

Longing for too Little - Rev. Thomas Davis

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[0 : 00] Well, for a wee while together tonight, I'd like us to go back to Matthew 22 and look at that section at the very end from verse 41 to 46. And I'll just read those verses again.

Now, while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he? They said to him, The son of David.

He said to them, How is it then that David in the Spirit calls him Lord, saying, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.

If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son? And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

One of the most common features of human experiences is that very often we long for things to be different.

[1 : 00] That's a pattern that you see throughout history. It's something that you see all across the world. People long for things to change. And that's not always a negative thing. Sometimes it can be a very good thing. Because there's a sense in which all the great advancements that have been made in technology, in medicine, in the arts, all comes from a vision for things to be different.

So sometimes it can be a positive thing, that desire for things to change. But in many ways, this is touching on something that tends to be negative, in the sense that people find themselves in circumstances that they don't want, and people long for things to be different.

I'm sure every single one of us has experienced that at some point in our lives. Maybe that's how you feel tonight, that you come here thinking, I wish that things were different.

There's one group who definitely felt like that. It was the Jews in the days of Matthew's Gospel. For so many reasons, they longed for things to be different.

And that's what we see in this short passage that we're going to look at together tonight. And what I hope we're going to see, though, is that although the Jews were longing for things to be different, although the Jews had a great sense of longing, the truth is they were actually longing for far too little.

[2 : 38] And that's the kind of title that we're going to take for our sermon tonight, longing for too little. And what I hope we'll maybe see is that it's very likely that in our own lives, many of us, if not all of us, are longing for far too little as well.

So as we look at this together, we're going to just look at three things. We're going to look at the Jews, then we're going to look at ourselves, and then we are going to look at Jesus.

So starting with the Jews, what were they longing for? Well, in verses 41 to 46, and in many other parts of Matthew's Gospel, what we find is a strong connection being made between Jesus and David.

David. David was a hugely important figure in the Old Testament. He was a king. In fact, he was the greatest king that Israel had ever had.

And in fact, every other king was measured against David. So a good king was like David, and a bad king wasn't. And so this David was the great figure in the Old Testament that they looked back to.

[3 : 49] And the great hope of the Jewish people in the days of Matthew was that a future king like David would come and save the nation.

That future king, that coming saviour king, was called the Messiah or the Christ. It's the same word, Messiah is Hebrew, Christ is Greek. It means the same thing.

Somebody from among the descendants of David, who is going to be a great king, just like David was. So when Jesus asks them the question in verse 42, and says to them, what do you think of the Christ?

Whose son is he? Their answer is instant. They say, the son of David. Because the connection to David is so important. Now, for us to understand why that was such a big deal, we need to understand how it felt to be a Jew in the first century, in the days when Jesus was in his earthly ministry.

And we can summarise the way that they felt under three kind of headings. The way things were, the way things were meant to be, and the way you want things to be. And so the way things are, is talking about the present.

[5 : 02] The way things were meant to be, is looking back to the past. The way things they wanted it to be, was looking to the future. And for the Jews, David was a key factor in answering all of these questions.

So in terms, so for a Jew in the first century, in terms of things, of the way things are, the Jews are under Roman occupation. David had lived about a thousand years before Jesus.

And since David's life, there had been a rollercoaster for a rollercoaster millennium for the Jewish people. There was the high point, when David was king, they were a strong, united, and prosperous nation.

And Solomon coming after him, built the temple, the palace, everything looked so good. But from there, it was all downhill. When David's grandson became king, the nation divided into two.

And it wasn't long before the two nations were at war with each other. And so you go from David, king of this united, prosperous nation, before long, it's split, it's divided, it's fighting.

[6 : 12] The northern kingdom lasted about 200 years before being obliterated in 722 BC. The southern kingdom lasted a little bit longer, but was conquered by Babylon in 586, and most of the people were taken into exile.

Eventually, the Jews began to return from exile, that's around 530 BC. And for the next 300 years, they were under the rules of the rule of the Persians, then they were under the rule of the Greeks. By this time, the Old Testament's finished. We're in what we call the intertestamental period, the bit in the middle, in between the two, about 400 years. During that time, the Jews managed to regain a little bit of independence, but it came at a huge cost.

