

# GOD WITH US

## Part 8: JESUS

### Message 21 – KING: Triumph and Trouble Matthew 21 & 22

#### Introduction

At the beginning of Passover Week Jesus came into Jerusalem, accompanied by a huge crowd celebrating the arrival of the man they hoped would be their King. This event is commonly called “the triumphal entry,” and it is recorded in all 4 gospels (Matt.21; Mark 11; Luke 19; John 12), each with their own unique emphasis. Following Jesus’ arrival, He encountered resistance from the religious leaders who had already decided that they must find a way to put Him to death. Thus, although the triumphal entry is a major event, the gospel writers focus more attention on the events that happened *after* Jesus’ arrival, in His conflict with the religious leaders. After this conflict reached a peak, Jesus delivered His great hypocrisy sermon (only found in Matthew 23) where He condemned the religious leaders for misleading the people and rejecting God’s plan for their salvation. In these notes, we will focus primarily on the “triumph and trouble” themes found in Matthew 21-22.

#### **The Triumphal Entry: Matthew 21:1-11**

As was customary for visiting kings, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a “red carpet” of clothing and palm branches, with thousands of Passover pilgrims lining the road heralding His arrival:

*A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of Him and those that followed shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!” (21:8,9).*

The fact that He rode on a donkey indicated that He came to offer terms of peace. Had He ridden in on a large horse, He would have been coming to demand surrender and/or to threaten war. The word “hosanna” means “save us now.” The crowds were chanting lines from Psalm 118:25,26. Numerous Psalms of Ascent were used as songs to welcome pilgrims who were making the final ascent up the mountain to the city of Jerusalem. In Jesus’ case, the

Passover crowds were welcoming Him as the long-awaited “Son of David” who would save them from their enemies. Their expectations were high, yet misguided.

Comparing the other gospel accounts, we see that several other things happened during the triumphal entry:

1) The religious leaders demanded that Jesus stop His followers from singing the hosanna song, to which Jesus replied that if the people stopped singing, the stones would sing (Luke 19:39,40).

2) Jesus stopped and wept over the city of Jerusalem and its inhabitants, since they did not grasp what He needed to do to bring them peace with God (Luke 19:41-44).

3) Lazarus was with Jesus in the processional, and huge crowds came out to see both Lazarus and Jesus. The religious leaders were disturbed by the multitudes’ praise of Jesus (Jn. 12:17-19).

*Misguided expectations of God. We have them even today. We expect God to act in certain ways; or to show up in our lives in ways that we feel are right and/or deserved. What expectations do you have of God that might be misguided? Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal some things to you and, if you can, surrender these expectations to God saying, “not my will, but Thy will be done.”*

### **Jesus drives the moneychangers out of the Temple: 21:12-17**

*Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. “It is written,” He said to them, “My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it ‘a den of robbers’” (21:12,13).*

(See notes on pp.903-904 on the moneychangers.) This corrupt business was run by the family of the High Priests and the revenues were used to pay Rome for the right to continue holding their offices. The exchange rates for ‘temple coinage’ were exorbitant; yet people had to exchange Roman money for temple money if they wanted to buy sacrificial animals for their worship rituals. Such a corrupt system was abhorrent to Jesus, thus His display of righteous anger. Matt.21:17 indicates that Jesus was spending evenings in Bethany, a small village just 2 miles from Jerusalem (probably at the home of Lazarus, Martha and Mary).

*Clearly, there were certain aspects of the worship life in Israel that Jesus was not pleased with; thus, His driving out of the money changers who were selling sacrificial animals. Greed and pride were at the root. If Jesus came to you today, what might He find displeasing in your life? What might He want to “drive out” so that your worship of Him might be more pleasing and pure? Who have you given permission to point out the ‘roots’ of behaviors you are blind to? Ask Jesus to show you what your “money-changers” are that are disrupting and polluting your worship of Him. WORSHIP as a way of life 7 days a week is our #1 trait of a true disciple of Jesus at OPC. ‘Blessed are the pure in heart’. Let’s make sure HE is pleased with our worship.*

