

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

OCT 3RD-4TH, 2020 // BOOK OF MATTHEW

A TRIUMPHAL ENTRY (MATTHEW 21:1-11)

Jesus has been on a journey towards Jerusalem with His followers alongside a group going to the holy city to celebrate Passover. Now they've finally arrived!

- Approaching Jerusalem, Jesus passed through Bethpage (vs. 1) to the east on the Mount of Olives, which looked down on the city and the Kidron Valley.
- To stand on the Mount of Olives was to face the temple and to face the eastern gate into Jerusalem.

Jesus' act of entering Jerusalem in the manner that He did was symbolic of His Kingship.

- Part of that symbolism involved Jesus riding a donkey as He entered the city.
- This was a fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9, which described the savior king of Israel (the Messiah) riding on a donkey to bring salvation.
- His coming would break all instruments of war and bring peace to the "city of peace".

But most Kings rode neither colts nor donkeys, but full-grown, strong, impressive horses.

- Jesus came as a different kind of king—the kind who comes in peace to die and serve.
- Just as a king's huge, spirited war-horse sends a message about the man who rides it, so also Jesus' donkey colt sends a message about Him and His purpose in coming.
- When Jesus comes a 2nd time, He'll ride a white horse to conquer and judge (Rev. 19:11).

Jesus sends two of His disciples ahead to the little village to get a donkey and colt for Him to ride in on.

- The disciples reach the village and find the colt exactly where Jesus had told them it would be and bring it to Jesus (vs. 2-7).
- Ezekiel, saw the glory of the Lord return to the temple via "the gate facing east" (Ezk. 43)

Luke 19:37 says that Jesus "came near the place where the road goes down near the Mount of Olives", and it's implied that Jesus entered in through the eastern gate.

- As He rode into Jerusalem towards the temple, the crowds threw out cloaks and branches (vs. 8) on the road to welcome Him as King.
- They cried out "Hosanna" (vs. 9), which literally means, "save us", quoting Psalm 118:26.

Couple all these things together along with Jesus being referred to by His Messianic title, "Son of David" (vs. 9), and we can imagine why the whole city was "stirred up", "shaken" (vs. 10).

- The residents of Jerusalem weren't familiar with Him and inquired about His identity, to which He was introduced to them as "the prophet" (vs. 11).
- Jesus was entering into God's holy city towards God's temple as God's chosen King, Prophet, and Priest.

CLEANSING THE TEMPLE (MATTHEW 21:12-17)

Based on a prophecy in Mal. 3:1-4, the Jewish people expected the Messiah to come and purify the temple and the people of Jerusalem.

- The prophecy speaks of God's messenger restoring the worship life of the people of God and purifying the priests.
- But now Jesus will fulfill that prophecy in a way that is unexpected.
- This was Passover week- so the temple complex was a busy area!

During the week of Passover, Jerusalem would swell up to 5 or 6 times its usual size.

- Worshipers would come in from all over the world to celebrate the feast that would remind them of when God rescued their fathers from slavery and brought salvation through the blood of a lamb-Jesus as the lamb of God would inaugurate a new and greater exodus.

Jews coming to worship from all over Israel for Passover needed animals to sacrifice- and it was easier for many of them to buy them in Jerusalem rather than travel with them.

- Selling animals for sacrifice wasn't wrong, but it was where (in the temple complex) and how ("money-changers") this practice was taking place that infuriated Jesus so much that he overturned their "tables and seats" (vs. 12).

The priesthood and religious leaders of that time most likely gained a healthy profit from sales in the temple.

- Jesus' disruption of their business was an attack on one of their sources of wealth!
- Referencing Isa. 56:7 & Jer. 7:10, Jesus said to them, "It is written, 'My house will be called a house of prayer', but you've made it into a den of thieves!" (vs. 13).

The outer court ("court of the Gentiles") was intended to be a place where people from all nations could come and learn from Israel about the one true, God and commune with Him through prayer.

