lordship in our lives. Sparks encourages believers to engage deeply with Scripture, understanding that true authority comes from a personal commitment to Jesus. He warns against the spirit of rebellion against authority prevalent in society today, urging Christians to submit to Christ's command. Ultimately, the message is a call to acknowledge and live under the Lordship of Jesus for spiritual victory.

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## Transcript

Now, Lord, we pray that as we are gathered together in body, Thou wouldest gather us together in Spirit. If our minds are not gathered together, draw them now to Thyself. Lord Jesus, Thou art the center of our lives, help us to forget everything but Thyself, help us to forget the place and the people and just be preoccupied with Thee. Help us to forget the messenger and the interpretation and help us, Lord, to listen with our inward ears to Thy voice. We are wholly dependent upon Thy Holy Spirit. Wilt Thou have regard unto our need. We ask in the Name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.

I hold in my hand a little book, and all that is in between the covers of that little book has to do with one thing, or three aspects of one thing: the mission, the meaning and the message of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. You know that it is the New Testament, and the whole of the New Testament is summed up in those words - the mission, the meaning and the message of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and it is that with which we are going to be occupied, as the Lord helps.

I want to underline this: that the New Testament is all summed up in those three things. As you know, it has many parts. There are twenty-seven books, but all the twenty-seven books make one whole. In some way each one of them tells us the mission of Jesus Christ, the meaning of Jesus Christ, and the message of Jesus Christ. There are twenty-one personal letters, and it is a wonderful thing that God chose to give

us all this in personal letters. It is indeed wonderful what a personal letter can do when God inspires it! One-third of the whole New Testament is in personal letters. There are five historical books, the four Gospels and the book of the Acts; and then there is the one book, the Apocalypse, which contains history, prophecy and doctrine. The majority of the letters have personal names attached to them. The one exception is the letter to the Hebrews. There were evidently more writings by the apostles which have been lost, but two things of greatest importance remain to us.

Firstly, God has seen to it that everything has been preserved which is necessary to the life of a Christian. For the Christian life we do not need any more than what is in the New Testament, and I think you will agree that we have quite enough. When I was a young man I thought that I understood the Bible. Someone has said that the Psalmist must have been a young man when he said: "I have more understanding than all my teachers" (Psalm 119:99). Well, after sixty years of studying the New Testament, it is more than I can cope with today. God has seen to it that we have all that we need for life and conduct.

The second thing is this: the whole of the New Testament is a many-sided revelation of one Person. Every one of the twenty-seven books is a distinct aspect of one Person, and each one of those twenty-seven parts has a particular purpose, but very many Christians are quite unable to say what that particular aspect is. The great need is for us to read one of these books, and I advise that you read it right through at one sitting. Remember that the chapter arrangements are quite a mechanical thing not arranged until the fifteenth century. That is man's hand upon the book just for convenience, but the really valuable thing is to read the whole book through at once.

Now having read that book, you stand back from it and you ask yourself some questions: 'What does that book say to ME?' Not: 'What is there in that book?' but: 'What does the book say to me? Now that I have read it, what does it amount to? What is its part of the whole? What is the result for me of having read that book?'

That is all preparing our way for the several things that we are going to consider. Our present purpose is firstly to show what we mean by what we have just said, and secondly to consider some of these parts of the whole. I want you to remember this as we go on - that we are trying to understand the very essence of Christianity. Having said that, we will start on our first part, which is the Gospel by Matthew. I want you just to look at two fragments, one at the beginning and one at the end. We shall refer to these more fully later on.

"The book of the generation of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham" (1:1).

"But the eleven disciples went into Galilee, unto the mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him they worshipped: but some doubted. And Jesus came to them and spake unto them, saying, All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the age" (28:16-20).

