

The Church of the Servant King

Mid-Week Bible Study

(Mid Week_Matthew_chp21)

THE ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM (21:1-11)

1 When they had approached Jerusalem and had come to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied there and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to Me. 3 "If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them." 4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

5 "SAY TO THE DAUGHTER OF ZION,
'BEHOLD YOUR KING IS COMING TO YOU,
GENTLE, AND MOUNTED ON A DONKEY,
EVEN ON A COLT, THE FOAL OF A BEAST OF BURDEN.'"

6 The disciples went and did just as Jesus had instructed them, 7 and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid their coats on them; and He sat on the coats. 8 Most of the crowd spread their coats in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in the road. 9 The crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were shouting,

"Hosanna to the Son of David;
BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD;
Hosanna in the highest!"

10 When He had entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?" 11 And the crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee."

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 CLEANSSES THE TEMPLE (21:12-17)

12 And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. 13 And He said to them, "It is written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER'; but you are making it a ROBBERS' DEN." 14 And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. 15 But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became indignant 16 and said to Him, "Do You hear what these children are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'OUT OF THE MOUTH OF INFANTS AND NURSING BABIES YOU HAVE PREPARED PRAISE FOR YOURSELF'?" 17 And He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.

7 Even those I will bring to My holy mountain
And make them joyful in My house of prayer
Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar;
For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples." (Isa 56:7)

11 "Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your sight? Behold, I, even I, have seen it," declares the LORD. (Jer 7:11)

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 question 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 (21:18-22)

18 Now in the morning, when He was returning to the city, He became hungry. 19 Seeing a lone fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it except leaves only; and He said to it, "No longer shall there ever be any fruit from you." And at once the fig tree withered. 20 Seeing this, the disciples were amazed and

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asked, "How did the fig tree wither all at once?" 21 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it will happen. 22 "And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."

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 fruit-bearing. It promised a show of fruit-bearing, 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 was representative of 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)

23 When He entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him while He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?" 24 Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. 25 "The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?" And they began reasoning among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Then why did you not believe him?' 26 "But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the people; for they all regard John as a prophet." 27 And answering Jesus, they said, "We do not know." He also said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

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)

28 "But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go work today in the vineyard.' 29 "And he answered, 'I will not'; but afterward he regretted it and went. 30 "The man came to the second and said the same thing; and he answered, 'I will, sir'; but he did not go. 31 "Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you. 32 "For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him.

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)

33 "Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT AND DUG A WINE PRESS IN IT, AND BUILT A TOWER, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey. 34 "When the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce. 35 "The vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third. 36 "Again he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them. 37 "But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 38 "But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' 39 "They took him, and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. 40 "Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers?" 41 They said to Him, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons." 42 Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures,
'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED,
THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone;
THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD,
AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES'?" 43 "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it. 44 "And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust." 45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them. 46 When they sought to seize Him, they feared the people, because they considered Him to be a prophet.

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” (ἐθνος - 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.