

# 1. A real Shepherd - Christ the real Shepherd of God's people

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Preacher: William Philip

[ 0 : 00 ] We're going to turn to our Bibles now and read. We're going to read a couple of times this evening in Matthew's Gospel. First of all, in Matthew chapter 1. I haven't got the page number, but you can't find the first book of the New Testament.

Well, you're in trouble. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And we're reading in Matthew chapter 1, the very first chapter of the New Testament.

And we're going to start reading at verse 18. Our passage this evening that concerns us is really the first 12 verses of chapter 2. We're going to spend three or four studies, four I think, between now and Christmas.

Tonight, next Sunday evening, then Christmas Eve and Christmas morning, looking at the lessons from Matthew chapter 2. But let's just read in from Matthew 1 verse 18, which sets the scene.

Then we'll sing again and then return to Matthew chapter 2. Now, the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way, says Matthew.

[ 1 : 02 ] When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

The assumption, obviously, was that there had been adultery involved. And Joseph didn't want a public exposure of that, but nevertheless understood that this marriage could not properly go ahead.

But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife.

For that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son. And you shall call his name Jesus. For he will save his people from their sins.

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. That's a very important phrase. We're going to see it five times between there and the end of Matthew chapter 2.

[ 2 : 13 ] All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet. But behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son. And they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us.

When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him. He took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Now, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men, magi.

Nobody's quite sure exactly what that means, but wise men is probably as good as any. Magi, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? But we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him. When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

[ 3 : 18 ] And assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, In Bethlehem of Judea.

For so it is written by the prophet. And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah. For from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.

Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them at what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, Go and search diligently for the child.

And when you have found him, bring me word that I too may come and worship him. After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.

When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother. And they fell down and worshipped him.

[ 4 : 25 ] Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

Amen. May God bless to us his word. Well, perhaps you'd be good enough to turn with me to Matthew. Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 2.

Well, as I've said, we're going to be looking over these next few evenings and mornings together. And asking the question, really, that I think arises from this chapter. What kind of king?

What kind of king is it whose birth is being described here? What kind of king did the wise men, the magi, whoever they were, come all that way to see?

And the answer, I think, in this first section of Matthew, Chapter 2, is that they came to find a king who is a real shepherd. Christ, the real shepherd of God, come to shepherd his people.

[ 5 : 37 ] Whenever the living God invades the world of human beings, of men and women, a world which is at the same time searching and longing, a world in desperate need, and yet also a world at odds with its creator and resistant to his rule, whenever God so invades a hostile world to present his claim to rule over it, then huge confrontation is always provoked.

Because that kind of claim to a unique and sole divine authority over the world and its people is a scandal to the world and to its peoples. I just dare suggest such a thing today in our pluralist and multi-faith world, that there is one God alone, and one God made known to the world in one place and person alone, through Jesus Christ alone.

Just dare to try and put that point of view in our world today, and you'll get howls of protest. Of course you will. But friends, what this passage teaches us is that so it has always been.

Because that's what this story in Matthew chapter 2 is all about. There's all sorts of things we don't know about this story of the wise men, and it's amazing how often those are the things that people seem to want to focus on.

We don't know how many there were. It's only a supposition that there were three from the three gifts that they brought. But there could have been ten, or there could have been two. We have no idea. Matthew doesn't tell us. We don't know where they came from.

[ 7 : 18 ] They came from the east, that's all we know. Probably somewhere like Persia or Babylonia. We certainly don't know their names, although lots of people seem to know their names.

We don't know if they were kings. We're not told that either. Or if they rode on camels, as they always do on the Christmas cards. We don't know any of these things. We do know that they didn't come to the manger along with the shepherds, as is always shown on Christmas cards.

Verse 11 tells us that they came to a house. And very probably it was about 18 months, maybe even longer, later, after the birth of Jesus that they came. They saw his star, presumably at his birth, and it took them some considerable time to get there.