There was lots of tragic wars in that period. And before long, they were conquered by Rome. And that's where we find them in the New Testament.

So you've had this roller coaster from 1,000 years ago, David. Downhill from there, the nation splits, the nation falls apart, they're conquered by the Persians, the Babylonians, the Greeks, eventually the Romans.

[7 : 23] And that means that for every Jew in Matthew's Gospel, as we read these words, they are looking at the way things are, and they are thinking, I long for this to be different. And what they longed for was the good old days of David.

Because that was the way things were meant to be. It was the past, what it was like with David. That's the way it should have been for them. They were supposed to be God's chosen people. Because things were so much better then. David didn't have to pay taxes to Caesar. David didn't have a Roman governor sitting in Jerusalem. David wasn't the puppet king of some foreign emperor.

In David's day, Israel was strong, independent, and thriving. And for the Jews in Matthew's Gospel, that was the way things were meant to be. And that meant that for the Jews, what they saw in the past, in David, is what they longed for in the future.

They're like, we just want it to be back like that. That's how we want it to be. So if you asked a Jew, how do you want things to be? They would say, we want things to be the way they were with David. And so you can picture it like this, just always with the Old Testament, it's good to have the idea of like a slope downwards, because it is just a downward slope.

[8 : 42] David is kind of the high point, and from there, things just get progressively worse and worse. And the Old Testament, always remember, it's not a success story, it's actually a story of failure of God's people, but the incredible faithfulness of God.

And so everything is going downhill. And so the Jews in Matthew's day, they're looking at their circumstances, they're looking back, thinking that's the way things are meant to be.

And their great hope for the future is that the Christ, the son of David, is going to come. And if he came, he would get rid of the Romans.

He would be strong enough to fight them off. He would give the Jews their nation back again. He would restore things to the way they were meant to be. And we can get a wee taste of this, if you imagine, sometimes if you're going out in the moor, sometimes you'll see some Adhi's, and you'll see that they're kind of neglected, or falling apart.

Sometimes you'll come across what was the ruins of like Black House villages. And sometimes you see these things, and you think, ah, I wish somebody would restore them to the way they were meant to be. This was once thriving, and now it just lies in ruins.

[9 : 53] Or if you go to the mainland, and you see like a big redundant shipyard, and you think, once upon a time, there were thousands of people working here, and now it's just dead. And you think, I wish somebody would restore this to what it used to be, to what it was meant to be.

That was the way the Jews thought at the time. And there's two key words that sum up their situation. The two key words are king and enemies.

King and enemies. For the Jews right now, they had no king, and they had enemies all around them. In fact, the enemies were right there in Jerusalem, governing their territory.

And all of that was so different to what they had with David. With David, they had this sense of community. They were a nation, a family, a people. They could build a society the way they wanted it to be.

They had their own identity. The king brought everyone together. And with David, they had their own territory. They had their borders, their cities, their space.

[11 : 00] They had a home that was their own. And with David, they had a future. They could plan and build and grow and be the people that they wanted to be. But now, all of these things were in the hands of their enemies.

So the Jewish culture that was grounded in David and the Old Testament was gradually being eroded by the influence of the Greeks and the Romans. And that influence had led to people like the Pharisees becoming so strict in their conduct because they were so desperate to preserve their Jewish identity.

The territory that was meant to be theirs belonged to the emperor in Rome, which was a toy in the hands of this guy Caesar, who lived hundreds of miles away. And their future was in their enemies' hands.

They'd already seen their nation crushed by foreigners on many occasions. And without a king like David, their future was out of their hands. They were at the mercy of their enemies.

And the Jews are thinking, if only the son of David would come, if only he would come, all of that would change.

[12 : 12] He would defeat the enemies. He would reclaim the territory. He would reestablish the community. He would transform their future. The Jews were longing for the son of David because they were longing for things to be different.