### **Jesus curses the fig tree: Matthew 21:18-22**

The cursing of the fig tree, at the beginning of Jesus’ passion week, is also recorded by Mark (who shows that it was a 2-day process for the tree to completely wither). While Jesus used this as an example of God’s ability to do miracles upon our asking in faith, it had a deeper significance in Jewish culture. The fig tree was a symbol of the Jewish nation in the Old Testament (Jeremiah 8:13; Hosea 9:10). The fact that the tree was barren of fruit pictures the barrenness of spiritual fruit in the lives of the Jewish leaders in particular, at the time of Jesus. (Note how it is placed next to the cleansing of the Temple.) The withering of the tree pictures God’s judgment on Israel for their spiritual barrenness, and for failing to welcome Jesus as the God-sent Messiah – a fitting symbolic act at the beginning of a week that would end in His death. Jesus predicted the ‘withering’ of the nation of Israel, and the nation’s fall to oppressors, who would come soon after He ascended, because they didn’t recognize Him.

### **Jesus’ Authority Challenged: Matthew 21:23-27.**

The chief priests and elders owned and operated the temple marketplace. They challenged Jesus’ authority because of His actions in “their house” (they were in charge of the Temple, not Him). Jesus refused to answer their question as to the source of His authority. Instead, He asked them a question:

***“John’s baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?” (21:25).***

The people highly respected John the Baptist. The leaders could

not answer Jesus' question without indicting themselves, because they had refused to repent and acknowledge their personal need for God's forgiveness that John challenged them on.

### **Three Parables Condemning the Leaders: Matt. 21:28 – 22:14**

In a sequence of powerful parables, Jesus held the religious leaders accountable for their disobedience to God, their pride, their misleading of the people, *and* their rejection of Him as Messiah.

- **The parable of the two sons: Matthew 21:28-32** Two sons are contrasted: One son *said* he would work, but didn't. One son said he would not work, *but later decided to work*. Jesus explained:

*“Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him” (21:31,32).*

- **The parable of the wicked tenant farmers: 21:33-46** Tenant farmers lived off the land of a landowner, while also giving the owner a percentage of the fruits. These wicked tenant farmers wanted to own the vineyard for themselves, thus they kept mistreating servants the owner sent to them to receive his share of the harvest (picturing the O.T. prophets that God had sent to Israel, up to and including John the Baptist.) Finally, the owner sent his own son, expecting that the tenant farmers would receive him. Instead, they killed him and tried to take the field for themselves (picturing what the religious leaders were in the process of plotting to do with Jesus, God's Son, as they sought to protect their own positions of authority in Israel). Jesus explained:

*Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’? Therefore, I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.” When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew He was talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest Him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that He was a prophet (21:42-46).*

- **The parable of the royal wedding banquet: 22:1-14** The people who *should have eagerly welcomed* the king's invitation to the wedding feast *rejected it*. They mistreated the messengers who brought the banquet invitations to them. On the other hand, ordinary people out on the streets gladly welcomed the invitation to join in the king's party for his son. Tax-collectors and sinners were flocking to hear and embrace Jesus' message; while the leaders were scorning and rejecting Him. To this parable, Jesus adds an interesting twist: a person sneaking in to the wedding banquet without being properly dressed:

***“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless.’ Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are invited, but few are chosen” (22:11-14).***

There will be some who try act like they are part of the kingdom of heaven without having a true, repentant, life-changing relationship with God (i.e., without the proper clothing). They will quickly be sorted out from true believers and dismissed from the heavenly party. Once again, the leaders had the “appearance” of being righteous; but they did not have hearts that pleased God; while many of the “sinners” had true, repentant hearts welcoming the message of salvation. (On a similar theme, see Matthew 7:21-23 where Jesus spoke about those who falsely claimed to be *with Him*; and Matthew 13 with the parable of the wheat and the tares.)

### **Three Question for Jesus: Matthew 22:15-46**

After Jesus told these parables denouncing the religious leaders, they attempted to catch Him in a trap by throwing various impossible questions at Him. They figured that if they could discredit Him in the eyes of the people, He would quickly lose His following and His influence. Their questions came from different groups attacking Jesus from their own angles.

- **The Taxation Question: 22:15-22** The Pharisees, who were anti-Rome, decided to trap Jesus by asking if they should pay taxes to Caesar. If He answered YES, they could accuse Him of being an enemy of God; if He answered NO, an enemy of Caesar.