Hence, when we get down to verse 16 later on, we'll see that Herod's slaughter of the innocents was all children in Bethlehem under the age of two.

He carefully asked them what time the star rose, so that he would get an idea. So they certainly weren't there in the stable with the shepherds. We don't know all of these things, but what we do know is what Matthew has recorded for us and drawn attention to.

[ 8 : 28 ] And obviously, that's actually what's important here. And verses 5 and 6, it seems to me, are clearly the key to Matthew's whole point in telling us this story.

He says, All of this shows how the promise of God in Scripture is fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. For so it is written by the prophet, he says. Now, five times, as I've said, we have that phrase, or very similarly in Matthew 1 and 2.

First time we read in Matthew 1 verse 23, where he said that Jesus fulfills the word of Isaiah the prophet, that a virgin will conceive and bear a son, and he shall be called Emmanuel, which means God himself with us in the midst.

And so here in verse 6 of chapter 2, Matthew is explaining to us from the Scriptures what this divine person would be for the world. He would be a great king, he says.

Look at the quote. He would be a ruler who will shepherd God's people, Israel. Now, what could be more innocuous than a shepherd?

[ 9 : 36 ] We always have sentimental ideas about shepherds, don't we? Shepherds and fluffy lambs, that's what's always on the Christmas cards. And yet, in fact, this coming of the shepherd of God into the world led to an extraordinary disturbance in the world and to a great division among the people of the world.

So what is this story about the coming of the shepherd really telling us? I want to think about two things.

First of all, Matthew is making it clear to us that the news that God's true shepherd has come into the world causes great disturbance to the world's powers.

Great disturbance to the world's powers. This story reminds us that our world is full of longing, longing for something more.

People are seeking, seeking for truth and meaning and significance. People are longing for the definitive answer to the human condition. That's been so all through history. Certainly that was so at the turn of the first century.

[ 10 : 43 ] There was a general expectation in the whole of the ancient world of some kind of divine visitation to show the way. And so, in a sense, the whole world was watching and waiting, not just the Jews by any means.

Ancient poet Virgil wrote his messianic eclogue, and that's all about longing for the ushering in of a golden age in the world through some kind of divine birth. And clearly these Gentiles, these magi, these wise men for the East, clearly they were seeking confirmation in the stars and the constellations of some kind of great expectation that they had.

But of course, above all, the Jewish people had the very words of God in the prophetic scriptures that promised them God's coming king. That promised a ruler who would come and shepherd God's people forever.

He would be born in David's town in Bethlehem. He would be born as the great son of David, who was the great king. The David we were reading about this morning. They were expecting the long-awaited Messiah of God.

And yet, when the good news of the birth of this promised king is announced, well, verse 3 tells us that it caused not unbridled joy, but great disturbance.

[ 12 : 00 ] When Herod heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Why should the coming of God's true shepherd be so troubling?

Why should it cause such disturbance to the world's powers? Well, the answer, of course, is because, though we might like to sentimentalize it, there is nothing whatsoever feeble or sentimental about a real shepherd.

Certainly not the shepherd as the Bible thinks of him. It's not at all the feeble picture of a child in a nativity play with a cloth on his head. Just read the Psalms, read the prophets, and look to see what they say about God's shepherd.

Now, the real shepherd of Israel in the Bible is a mighty warrior, a powerful, a powerful one. In fact, it's God himself, we are told, who is the real shepherd of Israel.

He is the leader of his people, who leads his flock. What kind of a leader is this God? Well, read Psalm 78 when you get home. It'll tell you how God led his flock with a mighty hand out of Egypt.

[ 13 : 09 ] And as he did it, he struck down all enemies. He struck down the firstborn of Egypt with mighty power. He destroyed all earthly kings arrayed against him. And that is the kind of shepherd that's promised in the Messiah King who will come.

David himself, you'll remember, was called to be a shepherd of God's people with strength and with justice. And God promised that a descendant of David would always be on his throne to lead and to champion his people forever.