Now, you might be thinking, well, Thomas, that's very interesting, but what on earth has it got to do with me? Because it's a million miles from today's world and in so many ways our problems and our challenges as individuals and as families today are nothing like what the Jews faced in Matthew 22. And in a sense, that's true because we don't live under the rule of a conquering enemy. We don't face the same crisis of national identity. And I don't think there's anybody in here who would think back to life in Lewis a thousand years ago and think, I would like to go back to that.

None of us are going to think like that. However, if the great characteristic of the Jews was that they were longing for things to be different, then I think it's true that in so many ways we are still exactly the same.

How many of us look at the way things are and we think, I wish it was different? And that might be as a society, sometimes, you know, you long for a change in rules and you long for different policies or for a different government.

[13 : 46] Sometimes it might be as a nation. There might be some people in here who long for Scotland to be independent. There might be some people here who never want Scotland to be independent. It might be for the environment.

You long for things to be different as we face the threat of climate change and all the news that you hear about that. But most of all, it might be for you as an individual. You look at your work, your relationships, where you live, what you earn, how you look, what you've achieved.

And maybe you long for all of these things to be different. And maybe like the Jews, you long for the way things were meant to be.

You maybe look back into your own history and maybe there's a time in your past where you just wish you were back to that. Maybe it was your school days. Definitely wasn't my school days. I was so glad to leave school. But some people long for their school days. Maybe student years. Maybe starting out your career, all the excitement of getting going with the job that you've worked for.

[14 : 55] Maybe you think back to a day when your house was full of children and now it's empty. Maybe you look back to a time when you were fitter, stronger, faster. But maybe it's not stuff that actually happened in your life.

Maybe you look back and you just think of your hopes and expectations that you once had that now haven't been realized. Maybe there was dreams of a relationship that hasn't happened.

Or maybe there was one but it didn't work out the way you expected. Maybe there was a job that you were dreaming of getting, a house you dreamt of building and it's not happened.

Or maybe it has happened but you're not as happy as you thought you would be. It's not the way it was meant to be. And all of that makes you yearn for things to be different.

And you just have this dream of the way you wish things might be. And when we find ourselves in that situation, it's so tough.

[15 : 59] It is so tough. And the Jews weren't wrong for wishing that things were different.

And neither are you. And I think that every single one of us have times in our lives, maybe right now, we look at things and we think, I wish that was different.

The key issue is how we respond. And what I want us to recognize is that just like the Jews, at the heart of all of this is the issue of our king and our enemies.

Now you might be thinking, what do you mean, Thomas? I don't have either. I don't have a king.

Well, I suppose we do have a king now in London. But I don't really have a king in that sense. And I don't really have enemies. But we have to think about it because I'm not so sure that these aren't as irrelevant as we think they are.

Because when we talk about a king and enemies, what we are really talking about is our security and our threats. So we want security.

[17 : 13] We want to be safe, to thrive. We want to be part of a community. We want to enjoy our own territory. We want a future that's bright. And we look for a king who'll give that to us.

We look for a king that's not really a king, but the thing that we're going to serve. And so that might be a job. It might be a salary. It might be a political partner.

It might be a political party. It might be a boyfriend or a girlfriend, a husband or a wife. It might be a certain lifestyle. And these things are not necessarily bad.

And there can be a lot of good things in all of these. But if we make them our king, then we are making ourselves their servants.

And we are looking at something like our job or our bank balance or our house or whatever and we're saying, you are the key to making my life better. And I am your loyal subject.

[18 : 17] I'll do whatever you say. And equally, not only do we want security, we also want to overcome the things that threaten us.

So our lives are different. We're not facing a foreign enemy like the Jews did. But it's not that long ago in our history that Britain did face that. But for us, we can feel threatened in so many different ways.

Maybe you feel threatened by colleagues. Maybe you feel threatened by classmates. People who seem like they're smarter than you or better at football than you or more good looking than you.

Sometimes we might feel threatened by our circumstances. Maybe our financial circumstances. We think, I don't know how I'm going to cope or I don't know how we're going to get through this.

