

The Church of the Servant King
Survey of the Bible Series
The Gospel of Matthew
(Lesson SB-MT21)

The Entry into Jerusalem (21:1-11)

Timing of the Entry – This trip into Jerusalem occurred a few days prior to Passover during which Jesus was crucified. Matthew does not mention Jesus' stay at Bethany (John 12:1-10) where Jesus arrived "six days before Passover". Most likely, Jesus went back and forth between Jerusalem and Bethany during this period leading up to His crucifixion since Bethany was so close.

The Geographical Setting – The Roman military road from Jericho (Mt 20:29) to Jerusalem was about seventeen miles long and climbed about 3,000 feet in elevation. It passed through Bethany and nearby Bethphage ("house of figs"). Bethphage was situated on the southeast slope of the Mount of Olives. The Roman road crossed over the mount and the Kidron Valley and entered Jerusalem. The Mount of Olives is about 300 feet higher than the hill within Jerusalem upon which the temple is situated, therefore it provides a panoramic view of the city.

The Colt – The entry on a colt was a very deliberate symbol of peace. Normally, a king entered a city as a conqueror riding on a horse. Though all four Gospels include the entry into Jerusalem, only Matthew mentioned a donkey along with a colt. Evidently, when Jesus rode the colt, the mother donkey naturally went along. Matthew quotes portions of Isaiah 62:11 and Zechariah 9:9 and indicates that they were fulfilled by Jesus. The Jews understood these passages to be referring to the Messiah. Therefore, for those with spiritual eyes to see, this action by Jesus would have been a proclamation of His Messiahship in very open and public fashion.

The Multitudes – The words of praise come from Psalm 118:25-26 and "Hosanna" is a transliteration of the Hebrew expression that was originally a cry for help and meant "Save". Over time, it became an invocation of blessing and an acclamation. The people praise God in the highest heavens for sending the Messiah and they cry to him for deliverance. However, there was still plenty of unbelievers present – verse 10 – "all the city was moved, saying, 'Who is this?'". This is certainly consistent with an undercurrent that we have consistently seen throughout Matthew – when Jesus was perceived as the Messiah, He was not perceived as the Suffering Servant. It had been easy for the crowds to ascribe messiahship to Him after hearing Him and seeing His miracles; however, this was most likely based upon a hope in the Messiah's capability to deliver them as much as it was based upon any conviction that fully comprehended the inevitability of His suffering and death. In other words, while multitudes expressed wishful hope in Jesus as the Promised deliverer, the city and its leaders expressed disbelief that such a humble Person could possibly be the deliverer.

Jesus Cleanses the Temple (21:12-17)

Two cleansings of the temple are recorded in Jesus' ministry – one in John 2:14-17 at the beginning of Jesus' ministry and one in the synoptic Gospels at the end of His ministry (Mt 21:12ff). Jesus demonstrates His authority over the corrupt religious leaders. Many were making their living from the temple and the sacrifices purchased there. First, they would exchange common currency for temple currency at a fee. Then, they would sell sacrificial animals at inflated prices. The Lord overturned their tables and disrupted their commercial venture while He quoted parts of two OT verses, i.e. Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11. Then, just to emphasize the point, He healed the blind and the lame who came to Him at the temple. Normally, such individuals were excluded from the temple area, i.e. the Court of the Gentiles.

As Jesus healed the lame and blind, children with impressionable minds witnessed these events and began to sing Jesus' praises. The religious leaders respond with a questioned

designed to prompt Jesus to command them to stop. After all, even Jesus must agree that this was not true about Himself. However, by receiving their praise, Jesus was in effect declaring that He was worthy of praise as their Messiah. The religious leaders, in rejecting Jesus, did not even have the spiritual insight of the children who were receiving Him. Jesus then abandoned the religious leaders and the city.

The Fig Tree Withered (21:18-19)

This event has two lessons for the disciples: 1) a lesson of **faith** and 2) a lesson regarding the **religious leaders** of Israel. Obviously, Jesus is teaching His disciples a lesson regarding faith. If the disciples had genuine faith in Him, they would be able to perform such miracles. By contrast, the religious leaders of Israel had failed to exercise faith in Him. They had all of the outward signs of fruit bearing (the temple, feast days, the Law, priesthood, etc.); however, they bore no fruit. The fig tree had all of the outward signs of fruit bearing; however, it bore no fruit.

Mark notes that “it was not the season for figs” in his narrative. Why should Jesus curse a fig tree for not bearing fruit when it was not the season for fruit? The tree stood out because of its leaves, i.e. signs of fruitbearing. It promised a show of fruitbearing, but actually produced no fruit. I don’t believe that Jesus’ cursing of the fig tree represented a cursing of all of Israel. I believe that Jesus’ cursing of the fig tree represented a cursing of the religious leaders who were hypocrites within Israel. This is more consistent with the narrative and connects very well with the rejection of Jesus by the religious leaders in the previous verses.

Jesus’ Authority Questioned (21:23-27)

By “these things”, the religious leaders were referring to His entry into Jerusalem, His reception of praise from the people, His clearing of the temple, His healing of the blind and the lame and His teaching. The religious leaders understood Jesus was claiming authority as Messiah and wanted to know where He got such authority since He had obviously not received it from them.

The Parable of Two Sons (21:28-32)

While some had seemed to accept the message of John the Baptist (Jn 5:35), their actions (Lu 7:29-30) proved that they were like the second son in Jesus’ parable. On the other hand, many tax collectors and prostitutes received the message of John and would be granted entrance into the kingdom. Jesus leaves the door open for future repentance by the religious leaders when He uses the phrase “enter the kingdom before you” in verse 31.

The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers (21:33-46)

Obviously, Jesus was speaking of the nation of Israel that had been carefully prepared by God to be His fruitful vineyard (Is 5:1-7). The care of the vine had been delegated to the nation’s religious leaders. However, they failed to acknowledge the Master’s (the Heavenly Father’s) authority over them and treated His messengers and prophets badly. They would ultimately even kill His Son, Jesus outside Jerusalem (outside the vineyard).

In verse 43, Jesus makes a prediction that the kingdom of God would be given to a “nation” (nation or people) which would bear the fruits of it [the kingdom]. Many have interpreted this to be a prophecy of the Church which would consist of Jew and Gentile since the Church is on some occasions referred to as a nation (1 Pe 2:9-10). However, I do not believe that Jesus was necessarily predicting the Church here. Rather, I believe that He is referring to that future group of Jews who will in fact believe in Him. Jesus was using the term “nation” in the same sense as the term generation in Matthew 23:36. Because of their rejection, that generation of Israel would

never be able to experience the kingdom. However, a future generation will respond to Him in faith (Ro 11:26-27) and experience the spiritual and physical blessings of kingdom.