But of course, you only need to read on, don't you, from the passages in 2 Samuel that we were reading this morning. You only need to read on through the history of Israel's kings to realize that it was a great calamity.

It went from bad to worse. If you read the prophets, you'll find that they're constantly railing against the kings of Israel, railing against them and calling them evil shepherds.

Evil shepherds who destroy and scatter the flock of God. Evil shepherds who end up leading them only into exile. Read Jeremiah chapter 23 or Ezekiel chapter 34, for example.

[ 14 : 20 ] And yet, God did promise his people that he would not abandon them forever to these evil shepherds. He comforted them with great hope.

The hope was that at last the Lord himself would come and he would shepherd his people, rescuing them from all evil rule. That he would rule over them with justice and with peace and in righteousness.

I'm sure you've been listening, or will be listening at this time of year, to Handel's Messiah. Do you remember the beauty of those opening words from Isaiah chapter 40?

What are they? Edwards, sing them out for us. That's it, pretty good. Better than I'd be tonight, certainly.

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. How does Isaiah 40 go on? Behold, the Lord comes with might. And his own arm rules for him.

[15:20] Speaking of power and strength. He will tend his flock like a shepherd with a powerful arm, strong against the foes. And yet also with great gentleness.

That lovely solo. He will gather his lambs in his arms. He will carry them in his bosom and gently lead those who are with young. God himself, says the prophet, will come and rule his people in righteousness.

And he must do, because man cannot be left to rule himself. It's a disaster. Even a people who have the possession of the highest truth, the people of Israel, who have the very word of God in scripture, even for them, all earthly rule of mere human kings is disaster.

How much worse of the pagan powers of this world. God must come if his people are to be ruled with righteousness and justice and gentleness and peace.

The whole of world history bears testimony to that, doesn't it? The failure of every earthly rule, even the highest and best. Even the greatest human empires and kingdoms have ended in disaster, from ancient to modern.

[16:38] They've ended in cruelty and corruption and inhumanity and greed and hubris. Think of the great Babylonian and Persian empires.

Think of Greece and Rome. Think of the German Reich. Think of the Soviet Empire. Think even of the British Empire, upon which once it was said that the sun never set.

And yet now, what are we? A bankrupt little nation. Seems that we're living through, very possibly, aren't we? The demise and the collapse of the great European dream as well.

And the great American dream, for that matter. The powers of this world, the kings, the rulers, the empires, they cannot solve the problems of this world.

And he needs to read your newspapers today to realize how obvious that is. Nor can they bring hope to the people of this world. Not even for their earthly lifespan. Far less hope and answers to the great questions of life and death.

[17:45] The great questions of eternity. And you see, when faced with the true shepherd of God, the one who will rule with power and righteousness and judgment and goodness forever, that that is a monumental threat to the powers of this world.

Because it exposes utterly their impotence. It exposes utterly the corruption of all earthly powers. And that's what this story is all about.

It's not about three kings, but it is about two kings. It's about the clash of these two rulers. The rightful king and lord of this world. God's true shepherd king, Jesus Christ.

And every usurping power of this world. Represented by King Herod. Now, Herod epitomized everything. Almost in one man of the evil shepherds of Israel.

This was Herod the Great. He was known as a great builder, of course, in the ancient world. But he was far from being a great man. But this time in his life, he was old. He was utterly paranoid about being pushed out and taken over by another king.

[18:57] He murdered everybody around him who might have been a threat. He murdered three brothers-in-law. He murdered his favorite wife, Marianne. Murdered his mother-in-law. That's maybe more understandable. And he murdered his three sons.

The emperor Augustus said of Herod, It's safer to be Herod's son than his son. But in a strange sense, not that much has changed among world powers in 20 centuries, has it?

In the East today, what do we see? Plenty of murderous dictators just like that. Cutting down everybody all around them. Threatening them. Still ruling powers.

Some of them being toppled recently. Plenty more where that came from. But in the West, is our politics really so different? Yes, maybe less physical violence at the moment. But certainly no less cutthroat and vicious, is it?

