

## *“Behold Your King”*

Matthew 21:1-17

October 25, 2020

Matt 21 is an important chronological marker in the life of Jesus. The triumphal entry, as you know, is just one week prior to Jesus resurrection, and just a handful of days before his crucifixion. What might surprise you is that we are still 5 chapters (and five months of preaching!) away from the beginning events of Jesus’ passion. This is because Jesus did a remarkable amount of dense teaching during the last week of His earthly life (Note that chapters 21-25 are dominantly red!).

So today we begin the final week of Jesus earthly life and ministry, which Jesus inaugurates by deliberately identifying Himself as the Son of David, Israel’s Messiah.

### **SCRIPTURE READING: Matt 21:1-17**

#### **The Presentation of the King (Mt 21:1-7)**

Matthew 21 opens with Jesus deliberately acting out a prophecy in Zechariah 9:9 to visibly identify Himself as the messianic king. He sends his disciples to a neighboring village to bring him a donkey and her colt. Notice the omniscience of Jesus displayed here, not only knowing location of the animals but also the interaction that would transpire between the owner and the disciples. We know from Mark’s gospel, that the colt had never been ridden, which carries symbolic significance, because in ancient times it was not only a kingly privilege to ride a beast of burden, but according to the Mishnah (Jewish oral law), no one else was allowed to ride a king’s horse. To ride an unbroken colt in the midst of an excited crowd, portrays the kind of peace that this king would one day bring to all the earth.

Matthew specifies that Jesus did this as a fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9: “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘behold your king is coming to you, gentle, and mounted on a donkey, even a colt a foal of a beast of burden.’” The context of Zechariah 9 is one of hope. The messianic king is coming, having conquered every enemy, to bring peace to the nations. He is a humble and

gentle King as well as a victorious King, who according to Zechariah, comes endowed with salvation!

It’s interesting that Jesus comes on a “beast of burden.” He didn’t come as a warrior king on a white horse—that will happen in Revelation 19 at His second coming. Rather, He came as a burden-bearer, to bear the weight of our sin and die under its condemnation just a few days later. One day He will establish peace among the nations, but first He would establish peace between God and man for all who own Him as their King.

#### **The Procession of the King (Mt 21:8-11)**

As Jesus makes His kingly procession into Jerusalem, the people laid coats and branches on the road, in keeping with an ancient custom to honor their king (2 Kings 9:13). They give voice to their confidence in Jesus to lead them in triumph as they shout the words of Psalm 118: *“Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!”* There’s no doubt that these words from Psalm 118 were messianic in nature, yet the people were anticipating the kind of messiah who would deliver them from the thumb of Roman rule—one who, in the words of Psalm 118, would “cut off” their enemies as a valiant and triumphant warrior. This, Messiah will do in the end, but first He would fulfill another aspect of Psalm 118 as the “stone which the builders rejected [and] become the chief corner stone.” Remember, Matthew’s Gospel presents Jesus as the royal, rejected, and reigning King. Here in chapter 21 we see His *royalty* as the messianic Son of David fulfilling multiple prophecies. In just a few days, man’s *rejection* will result in His death, yet as Jesus teaches in chapter 24, He will return to earth again to *reign* as the sovereign King, “coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory” (24:30).

As the procession descended on Jerusalem, vs. 10 says “all the city was stirred, saying, “Who is this?” Note that this is not just an exclamation nor a simple question of curiosity. This is probably an expression of alarm. The word used here in vs. 10 (*seio*) is the same word used in Matt 28:4 when the guards at Jesus’ tomb *shook* with fear before they passed out at the sight of the angel of the Lord.

Remember the last time in Matt that the arrival of a king was announced in Jerusalem. Herod slew all the babies under the age of 2. And while Herod is no longer around, consider the tension that would be caused in a Roman controlled city when massive crowds are giving kingly acclaims to a Galilean Jew. Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem would be unwelcomed by both Jewish leaders and Roman authorities alike.

We often emphasize how fickle the crowds of people must have been to sing Hosanna one day and yell, "crucify Him" just a few days later. And indeed, the crowds that followed Jesus didn't fully understand Him and were fickle. Yet, we must not overlook the fact that the crowd that excitedly ushered Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday was not the same crowd that demanded his death in chapter 27. Not only were there significant "tribal" prejudices between Galilee and Judea, but also very different perspectives of Jesus. The Galileans had experienced the power and kindness of Jesus as a healer and provider—nothing was beyond His ability—not to mention the refreshing humility and gentleness of Jesus as a kind shepherd. But the Judeans saw the threat that He posed to Jerusalem's ruthless leaders. To have a Galilean, Jewish King come to town with throngs of enthusiastic followers, could only mean trouble for Jerusalem and all who lived there.

According to the crowds accompanying Jesus, the answer to the question, "who is this" is given in vs. 11: "this is *the prophet* Jesus..." Before we too quickly interpret their response as a deficient understanding of Jesus (a mere prophet), remember they were looking for *the prophet*, one greater than Moses.<sup>1</sup> The Galilean crowds were ready to own Jesus as their Messiah! Yet perhaps none of them were prepared for what happened next.

### **The Purging of the King (Mt 21:12-13)**

**[vs. 12-13]** We know from Mark's Gospel that this is not just a sudden burst of emotion. When Jesus entered the temple on Sunday, He just went in and looked around at what was taking place and left. It is the next day that Jesus returns with a calculated response of judgement and righteous indignation.

