

Matthew Round / General

The Kingdom of Hope / Law; Grace; Kingdom of God / Exodus 19–20; Matthew 5:17–20; Matthew 28:18–20; Galatians 2:15–16

---

Intro me.

We're taking a short break from our journey through Matthew's Gospel, his telling of the story of Jesus, to take a look across the whole bible at the long story of God's Kingdom - because the next section of Jesus' teaching is focused on this idea of the Kingdom of God, or the Kingdom of Heaven as it's also called. Here's what I want us to think deeply about today:

Every kingdom has a **king**. And every king has a **design** for his kingdom - a way he wants it to be. And every king has to figure out **how** to bring about that design.

Think about the United Kingdom, where we live. Well, this kingdom has a king: **King Charles**. And our King has a design for his kingdom. Charles wants us to be nice to **plants** - among other things, admittedly - but he does want us to be nice to plants.

Now how can Charles bring about this design? Well, in our system of government, he doesn't actually have much in the way of kingly powers to deploy. He can do press conferences. He can write books. He can invite people to dinner. He can manage his own little estates - and his large estates too - for the good of plants. Is our United Kingdom - his united kingdom - going to be nice to plants? Well, perhaps.

But think about the kingdom of **North Korea**. Officially, the *democratic people's republic* of Korea - but if that's democratic, I'm a tomato. It's a kingdom with a very powerful king: **Kim Jong Un**. He wants a powerful army to intimidate others, wants to build **nukes** so he'll be respected by world leaders, wants his people to bow to his statues and cheer when he shows up.

How can he bring about this design? By being horrific to anyone and everyone who doesn't go along with him - it's prison or worse if you don't work towards his design. Is his kingdom going to be the way he wants it? Well, it seems to quite a large extent, it is - at least on the surface.

Now we're just starting our **series** talking about God's Kingdom - and we want to be clear on what we mean by that - so what is the Kingdom of God? **God's rule, over God's people, in God's creation, by God's plan, and in God's timing.**

For God's Kingdom, who's the King? Easy question. God. What's design for his kingdom? And how's he going to bring that about? That's what we're thinking about today.

Last week we looked at the first days of God's Kingdom, everything created "very

good” with Adam and Eve working the **Garden of Eden**. God’s design. Yet the enemy led them to rebel against the King’s rule and saw them expelled from God’s Kingdom. Is this the end? No - remember the Kingdom is by God’s plan and in God’s timing. We closed out last week with the faintest glimmer of hope through some mysterious words about Eve’s descendent to come: **“he will crush your head,”** the snake is warned.

Today we’re going to fast forward to another critical moment for **God’s Kingdom**: the story of Moses being given the Ten Commandments by God for his people. We’ll be thinking together about the King’s design - and how he plans to bring that about.

Before we read together, can you help me out with two quick questions: we’ve been trialling **fill-in notes** in our app over the past few weeks. Can you take a moment and let me know if you’ve used them, and whether they feel helpful? So we can decide if it’s something we should keep doing or not.

[poll]

Thanks. we’re hitting fast forward from the low of Adam and Eve leaving the garden. There’s a bunch that goes on - but the big news you need is God chooses a guy called Abraham, and his family after him, to be at the heart of the long story of God’s Kingdom, making him great promises.

Things seem to go wrong, with Abraham’s fast-multiplying descendants becoming slaves to Pharaoh, king of Egypt. But then, after 400 years, one of those descendants, Moses, is adopted into the royal household and becomes a **Prince of Egypt** - great story, and actually a pretty good movie too.

God uses this Moses to confront king Pharaoh, and through ten great plagues, God delivers his people from slavery in the kingdom of Egypt - bringing them out through the red sea and into the wilderness.

The sun is rising on God’s Kingdom again as we pick up the story and read a little from the book of Exodus, chapter 19 - and El’s going to be reading for us today. Exodus chapter 19 - page 66 in these blue bibles, and look for the big 19.

#### **Exodus 19:1–6 NIV**

On the first day of the third month after the Israelites left Egypt—on that very day—they came to the Desert of Sinai. After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the Desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain. Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, “This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”

Thanks El - will you stick around a moment longer? .. And then God, their King, gives

Moses the famous Ten Commandments on two stone tablets, then explains his full Law to Moses. Remember our definition for the Kingdom of God? **God's rule, over God's people, in God's creation, by God's plan, and in God's timing.** Are we about to see this fulfilled as Moses descends from Mount Sinai with those ten commandments? Well, if you know the story at all, you know the answer is a resounding no. Let's hop forward to chapter 32 and ask El to read us just a little more of the story:

#### **Exodus 32:1-4 NIV**

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him." Aaron answered them, "Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me." So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, "These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt."