Read the papers about what's been going on in the last few days. In Europe and in Westminster. And you see, here Herod's worldly power is hugely threatened by one who is born king.

[ 20 : 07 ] By one who's been declared to be king by God. By one who's been recognized in his kingship, even by distant foreigners who come to worship him, who come to give the devotion and the love of their hearts.

Friends, there is nothing so disturbing and threatening to any worldly power than that. A power that cannot be stopped, and which utterly overwhelms them.

The news of God's true king and his claim to be this world's only true shepherd. That is a greatly disturbing thing.

The powers of this world. And that is why from that day to this, the people who bring that news have been opposed, and have been persecuted by earthly powers without ceasing.

Because the gospel of the good news of Christ, God's shepherd ruler, is a huge threat to all earthly Herods. That's why Christian believers have been persecuted all through the centuries.

[ 21 : 09 ] And that's why they're persecuted all through the world today, and still are. We have a skewed view of this in the West, because we've known a brief West spike from it for a few hundred years.

But that's only because Western culture has been so transformed in the past by the gospel, that it became, well, not Christian, no culture is ever Christian, but it did become Christianized.

So that its values and conventions have been shaped to a huge extent by the truth of God. But that is an era that is now passing, as we know. And what we are seeing in the West today is simply a reversion to the normal situation of the Church of Jesus Christ all through history.

We better get used to that. Because our super-tolerant society in this country today, and in the West generally, will tolerate everything, except, except any who dare to name Jesus Christ as the only King and Lord, and to claim a unique rule and authority for Him, so that He must be listened to. The gospel, the news of the one who is born King, the rightful ruler of this world, is a huge threat to all earthly Herods. And that is why the gospel will be opposed by all earthly powers.

[ 22 : 31 ] And it is also a threat, of course, to all human hearts in just the same way, and for just the same reasons. Because, you see, this true shepherd is a ruler.

He will take the lead. His role is to lead and direct unilaterally His people. He will control the lives of His sheep.

There is no confusion about who is in charge. It is the shepherd who leads the sheep, not vice versa. And He has a rod and a staff to make sure that that right route is followed.

And that kind of control of our lives by one who lords it over us is anathema to the human spirit, isn't it?

You have a great desire for autonomy, for self-determination. I want to do it my way, and I jolly well will do it my way. People hate that kind of rule by another.

[ 23 : 33 ] People resent leadership, don't they? Even the Christian church. It's a curious thing. People cry out and say, we have a lack of leadership. We need leadership. But as soon as leadership is shown, people are saying, who are you to tell me what to do?

Well, God, who are you to tell me what to do? That's the basic cry of every human heart. See, the world, this world, will delight, delight in a pretend Jesus, in a sentimental Jesus, in a safe Jesus.

It will delight in a Jesus who's in a crib surrounded by lambs and shepherds and sheep, but it will hate the real Jesus, the Jesus who is himself the true shepherd, the rightful ruler of every life.

And yet here we are, seeing in Matthew chapter 2, that even from his cradle, the real Jesus, the one born king, couldn't be hushed away.

Even the news of his birth disturbed this world's powers. The news of Jesus' real kingship disturbed the powers that be then and still disturbed the powers of this world today.

[ 24 : 48 ] And that's why, as this story reminds us also so clearly, secondly, that the news that God's true shepherd has come into the world brings great division to the world's people.

It's later on, isn't it, that the end of Jesus' earthly ministry, that he himself speaks about the characteristic of his work of shepherding as being one of division.

Do you remember? He separates people one from another, says Jesus, as a shepherd separates the sheep and the goats. And what causes that division, that separation of people, is a division in their attitudes to Jesus the shepherd himself.

Now, Jesus is speaking there in Matthew chapter 25, of course, of the final and last, ultimate separation on the day of judgment, the eternal judgment into eternal life and eternal punishment. But the great division that Jesus speaks about there is evident even at the very beginning of his life, right here.