Maybe we feel threatened by our social circumstances where we feel isolated. We feel like everybody's judging us. Everyone talks about us. Everybody looks down their nose at us. We might feel threatened by our past.

[19 : 14] We might be thinking, there's stuff in my past that I don't want anyone to ever know. And if that comes out, then, oh, I will be mortified. Sometimes we can feel threatened by people who think differently from us.

People who have got very, very different views from us on all sorts of types of topics. Or sometimes, and this is probably maybe the most common of all, sometimes we feel threatened by our own sense of expectations.

Our own sense of failure. Our own feelings of inadequacy. And all of that can leave us in a situation where we feel like we're surrounded by enemies who are just trying to make things worse for us. Enemies that threaten us. And so our hope is that our king will deal with our enemies. That's our great hope, that our king will deal with our enemies. So, king's successful career will mean that I don't need to feel threatened by colleagues or by classmates who are smarter than me or better than me.

King, political party is going to deliver us from the threat of evil other political party that I don't like. King, good exam results means that I don't need to feel threatened by the pressure of peers or parents or teachers.

[20 : 33] King, nice house means that I don't feel threatened by what everybody else has. I don't feel inadequate in front of my friends. King, social life is going to deliver you from the threat of loneliness or rejection and even king, outward religion can be seen as the one that, the great thing that's going to deliver us from the big bad world that's all around us and it's going to make us feel secure because we've got it right and everybody else has got it wrong.

We're doing what we should. We're taking the right boxes and it makes us just that wee bit better than everybody else. Now, so many of us and so many people around us think in these terms all the time and not all of it's bad.

Many of these things can be good things but what we have got to recognize is that none of these are kings. None of these things are kings.

So, the Jews were longing for things to be different, just desperate for things to be different. And so often we're the same. We long for things to be different about our lives, our homes, our relationships, our reputation, whatever it may be.

In it all, what is Jesus saying to us? Well, the crucial thing that we have to recognize is that in this passage, Jesus is not saying, stop longing.

[22 : 08] It would be so easy to think that that's what Jesus has come to say, that he's come to say, stop this, stop complaining, stop wishing for things to be different, stop longing, be content, and get on with life.

You've actually got lots of nice things, so just get on with it and stop this longing. That's not what Jesus says at all. This passage is not saying, stop longing. This passage is saying, you are longing for far too little.

And that's the key point. The Jews' expectations were too low. They were longing for far too little. Remember the imagery I told you to have to kind of have that idea of David as the high point and it's all downhill from there. They wanted to get back to that high level, back up to there when things were good with David.

That was their great goal. And they were just longing for David's son to come, to get them back to that level. And at one level they were right to do so because the Messiah would be a descendant of David.

[23 : 21] And they were longing for that descendant of David to take everything back to David's level. Jesus is saying, that expectation is far too low.

Because what Jesus teaches them right here as he quotes from Psalm 110 is this. They, the Jews, were looking for David's son.

What they actually got is David's Lord. That's what Jesus highlights in this quote from Psalm 110 in verse 44.

That psalm written by David is speaking about this coming king. It's speaking about the Messiah, the Christ. That's why we'd call this a messianic psalm in the sense that it's prophetic.

It's looking forward to the coming king. It's teaching us something about him. And part of this psalm describes words spoken from God to this coming king.

[24 : 19] The key point, though, is that when David describes God speaking to this king, he doesn't say, the Lord said to my son. He says, the Lord said unto my Lord.

You can see that right there in verse 44. David's saying, the Lord said to my son. No, the Lord said to my Lord. And the point that Jesus is making is that the Christ is not just David's son.

He's David's Lord. So he's not simply an heir that comes after David. He is the Lord who rules over David. And he's not just this descendant who will take things back to the level that they were at David's time.

He is the Lord who is going to take them far, far above anything that David achieved. In other words, the Jews had all these great expectations for the Messiah.

They had huge expectations for the Messiah. The truth is what Jesus has come to do is way, way bigger. If their dream was to get back to the level of David, Jesus is saying to them, you are longing for far, far too little.