That didn't last long! God traded in for a golden statue of a cow. Not God's Kingdom but **the cow kingdom** - and the great thing about being a part of the cow kingdom is a cow statue doesn't rule at all - it just stays right where you put it, watching you do whatever you want - because it's just a statue. What happens next? Well you can read the story for yourself in Exodus - it's a cracker - but the summary is that God has mercy. In fact, this is where God first tells us he's compassionate and gracious, forgiving wickedness and rebellion - He means it.

But I want us to keep on thinking about this Law, about **God's design for his Kingdom**, and how he's going to bring that about. Years later, with death approaching, an aged Moses reminds God's People of God's Law, God's design, as they prepared to finally cross the Jordan river and enter the land God has promised them. Here's what he says:

#### **Deuteronomy 4:5-8 NIV**

See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?

Here we see two really important things about God's rule, about His design for His Kingdom: first, His design is to **be near his people**, among them, even - did you see that? As they keep the Law, they'll be marked out from other peoples because the Lord will be near them; and second, his kingdom's **design is righteous, good, beautiful**. If they will keep His Law, the nations around them will see the goodness of His Kingdom's design. Will see how it defends the weak, provides for the poor,

upholds justice, treasures truth.

These two go together, of course: God could only be near his people if they were good and holy - because God hates evil and acts against it. Closeness without goodness would mean destruction through righteous judgement. And in fact that's very much what God tells Moses after the calf incident: Ex 33:3

**Exodus 33:3 NIV**

Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way."

Really this is what we see through the whole of the long story of God's ancient people: God's design for nearness isn't fulfilled because God's design for goodness isn't fulfilled. The Law is a picture of God's design for what might be - his Kingdom - but it seems like it's doomed to only ever be a picture, never actually happen.

Hop back to where we started with me for a moment. Remember the two different kings we thought about, their different designs for their kingdoms, and how they try to bring them about? We thought about **King Charles** with his eco-designs, yet his limited power and influence; and we thought about **Kim Jong Un** with his selfish egotistical designs, and wicked, brutal enforcing of them. If God's design is a good design, key question is how he plans to bring it about. God's Kingdom is God's rule over God's people in God's creation by God's plan and in God's time. **So what's his plan?**

His power isn't limited like our King Charles; yet he won't bring about his design by force like North Korea's Kim Jong Un. Yes, he will judge his people when they break his Law - we saw that with Adam and Eve last week, and we'll see it again and again as we follow the story of his people - but His rule, His design won't ultimately come about by force, by Him beating down every one that refuses him every time until they fearfully but reluctantly bow before him. **[Gal 3:21]** One of Jesus' first followers, Paul explains to us that "righteousness", God's good design, can't come about simply through this Law and its enforcement.

| Galatians 3:21 (NIV)

| if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law.

So what is the plan? And *when* is the plan - "**by God's plan and in God's time,**" remember. The Law is just another step in God's *very* long plan to bring his design good about - and we shouldn't be surprised to find Jesus being the culmination of this. If you were with us a few months back, we were working our way through Jesus' famous teaching called the Sermon on the Mount. There Jesus tells us about how he fits into God's long plan:

**Matthew 5:17 NIV**

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

Jesus is going to bring God's good design into being - he is the one who will "fulfil" this Law, God's design for goodness and closeness with him. And Jesus isn't going to do this by watering down God's design, aiming lower, setting a lower standard: that could never work with God coming close. Instead Jesus tells us Mt 5:20

### **Matthew 5:20 NIV**

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

He points to the best-of-the-best in his day at trying to measure up to the Law, Law Top Gun, then says entry to the kingdom requires more - much more. So are we all done for? ... No! Because unlike Kim Jong Un who may get his way for a time through fear and violence - oppressing people; enforcing obedience from outside, God's Kingdom design will come about in a wholly different way.

God is building an inside-out Kingdom, not an outside-in one. God's plan is to bring about his design - and closeness with him - by forgiving us our past failures through Jesus' cross, and sending His Spirit to live and work within us, transforming our hearts so they pull towards what's good and right. God's good design increasingly flows out into our lives - and we can finally know him near to us.