[ 26 : 03 ] Because in the news of his birth, God is not only revealing the true king of Israel to the world, but if you like, he is revealing to the world who are the true Israel of the king and those who are not.

those who are not truly of Israel, who are not truly his sheep, who are not God's people at all. In John's Gospel chapter 10, Jesus himself speaks about being the good shepherd.

I am the good shepherd who lays down my life for the sheep. And he says, I know my own and they know me. And he made clear that there will be many surprises for the Jewish leaders who will discover who really are.

among that flock and who are not. Jesus said, I have other sheep who are not of this fold and I must bring them also and they will listen to my voice and so there will be one flock and one shepherd. He was speaking about the Gentiles, of course, the pagan world. The pagan world who would come and listen to his word and obey his word and so become his true people along with all of those who listen to and obey the voice of the shepherd.

[ 27 : 13 ] And so we see here, even right at Jesus' birth, those who are truly his, who know his voice, they're being revealed, aren't they?

Just as those who are not truly his, likewise, are being revealed. Being revealed by their reaction, by their attitude to the good news of Jesus' birth, to the good news of the gospel.

By their attitude to the news of the coming into the world of God's shepherd king. Look at how Matthew draws attention to the key people who are involved in this story and to the extraordinary contrast that he shows us.

Not just between these two kings, between Herod and King Jesus. You see all the way through the story, he talks about Herod the king, Herod the king, Herod and the one who is born king, Jesus, the child, the Christ.

So there's that great contrast, but there's also another great contrast and that's a contrast in the reaction of the people who hear the good news of Jesus' birth. A reaction, if you like, between two different flocks of the shepherd.

[ 28 : 19 ] There's the apparent flock of God, there's Israel and her king and her chief priests and scribes and high priests, and then there's the apparent pagan outsiders, the Magi, the Gentile wise men from far away.

And yet what we see here is a great surprise. It shouldn't be. If you actually read, by the way, Micah's prophecy that's quoted there in verse 5 and 6, Matthew chapter 5, you'll see that the prophet there is speaking about and foreseeing a time when the rule of God's good shepherd will stretch to the very ends of the earth.

He says it explicitly. He'll rule over many people, he says, so that the remnant of Jacob shall be among the nations and in the midst of many peoples. Right there in Micah's prophecy.

While at the same time, he says he will judge those inside Israel and outside Israel who do not obey the rule of the shepherd king. And that is exactly what Matthew's showing us here in Matthew chapter 2.

The news of God's true shepherd king causes great division among the world's people. There's such a contrast, isn't there, between the reaction of the pagan Magi and of the Jewish royals and the Jewish priestly class.

[ 29 : 34 ] These are the Magi. Well, they're Gentiles, obviously. They're not privileged Jews. They don't have the scriptures. Well, they might well have had some knowledge of Jewish prophecies, but at best it was going to be vague, it was going to be incomplete.

And yet, from the light that they had, they came seeking. Where is he? Was their question. That's the ignorant cry of all pagan religions, really.

At its best and at their most honest, they're seeking for light. They're seeking for revelation, but they can't find it without God's revelation of the real truth. But in seeking, these pagans are led to the light.

They're led to the truth embodied in the scriptures. And when they hear at last the scriptures and the sure promises of God from Micah, they receive that truth gladly and they respond gladly.

Off to Bethlehem they go to see what has been told them. And then in verse 11, at last, when they discover the Lord Jesus Christ, they fall down in worship before him.

[ 30 : 43 ] And they offer him the greatest treasures that they have and they express the love, the desire of their hearts for this king. What a contrast! What a contrast do you would think would be the true flock of God to Herod and the chief priests and the scribes.

the news of the star that heralded the birth of their Messiah, of their true king, the one promised in their scriptures. It doesn't bring them seeking and joy.