## THE MAN MATTHEW

To reach a conclusion as to the message of Matthew we must first consider the man himself. Who and what was Matthew? Well, we know that his former name was Levi, and he got a double name - Matthew

Levi. We know that he was a tax-gatherer, and he lived in Capernaum. Please believe that this is not a lot of unnecessary detail; the two things that I have just said have a tremendous history bound up with them. Matthew was a tax-gatherer and he lived in Capernaum. He was a man who was invested with Roman authority; he was employed by the 'army of occupation': he had sold himself to the enemy in the land. He had accepted Roman authority and he was a man under authority. If he said: 'I want so much as tax', all the Roman Empire stood behind him. That gave him a great deal of liberty, for he could put his own price on things, and he could be very exacting. Do you remember when John the Baptist was baptizing in the Jordan and all the publicans came to him? (I wonder if Levi was one of them! If he was, he had never been baptized.) What did John the Baptist say to these publicans? 'Do not exact more than you have a right to do!' So the publicans were men who liked to get more than they had a right to have. You are following me closely, are you not? Is your mind moving ahead of what I am saying? Levi was evidently a man who loved power, for he had imbibed the spirit of imperial Rome.

What about the time in which Levi lived? it was the time when Israel was in great weakness, for she was being ground under the heel of imperial Rome and had lost world authority. Put a ring round that word 'authority', for that is the key to Matthew.

There is one other thing to say about Matthew. The only thing that remains as the fruit of his life is his Gospel. That is something very wonderful! We don't know anything else about the subsequent history of this man. Was he an apostle? Yes - and yet the only thing that remains is a book, but what a book it is! He is the only man in the New Testament who calls himself a publican. He alone says: "Matthew the publican" (Matthew 10:3). Twenty centuries afterward we are studying that Gospel, and it has been studied all through those twenty centuries - the fruit of a converted publican. There are possibilities for us all!

Now it says that Jesus came to Capernaum, and as He passed by He saw Levi sitting at the receipt of custom. He said: 'Levi, you wicked man! You traitor to your country! You enemy of your own country! What are you doing there, Levi?' No, Jesus did not say anything like that. He looked at Levi, He saw his account books and all his money and He saw all the people looking at Levi with anger. He knew the worst about him and He said: "Follow me!" That is all. And Levi arose and followed Him.

I think it is possible that Levi had overheard Jesus' teaching in Capernaum, and perhaps he had seen some of the miracles, so that when Jesus said: "Follow me!" he heard in those words something more than the words themselves. He heard something that appealed to his sense of authority. Jesus did not say: 'Levi, would you like to be one of My followers?' Nor did He say: 'Levi, I give you an invitation to come with Me.' I wish I could catch the tone of Jesus, but it would have been something like this: 'Follow ME!' There was authority in His voice. Young Christians, Jesus does not INVITE you to be Christians. He does not just say: 'Would you like to be one of My disciples?' The voice of Jesus is the voice of Divine authority. This is not a messenger of the King inviting; this is the King COMMANDING. You refuse this call at your eternal peril. When Jesus says: 'Follow Me!' there is all the content of eternal destiny in that. This is where we strike the message.

Now note one or two other things about Matthew. Matthew already knew what was in the Bible. He knew the Scriptures, but the Scriptures had no authority in his life until Jesus came in. If you read through this Gospel by Matthew you will find that he repeats one phrase nine times, and that phrase is: "that it might be fulfilled as it is written." Now he had all that Scripture, but his Bible was not alive until Jesus came into his life, and when that happened, he said: 'Why, this is what the prophet wrote about. I am seeing Jesus everywhere now!' He could identify Christ in the Scriptures when he had wholly committed himself to the

authority of Jesus. That is very instructive. You see, we are not saved because we know something about the Bible, nor because we have been brought up in a religious family. The very reality of Christianity is in an absolute committal to the authority of Jesus Christ.

## MATTHEW'S TWO FOCAL POINTS

Now, just leave that for a minute, and note Matthew's two focal points. In his genealogy he says: "Jesus... Abraham... David" - 'the seed of Abraham, the seed of David'. So Matthew sees Jesus in relation to a chosen nation, and Abraham is the first of this new chosen race. Matthew sees Jesus in relation to a chosen people and then he says: 'of the seed of David'. What does David mean? David represents the Divine thought for this people, which is dominion in the world. First, then, a chosen people: that is Abraham. Then a people in absolute authority amongst the nations. That is the Divine thought.

Hold on to that very tightly. Presently Matthew is going to say to that chosen nation: "The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (21:43). This is tremendous! So Abraham is to have another nation! A HEAVENLY people, and that people is to inherit the authority among the nations, to be the TRUE seed of David. That is where you need to dip into the book of the Revelation: a great multitude out of every nation centred in the Throne.