Not only is Jesus displaying righteous anger and passion for His Father's proper honor, He is demonstrating authority over the temple and therefore over every Jewish person. Take note of this, because the authority of Jesus will become a significant theme in the next several chapters. In fact, the next time Jesus returns to the temple in vs. 23, He will be greeted with a scathing question by the chief priests: "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave You this authority?" Jesus is acting out of an authority that only belongs to God. As we see the Kings' fury, it brings to mind Malachi 3:1-2: "*The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple....But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and fuller's soap.*"

The charge that Jesus issues is that they have perverted God's house of prayer and made it a den of robbers. Here Jesus is quoting two O.T. passages. The first is Isaiah 56:7 which envisions a day when even foreigners will be made joyful in His house of prayer and their sacrifices will be accepted because it will be a house of prayer for all nations. Interestingly, Isaiah 56 opens with these words: "Preserve justice and do righteousness. For my salvation is about to come and My righteousness will be revealed." Yet the temple is no longer characterized by justice and righteousness. It has become a sham. Jesus is about to bring His salvation through the sacrifice of His own life in just a few days, yet the very temple sacrifices that should foreshadow His own death have become a mockery.

Jesus charges the temple authorities with turning the temple into a robber's den, referencing Jeremiah 7:11. There's no doubt that there was extortion going on, and the temple priests were making an exorbitant amount of profit on those coming to sacrifice for Passover. Money had to be exchanged for the temple tax, but the exchange rates were out of control. Sacrifices were an essential part of Jewish worship, yet those who traveled to Jerusalem and needed to purchase a sacrificial animal for Passover were being price gouged. Certainly, Jesus was angered as He saw them turning worship practices into money-making ventures. Yet there is something deeper going on here than a mere rebuke for their financial practices. Robbers don't steal in the robber's den; they hide there.

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<sup>1</sup> Ex 18:15; Acts 3:22; 7:37

Listen to the context of Jer 7: *"Hear the word of the LORD, all you of Judah, who enter by these gates to worship the LORD!"*

3 *Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, "Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place.*

4 *"Do not trust in deceptive words, saying, 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.'*

5 *"For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly practice justice between a man and his neighbor... then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.*

8 *"Behold, you are trusting in deceptive words to no avail.*

9 *"Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and offer sacrifices to Baal... then come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered!'-- that you may do all these abominations?*

11 *"Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your sight?*

Both Jeremiah and Jesus are condemning temple practices from unrepentant hearts! They are like thieves in a den, hiding out in the temple, hiding behind their religious traditions as a covering for their unwillingness to repent and act justly toward one another. They have made the temple a 'sanctuary' to which religious people can retreat without repentance. Their sacrifices pacify their conscience but don't reconcile them to God. They are hiding behind the pretense/guise of spirituality and temple religion to cover for their wayward hearts.

How easy it is to confess our sin, but have no intent to truly turn from it. We come to the Lord's table and ask forgiveness for known sins, yet we do not put them out of our life. We seek to be reconciled to God, but we do not take the necessary steps to live at peace with one another. For this kind of hypocrisy, God has little patience. In fact, we know from Isaiah 1, that sacrifices and prayer that arise from unrepentant hearts are a stench to God.

What astounding mercy that in just a few days Jesus Himself would offer up the only sacrifice that can truly please God—the offering of His own life. The irony of this moment in the temple is that the King of fury and Lamb of God are one and the same—standing before them, condemning sin and

preparing to be condemned Himself for *their* sin. He will be the perfect, final sacrifice; He will be the high priest who alone can mediate between God and man. And He will be the cornerstone of a living temple in which the Spirit would dwell in the repentant hearts of God's people.

### **The Power & Compassion of the King (Mt 21:14)**

After Jesus purged the temple and condemned the hypocrisy of those who had turned the meeting place with God into a wealth-generating scam for themselves, notice what happened next. Vs. 14 is beautiful!

[vs. 14] What a transformation! From hypocrisy to healing; from abuse to acceptance; from disadvantaged to wholeness; they found themselves standing in the mercy of God because they were in the presence of God. **Jesus Himself is the meeting place with God.** Beloved, He is your true sanctuary and the old temple has become obsolete. And just as the kingdom of God came to those needy, trusting individuals who were blind and lame, so the kingdom of God is granted to all who trust in Jesus as their only source of hope.

### **The Rejection of the King (21:15-16)**

Yet even the wonderful acts of mercy and healing that Jesus did in temple, would not overcome the offense that the scribes and chief priests had taken against Jesus as they children praising Him with Hosannas to the Son of David. Their hard-hearted resistance of Jesus is a prelude to the *rejection* He will face in the days to come as He is handed over for crucifixion.

### **The Praises of the King (21:15-17)**

To the unrepentant religious leaders who were indignant to hear the children praising Jesus, He replied by quoting Psalm 8:2: "Have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies You have prepared praise for Yourself?'" In Psalm 8, *God* is the one preparing praise for Himself through the mouths of children and so Jesus is affirming that it is right for Him to receive such praise, because He is the divine King.

Beloved, behold your King! Here in Matt 21 we have seen Him as the omniscient, humble Shepherd who offers His power and healing mercy to those who joyfully come under His reign, yet we have also seen that we must come to Him on His terms. His fury burns against sin, injustice, and religious charades. But when we come to Him needy, repentant, and trusting, He embraces us, pulls us into the Kingdom and sets us in the favor of our Father's full acceptance.

It's time to come out of our religious hiding places. To stop pretending. To stop using God's grace and forgiveness as a covering to keep on courting our sin. It's time to see the fury of Jesus. It's time to make a calculated choice to deliberately divorce our sin. Only then, can we experience the true healing power and compassion of Christ!