Verse 3, they're troubled. They're disturbed. They're agitated. They're thrown into confusion. And when they search the scriptures, well, what happens? Well, yes, they've got all the right answers. They know all the theory. They know where the Messiah is to be born. But do they have any interest in finding this Messiah? Do they have any desire to know him, to go and worship him?

They don't go immediately to Bethlehem. They had the great privilege of all the scriptures in their own language. They had the privilege of knowing it from their birth.

[ 31 : 51 ] The scriptures that Paul said were given to lead the Jews to Christ. and yet they refused to be led to Jesus by their own scriptures.

While these muddle-headed pagan Gentiles at their first chance grasp the message of the scriptures with joy and go immediately to discover the Christ.

It's extraordinary today, isn't it, how in our so-called Christian West we have so much privilege. Here we are in Scotland. where we've had the opportunity to know the scriptures from our earliest age.

Where we've had the gospel in this nation for hundreds of years. Where we've had churches in every parish. Where we've had freedom to worship and to find out the truth about God.

And yet what we have is an overwhelming refusal for the most part of God's gracious revelation among our people. Even just as it was in Jerusalem then.

[ 32 : 54 ] Even among religious professionals often. The shepherds of God's flock. Those charged to be teachers and ministers and professors of theology. So much dead orthodoxy in the West.

Full of knowledge about the Christ of the scriptures. But no knowledge whatsoever of him. No desire for him. Often even worse, outright opposition to the gospel.

Just as it was then. And yet at the same time in so many other parts of the world where people have so little where there is no privileged history of the gospel where people haven't got the Bible where they're confused and muddled about the truth of God.

People in the midst of that nevertheless today are streaming to find the Lord Jesus Christ in their thousands. Sometimes when they're exposed to the gospel for the very first time and very often in a very halting and inadequate way as it's being presented.

For so many of these people to be given a Bible for themselves is the greatest treasure that this world can afford. What a division. What a contrast among the peoples of the world then and now.

[ 34 : 09 ] We shouldn't be surprised should we when we see that today. It's been so right from the very beginning. The same Jesus, the same message, and the same reactions always.

What a contrast there is between the true worship of Jesus exhibited by the Magi here in verse 11 and the false and perverse protestations of worship from Herod in verses 7 and 8.

These pagan Gentiles are rejoicing with great joy. The end of their long journey, they've found the Savior, they've proved the truth of the scriptures true in their own experience and they bow the knee to Jesus Christ.

But Herod by contrast, well he's consumed with rage and with hatred. What he wants is for Jesus just to be dead. And we'll see what he tried to do in verse 16 when he went to slaughter all the children.

His hatred was unleashed against this terrible news. And the scribes and the priests, well they too are filled with this same reaction of hatred, aren't they? Read through Matthew's gospel, you'll see it building and building and building.

[ 35 : 18 ] Until when Jesus is hanging on the cross, we'll read that the passersby derided him and the scribes and the chief priests and the leaders of the people scorn him when he's on the cross, mocking him, spitting him.

And the whole of Jerusalem, who were troubled along with Herod. Though yes, Jesus will weep over them. Nevertheless, he tells the truth to them in chapter 23 of Matthew's gospel.

As always, he says, you have killed the prophets and stoned God's messengers. That's the religious people of Israel.

Sometimes people can be very naive, you know, they cannot believe, they simply cannot believe that as we would put it, men of the cloth can be so full of vitriol and hatred for the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That they want to destroy and break down everything that stands for that and everyone who stands for that real message of Jesus. But friends, nothing has changed in 20 centuries.

[ 36 : 41 ] They still do that today. Yes, just like then, it's cloaked with a lot of quoting of scripture and sounding very pious and religious. It's just the same.

Because the news of God's true shepherd, the real Jesus, the real Jesus who rules his people, the real Jesus who demands obedience from his people, that message has always divided the people of this world.

and it always will. Some people are still like Herod, just furious at the message of Jesus, with all its exclusive claim to lordship that usurps their own rule over themselves.