- This was the original intent of the temple- but the religious leader's greed had turned it into a "den of thieves" where people were exploited & taken advantage of in the name of God.

After Jesus clarifies God's intention for the temple, the priests look over and see a group of the blind and lame surrounding Jesus as He lays His hands on them and heals them (vs. 14).

- This is equally as stunning- blind and lame people were considered unclean and unwelcome in the temple!
- Then children, another "unworthy" group, begin to cry out praise to Jesus (vs. 15).

This is all too much for the religious leaders, who try to point out this blasphemous "error" to Jesus, who simply points to them to Psalm 8:2 (vs. 16).

- The praise of the children made it blatantly obvious that Jesus was the Son of the David- the Messianic King, Prophet, and Priest.
- But the presence of Jesus in their midst threatened their control- which is one of the reasons they sought to kill Him.

WHAT DOESN'T GOD WANT FOR HIS HOUSE?

- Church activity to be a form of entertainment, revenue, or exploitation of the sick, old, or gullible.
- Cliques or social structures that exclude or bar people from certain people groups.
- Routine or ritual for the sake of tradition.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT FOR HIS HOUSE?

- Prayer, in all of its forms, as the key activity (Isa. 56:7, 1 Tim. 2:1)
- People from all walks of life being welcomed, loved, and helped (Matt. 21:14)
- Power from God working to change lives (Eph. 3:20)

THE FIG TREE (MATTHEW 21:18-22)

After a night in Bethany, Jesus returned to Jerusalem and "became hungry" (vs. 18).

- As was the right of any Jew under Mosaic law, Jesus looked for some breakfast in a fig tree growing by the road.
- Because the tree had leaves, Jesus assumed it would have fruit- but there was no fruit.
- The tree's promise was empty.

In disgust, Jesus pronounces a curse on the tree and it immediately withers (vs. 19).

- This is a bit disturbing, as it's the only destructive miracle ever attributed to Jesus. Was Jesus just hangry? Does He just hate fig trees?
- The story nothing to do with fig trees- the tree is only a symbol of the temple, which appeared fruitful like the leaves on the tree. But in reality, it was barren and dead.

Under the "leaves" of the showy and outward religion of the Jewish leaders, there were barren and unbelieving hearts.

- True fruit wasn't being produced- the nations weren't being welcomed into God's house for prayer, the poor and needy weren't being taken care of, and when God's power showed up all the priests saw were broken rules.
- God cares deeply about the fruit of our lives.

Fruit reveals identity- you don't pick grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles (Matt. 7:16).

- It's false advertising for us to claim a relationship with God through Christ and live a life that looks nothing like Christ and does nothing that He's commanded us to do.
- Who we truly are is revealed more by how we live rather than we say about ourselves- if we're not producing fruit, there's an issue!

The disciples were amazed by this miracle!

- Jesus turns this miracle into a teachable moment as He tells that if that only have faith and believe, God will respond to their every request and prayer and they'll too be empowered to do amazing things (vs. 21-22).
- Jesus meant for us to assume that mountain-moving faith is not to be exercised in frivolous, showy ways like Christian magicians.

Real faith and effective prayer is an expression of our powerlessness and dependence on God- the more mature we are, the more we realize how weak we are.

- True faith is keeping with God's will, based on intimacy with God, and grounded in an understanding of the Father's heart and will.
- When we know God's heart and share the mind of Christ, we want what He wants and ask for His will and His kingdom to be done through us.

THE RETURN OF THE KING

Jesus came looking for fruit, but instead found barren, dead, self-centered, lifeless religion.

Rev. 3:1-2- "Wake up...strengthen...remember...obey...repent."

- The most dangerous threat to your spiritual walk is complacency- spiritual sleep.
- We fight against complacency by worship, obedience, accountability.

"If Jesus were to return RIGHT NOW, what kind of fruit would He find in MY life?"