***But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap Me? Show Me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought Him a denarius, and He asked them, “Whose image is this?” And whose inscription? “Caesar’s,” they replied. Then He said to them, “So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” When they heard this, they were amazed. So, they left Him and went away (22:18-22).***

Be a good citizen of the kingdom of man by honoring those who have been appointed as your rulers. And be a good citizen of the kingdom of heaven by honoring God as your highest King. These are the dual duties of the Christian living in the world today. (See Romans 13:1-7 where Paul wrote about submission to governing authorities, including paying taxes.) The only time that Christians are permitted to say “NO” to governing authorities is when obedience to earthly rulers would require disobedience to the commands given to us by our heavenly King. (For an example of this, read Acts 4:19,20 where Peter and John refused to submit to the order to stop speaking about Jesus.)

**- The Marriage-in-heaven Question: 22:23-33** The Sadducees were the anti-super naturalists. They did not believe in angels, spirits, the after-life, etc. The O.T. Law of levirate marriage required that a childless widow be taken as a wife by the deceased man’s brother, to raise up offspring through her. The Sadducees proposed the impossible equation: One woman had 7 successive brothers as husbands, with each one dying off before producing any offspring through her. The question: IF there is an afterlife, THEN which man will be her husband?

***Jesus replied, “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.” When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching (22:29-33).***

Jesus showed them that their question was built upon a faulty presupposition about the afterlife – namely, that it would be an extension/continuation of roles and institutions from this life (like marriage). He told them that there would be *no marriage* in

heaven, just as angels do not marry; thus, there was no issue as to who would be the woman's husband. Then, Jesus quickly challenged *their lack of belief in the afterlife*. How could God be the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (in the present tense) IF there was no afterlife (since Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did not live concurrently)?

**- The Greatest Commandment Question: 22:34-40.** An unnamed "lawyer" (Jewish scribe) brought a question about the "greatest commandment." This question was part of an ongoing debate within the scholarly community as they sought to rank the 100s of O.T. laws and regulations in order of importance. Jesus replied simply and clearly, not only giving the #1 commandment in the O.T., but also throwing in #2 free of charge.

***Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (22:37-40).***

Love God . . . Love People. It is that simple. So . . . how are you doing at those 2 commandments? If you made a list right now of what you could do to LOVE GOD MORE, what would be on that list? If you made a list of 3 people you could LOVE BETTER this week, who would be on that list? If loving God and loving people is really the whole Bible in a nutshell, it's worth taking some time to ponder those two questions. By doing so, you will be honoring the words of Jesus and living out the top 2 commandments given by God.

### **Jesus asks His opponents one question: Matthew 22:41-46**

Jesus' opponents had been unable to trip Him up with their questions. But in any debate, it is fair for the questions *to go both ways*. So, Jesus decided to ask His opponents 1 question, derived from David's words in Psalm 110:1.

***While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, "What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is He?" "The son of David," they replied. He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls Him 'Lord'? For he says, "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 can He be his son?"***

How can the son of David be the Lord of David? They were stumped by the human AND divine character of the Messiah.

***No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask Him any more questions! (23:41-46).***

The debates were over. While the religious leaders had hoped to discredit Jesus in these exchanges, the result that His reputation as a wise man was enhanced. In turn, Jesus gave His most condemning sermon after these confrontations (see Matthew 23). Notice how He ended, *weeping over the stubborn rebellion and resistance of His people.*

***“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see Me again until you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord’” (Mt.23:37-39).***

That last line is from Psalm 118:26 – *the same line the crowds were singing at Jesus’ “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem at the beginning of the week!* Now Jesus says: A day is coming when you will sing that song again . . . but the next time, you will truly understand Who this King is Who comes in the name of the Lord! (He was referring to His 2<sup>nd</sup> coming, at the end of the age.)

### **Discussion Questions**

1. People had misguided expectations of Jesus when they sang the “Hosanna” song (save us now!). How do we have misguided expectations of Jesus today? How do we demand Him to ‘save us now’ when He knows the ‘right time’ for His answers?
2. Jesus gave 3 parables condemning the religious leaders. Which of the 3 do you think hit them the hardest? Why?
3. In the parable of the king’s wedding banquet for his son, some who were not expected to be invited at all accepted the invitation. Think about your sphere of influence. Who are you reaching out to with the invitation to come to the King’s banquet for His Son, Jesus?
4. Jesus’ opponents asked Him 3 difficult questions. What most impresses you about the ways that Jesus answered? What did you personally learn from His answers that you did not already know?