And they're determined to prevent any kind of divine intrusion like that into their life. They'll do anything to avoid the gospel, even irrational things, even brutal things, even dramatic things, just as Herod did, slaughtering the innocence.

So their child, their teenager is converted at a scripture union camp, and they're so mad, so angry about it, they're determined never to allow them to go there again, even to move them from the school that they're in, to take them away from their friends, so they can't be influenced by this nefarious Jesus.

[ 38 : 02 ] Or when a true gospel ministry invades a comfortable church, they seek to destroy it and muzzle it, evict it, just as Herod did.

Others today still are just like the dead religious establishment of the scribes and the Pharisees, in which react with disdain and disinterest. Yes, of course the Bible says that, but so what?

We don't do anything in response to what the Bible says. We recite it, we do our religious things, we do our tradition, we go to church, we play our role, but actually respond, actually meet Jesus, actually let Jesus take control of our life and our church and institution.

Don't be ridiculous. That's beneath me, it's beneath us. We're far too educated and sophisticated for that. Well, the Magi were cultured and educated and sophisticated men, and they fell at Jesus' feet. But for many, as the scripture tells us, their wisdom is an unassailable idol, isn't it, that will never bow the knee to another lord. But friends, if nothing has changed in those reactions, so also nothing has changed in the other kind of reaction.

[ 39 : 29 ] There will always also be those who in their reaction to the news of God's true shepherd king will show themselves to be God's true flock, his true Israel, the sheep who know and love and respond to his voice.

Whether it's from the north or the south or the east or the west, people like that are coming to the king in droves today to worship him. They're rejoicing with great joy just as the wise men did.

They're proving the scripture's message true in their own experience as it leads them to the king who is the lord and master of the world and of their lives.

And they too are falling down before him and worshipping him as their king, offering them, offering him everything they have, the treasures and the love of their hearts. They're expressing their love for the shepherd king, for God's true shepherd, Jesus Christ, who they know to be the good shepherd who lays down his life for his flock, the great shepherd who rose from the dead and will reign forever, and the chief shepherd who Peter tells us will appear at the last day to give his people the unfading crown of glory.

It's one of the great joys that we have here, isn't it, in this church and in our city where so many people come from different parts of the world with no privileged Christian tradition, no background, no anything, no instruction in the scripture.

[ 41 : 01 ] from their youth, and they're like the wise men, they've begun searching with the little knowledge that they have. The silent working of God's most wonderful providence leads them to somebody who opens the Bible with them and shares with them the truth of scripture, what God has spoken, and how he has fulfilled it in the coming of Jesus Christ.

And they find the great shepherd king, and they bow down and worship him. And Matthew's message to us today, friends, is that that can be you.

It doesn't matter where you've come from, whether it's east or west, it doesn't matter who you are. If you will receive the message that they received with the same joy that they received it and rejoice in it, this message will lead you to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. And that's the greatest good news in the world. Yes, it's threatening to every other power and rule in your life and in the world.

The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ will always cause great disturbance to the world's powers. And therefore it will always cause a great division among the world's people.

[ 42 : 19 ] people. But for those who will receive it, it will lead you to the only place and to the only person where you can find the one who is born king by right.

To God's ruler who will shepherd his people as he has promised not only through all the tumours of this life, but forever. Because he alone, as the Apostle John says, he alone is the shepherd who will guide us to springs of living waters and wipe away every tear from our eyes.

So I urge you, all of you here tonight, come with the wise men. Bow down and worship him, Christ the chief shepherd, Christ your Lord.

Let's pray. Where is he who has been born king? Lord, how we thank you for Christ, the great shepherd and bishop of our souls, who came to find us wandering and scattered and laid down his life that we might be brought home to the fold, to the father's house, to where we belong, to the place that we have so much resisted, and yet the place wherein we find at last peace for our souls. And so, Lord, may the light of this glorious gospel shine into our hearts and into our lives and bring us to the place of the wise men fallen down in worship before the Lord Jesus Christ, our King.

[ 44 : 10 ] For we ask it in his name. Amen.