## THE BASIS OF CHRISTIANITY

There is another point of which I want you to make a careful note, because all the sovereign wisdom of God is found in this point. When the New Testament was put together, quite contrary to the usual way of men, the books were put in their wrong chronological order. The New Testament is not put together in chronological order. If it had been, Matthew would not have come in for a long time. When those men sat down to put the book together, for some reason which they did not know they said: 'We will put Matthew at the beginning.' They were more under the government of the Holy Spirit than they knew! The Holy Spirit knew what He was doing, so He said: 'We will put Matthew first.' And why is Matthew first? For the best of all reasons: this Gospel by Matthew is the first message of Christianity, and it is the foundation and basis of all Christianity. What is the basis of Christianity? What would be your answer if you were asked: 'What is the essential basis of all Christianity?' The answer is in the last words of this Gospel: "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth." The absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ is the foundation of all Christianity.

You notice how this idea had got hold of Matthew. It is he who tells us about the centurion who said to Jesus: "I also am a man under authority, having under myself soldiers: and I say to this one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh" (8:9). I hear the echo of the voice of Jesus: "Follow me!" "He taught them as one having authority", says Matthew, "not as their scribes" - and the scribes were supposed to be their authority! The great note of Matthew's Gospel is the absolute right of Jesus to command and be obeyed, and you note that the message of the Gospel in the book of the Acts was: 'We preach Jesus Christ as Lord.' The claim of Jesus Christ is unmistakable in Matthew. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old... but I say unto you..." (Matthew 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43). Six times He takes authority over "them of old", and "them of old" means Moses supremely. So on to the end, where it is all gathered up into 'All authority is given (has been given) unto me in heaven and on earth. Therefore go ye and teach all nations... whatsoever I have commanded you' - "have COMMANDED". Matthew's Gospel is always called - by the Bible teachers - "The Gospel of the Kingdom", and the aspect of Jesus in it is that of the King. What we are saying is that the true characteristic of a true King is authority, and this is the

imperative of Matthew, the erstwhile tax-gatherer, who worshipped authority so much as, first to sell reputation and honour and popularity to a foreign and hated power, and then to do the same as to this life for the heavenly, spiritual authority of Jesus Christ.

#### THE SPIRIT IN THE WORLD TODAY

Now why are we saying these things? The greatest peril that exists in the world today is the growing spirit of rebellion against authority. There is a spirit which is refusing all government and all authority in this world. It is the spirit of lawlessness, the spirit which claims independence of life and action. Children are casting off the authority of parents. They are demanding a life of absolute independence, and, sad to say, this spirit is amongst many Christian young people. If you would give them advice they will not take it, and if you say: 'That behaviour, that dress is not worthy of the Lord Jesus', they will not listen to you. But, of course, this is not only true of young people. It is a spirit that has come into the world, and that is the message of the letters to the Thessalonians, where it says that at the end the antichrist will be "the lawless one".

#### SPIRITUAL POWER AND SPIRITUAL VICTORY

I need say little more. All that sounds very hard and very terrible, but I will ask you to read again the book of the Acts, which is the book of spiritual power, spiritual authority, and spiritual victory. All the world rose up against the Christians. So much the worse for the world! Did Herod kill James with the sword? So much the worse for Herod! Read the sequel. Oh, no, here is an authority that is greater than the rulers of this world. These people may be poor people, and weak people from the standpoint of this world. They may be despised people. They may be poor, converted Levis, but they were joined to the "all authority in heaven and on earth". They were joined to the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Dear friends, you and I may be poor specimens, so far as this world is concerned. We may be the despised things and the things which are not, but Jesus Christ in us is greater than we are, and greater than this world's spirit.

But we come back to the point. The message of Matthew is the absolute Lordship and authority of Jesus Christ. Oh, may we all be found under that Lordship! It will come to mean much more than I am able to say. When all is said, it is victory at the end, for 'He MUST reign until He has made His enemies the footstool of His feet'.

But I do want to emphasize this thing: the beginning and the fullness of Christianity is in the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

We do pray, our Father, Thou wouldest teach us what this means. May we be wholly committed to the Lord Jesus. We thank Thee that He is our Savior, but that is for us. We want everything to be for Him, therefore, we want Him to be Lord. Protect Thy Word in our hearts, in the Name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.

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