[25 : 43] At its best, David's kingdom extended to a few hundred miles of territory at the eastern end of the Mediterranean. At its best, David's was a society of a small ethnic group descendant from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

At its best, David's nation always had bigger, stronger nations surrounding it and posing a threat. At its best, the future was a case of surviving as long as possible and Jesus is saying my kingdom is way bigger and way better than that.

And the result is that the Christ has come to establish a kingdom that is way higher and way bigger than anything David ever achieved.

It's a kingdom that includes people from every nation and every background. It's a kingdom that covers every territory, the whole world and the whole universe. It's the kingdom that has an eternal future and it's a kingdom that's not about surviving from your enemies.

It's a kingdom that is grounded on two great principles, the great commands that are in verse 34 to 40, love for God and love for one another.

[27 : 02] And just think about that. Just think about what Jesus has come to achieve. That Christ has come to establish the ultimate, dominant, permanent kingdom. He's come to establish the foundational culture and atmosphere and environment for humanity to live in and at the heart of that is love.

And you compare that to what we experience in the world. You look at the powers in the world vying with one another. You think about Trump and Biden and all that's going on in America just now and all the animosity and tension and fighting there.

You think about all the tensions in the world with things in Russia, Ukraine, the West, all the tensions that are building there. You think about even the tensions that have existed between Scotland and England over the years.

You think about the tensions that exist between you and your colleagues, your neighbours, the tensions that exist between you and your past and your mistakes and your struggles. All of these ways in which the kingdoms that we establish and that we live in are so flawed and broken and so full of trouble, Jesus has come to establish something so much better.

David, when he wrote this psalm, he knew that something bigger was coming. The Jews couldn't see it because they were longing for far too little.

[28 : 29] And we are doing exactly the same. We think, if only I can have my wee territory, my house, my job, my life. We think, if only if I can have a wee community that I can fit into where I'll be accepted and people won't reject me.

And we think, if only I can survive as long as I can, if I can get to 80, maybe 85, maybe 90. We long for health and success and security and fulfilment and love and we feel threatened by others who might get ahead of us or who might take that away from us.

And we have this kind of Hollywood movie idea of life where we have to get the job and the girl or the guy in the house and the lifestyle, the pension. And if we get it all, we think that we've made it. And if we get it all, we want to hold on to it because we don't want anybody or anything to take it away from us. And some of us might get it. If we do, it's only ever for a moment. For most of us, we spend our lives longing for something that we'll probably never get at all.

And even if we do get it, we're still longing for more and we are walking our way into hell because we are longing for too little.

[29 : 42] and all the time Jesus is saying, I will give you something way bigger and way better.

Jesus wants to bring us into his family where everyone is precious, where everyone is being restored, where every scar and bruise and wound is being healed, where nobody gets judged or shunned, where joy and peace and hope and security abound.

And it will last forever. Nothing can threaten it. Nothing can diminish it. Nothing can snatch you out of his hands.

Jesus is wanting to give us more, more, more joy, more peace, more security, more happiness, more safety, more peace than any house or job or money or success or reputation or whatever can give us.

He's saying, I am going to give you more than that, better than that, bigger than that. And the absolutely incredible truth is that this is what God longs for.

[31 : 09] God longs for. We long for all sorts of stuff. We long for far too little.

This, this is what God longs for. Why is God sending this king? Why did God make these promises in the Old Testament? Why is all of this happening?

Why is the Old Testament foreshadowing something that's to be fulfilled in the Messiah, in the new?

Why is God sending his son? Why does God want his enemies under his king's seat?

Why does God want to do all of that? It's so that you can be safe. So that you can be his.

so that you can have a place in God's family forever. That is what God longs for.

[32 : 12] And thank God his longings are never as low as ours. So, if you are here today and you're longing for the wrongs in society to be put right by a political party, that's good.

But you're longing for too little. Because Jesus has come to put everything right. He has come to hold every injustice to account.

And he's come to have mercy on all those who see their sin and repent. If you're longing for environmental action in the face of the challenges that we face today, that's good.

But you're longing for too little. Because Jesus is going to restore the whole universe. And when Jesus returns, all the curse that sin has caused, all the damage that the created world, all the groaning that the universe is subjected to just now, will be gone.