Are you with me? Does that make sense? This really helps us as Christians understand the ancient Law of Moses and the way we relate to it. It's God's design for his Kingdom - right and holy; good for us; enabling closeness to Him. That's how we should look at it. But it's *not what will bring about that kingdom design*.

Just like when **Parliament makes a law today**, that doesn't actually change anything - it shows us how our government wants our kingdom to look and to function - but the law itself doesn't actually make that happen. King Charles tries to bring about his design by persuasion. Kim Jong Un tries to bring about his design by punishment. God brings about his design through what we call salvation: stepping into his world to forgive what's past by Christ's cross; transforming us from the inside-out to change the future by His Spirit .

### **so what?**

Ok, a lot of ground covered in one morning, right? But what does this all mean for us, here and now?

Well, first of all, if you're not a Christian here today, thanks for sticking with us through such a long journey! I want to challenge you to think about the sort of kingdom you want to live in - and how that might come about. Wouldn't you like to live in a kingdom of freedom, of justice, of truth, of generosity, of rightness? Scotland's not bad - but it's not all of that and it never will be.

So **how could that sort of Kingdom ever happen?** We could make lots and lots of laws to describe what that looks like - but we've already seen that laws are not what change people. The problem with our world isn't the lack of laws: just haven't made enough yet, or made the right ones. The problem is how to bring a people into conformity with them. How to bring into being the kingdom those laws design.

And at one end of the spectrum we have King Charles and his persuasion - but I expect you know it'll take more than that - the problems in our world run deep. At the other end we have Kim Jong Un and his punishments. Do you want to live in a kingdom shaped through forcing everyone to conform? It's fine when laws are good - but what about when they're not?

Can you see how there's a real problem bringing about a better world through law, persuasion and punishment? God has made another way: A good design worth pursuing. A transforming power to bring it about. And a God who wants to be with you in it! This is the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of God. And God is inviting you in, offering you cleansing from your past and hope for your future. You just need to say yes to him. Will you do that today? ...

And if you're already a Christian, what would I say to you?

First, I want you to see that **God has a specific design for his kingdom**. He is the King and it's His Kingdom - he rules, he has the right to design it. And he does have a specific design, a kind of Kingdom he is going to bring about, where things do work a particular way, where his people do behave a particular way. The cross and forgiveness through Jesus are the very heart of our faith. Bound up in the idea of God's forgiveness is that fact that there was a right way - and we didn't take it, so we need forgiveness. Think about the Great Commission, Jesus' final instructions to his followers: he tells them to go and make disciples, baptising them, and teaching them to *obey* everything he has commanded. God has a specific design for his Kingdom.

Second, I want you to believe that **God's design is good**. Jesus teaches us to pray for the Kingdom to come because the kingdom is good! Not just good for God, finally getting his way, but good for us. Our king comes to us to help, gives himself to save us - so we can be with Him in His good Kingdom, a kingdom of love, justice, generosity, care - building towards God's perfect design where everything is made right at last, opening the way for us to be with him again - like that fleeting moment Adam and Eve knew in the garden, only forever.

Third, I want you to see how God will bring this about: **through grace and transformation**. God is not going to crush you with punishments under his Law until you fearfully conform - that's not how he is bringing his kingdom. That's not how we should hear Christ's commands: as threats. Neither is he just trying to persuade you to follow his design - like God has some good advice about how to be nice to each other - but whatever; you can take or leave it. The wonderful truth of how God will bring about his Kingdom is neither of those: instead, through the cross he offers grace for all that is past, and through the Spirit he brings transformation for all that is ahead. If you have put your faith in Jesus, he will transform you, from the inside out, to become more and more like him: more and more like the king - so you'll naturally - or supernaturally - live out his design more and more.

Let me pray..

[title]

If I can invite the band to join me now, we're going to sing once more - about the hope we have, the way we could ever be a part of this Kingdom: where we don't keep his Kingdom's design, it is God's grace that redeems us. It is his grace that restores us and patiently invites us in once more. When we freely walk into His arms, he *will* transform us; grace will see us welcomed home to walk beside our Saviour, to be with Him forever.

— Q+R verses —

**Galatians 5:16–18 NIV**

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

**Matthew 22:37–40 NIV**

Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."