Everything will be restored to the perfection of Eden. Only it won't be confined to a small area. It will be the whole creation.

[33 : 34] If you are longing for your own little territory, for a place that you can call home for a life that's just the way you wanted it to be, that's good, but you're longing for too little.

people. Because Jesus is not saying you can have an amazing home in Lewis for 70 years. He's saying I'm going to prepare a place for you for eternity.

And you know, in that new creation, the incredible Hebridean sunsets, the glorious northern lights, the warmth of the sun that we have enjoyed over the past few days, the turquoise water that we get on our beaches is all nothing compared to what He is preparing for us.

All of this stuff is just a glimpse. And if you are longing to be loved, whether that's in a relationship or whether it's an extended family or whether it's among friends or as part of a community, that's a good thing to long for, but you're longing for too little.

Because Jesus says, I will love you forever. Because I have loved you forever. And He's going to bring us into a family where we are all together, together in friendship and in harmony and in company.

[35 : 11] And whatever our circumstances have been in this life, whether we've had loads of friends or not enough friends, whether we've had the family we wanted or whether that's not worked out the way we wanted it to be, whatever it may be, we will all feel at home, we will all feel safe and secure, we will all feel valued, we will all be part of the one beautiful family that God is building through His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

The big mistake of the Jews was that they were longing for the good old days. Jesus has come not to bring back the good old days, Jesus has come to give us amazing new days.

New days that are beyond what we can imagine better than anything we can describe.

He's come to give us the unshakable hope of a new heaven and a new earth where all the sin and brokenness and enmity and all the pain of separation and grief and heartbreak and tension will be gone where all the power of death is destroyed and it's under Jesus' feet as Psalm 110 describes and we and all who trust in Jesus will be together and will be safe with him.

That is what God longs for. And Jesus died to make it possible.

[36 : 54] That's what Jesus, that's why Jesus died in order for us to be part of that, for us to have that. And all he asks for us to do is to put our trust in him, to pray, Lord Jesus, I need you.

Please save me. Please bring me into your family. Please, as you go away from here, think about what you're longing for.

think about what you're longing for in life. And there will be many good things that you're longing for and you should go for it.

But never ever make the mistake of longing for too little. Because what Jesus wants to give you is more than anything else, better than anything else.

It's the most amazing longing that we can ever have. And the thing that makes Jesus so amazing is that one day he'll take you to be with himself.

[38 : 15] And I don't know what heaven, I don't know every detail of what heaven and the new creation will be like, but one thing I do know. nobody longs for anything there.

Because nothing is missing. Amen. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we confess that often we long for too little.

to give us what we so desperately need. And we thank you so much that you have come not to give us what we want, but to give us what we so desperately need.

And yet we just marvel that actually what we need and what you promise to give is more amazing than we could ever have threat.

And we pray, Lord, that every one of us would hear your voice calling us to you tonight. Please lead us on in your ways, we pray. Amen. We're going to conclude with Psalm 34 in the Scottish Psalter and we're singing from verse 8.

[39 : 45] Amen. Amen. Amen. Psalm 34 verse 8 to verse 15. That's on page 247.

Oh, taste and see that God is good, who trusts in him is blessed. Fear God his saints, none that him fear shall be with want oppressed. And going into verse 10, it speaks about how we will not lack any good thing as we seek the Lord.

So let's sing verses 8 to 15 to God's peace as we close. Amen. O taste and see that God is good, who trusts in him is blessed.

Fear God his saints, none that in fear shall be with want oppressed.

O breast, the lions young may hungry be, and they may lack their food, but they that truly seek the Lord shall not like any good.

[41 : 20] O children, hither do ye come, and of to me give ear.

I shall you teach to understand how ye the Lord should fear.

What man is he that life desires to see good would live long?

Thy lips refrain from speaking God and from ill words thy tongue.

Depart from ill to good seek peace, pursue it earnestly.

[42 : 32] God's eyes are on the justice ears are open to their cry.

Well, as you leave and head into a new week, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

Amen.