

Matthew 21:1-17 – “Here Comes the King”

Matthew 21 now brings us to the final week of Jesus’ ministry. He’s been preparing His disciples for this. He’s been letting them know this is what is awaiting Him, yet the events of this week still seems to have taken many of them by surprise.

This is an important passage as we have this recorded in each of the 4 gospels.

Summary Statement: The Triumphal Entry establishes Jesus as the true King who comes in peace. However not everyone was ready to receive Him in this way.

This chapter brings us to another division we see in the book of Matthew.

1. The **Revelation** of the King (1-10)
2. The **Rebellion** of the King (11-13)
3. The **Retreating** of the King (14-20)
4. The **Rejection** of the King (21-27)
5. The **Resurrection** of the King (28)

21:1-3 - *Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came 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, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me. ³ And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord has need of them,’ and immediately he will send them.”*

Jesus is approaching the end of His ministry, His mission is just about completed. He’s coming into Jerusalem and He’s been preparing His disciples for this trip. There’s expectancy and anticipation of what this may mean. They’re thinking this is when Jesus is going to take His place on the throne. The disciples have been jockeying for the best positions in the kingdom (Matthew 20:21).

Jesus’ coronation must be on the horizon is what’s in their minds.

But things are going to unfold in a very different way.

Jesus isn’t heading for a coronation; He’s heading to a crucifixion. He’s days away, and yet He willingly comes to Jerusalem now to present Himself as the King knowing it’s going to cause people to want to kill Him.

What's interesting is this is happening on the 10th day of Nisan. This is all leading up to Passover. What was significant of the 10th of Nisan? This is when Jewish families who were celebrating Passover would choose a lamb to be sacrificed. It would be carefully watched and inspected for the next 4 days to be sure it was free of blemishes and defects.

As the city of Jerusalem would swell with visitors coming to celebrate the Passover, lambs would have been seen in plenty, and the sound of bleating heard far and wide. And it's in this scene that the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world enters in to complete His work and give His life as a sacrifice for humanity.

Now before they enter Jerusalem, they come to the Mount of Olives which overlooks Jerusalem from the east. Bethphage is there and opposite Bethphage is Bethany. Bethany became a bit of a headquarters for Jesus during this last week. It was the home of Lazarus, Mary and Martha.

Jesus then sends two of His disciples to retrieve a donkey and a colt from Bethphage. We don't know what the setup was for this interaction. Had Jesus made arrangements with the owner before this? Was this somebody Jesus knew would have a willingness to serve the Lord?

As far as we know the disciples have no idea how this is going to unfold. They're probably thinking, ***'if anyone says anything to you?? Of course they will. We're stealing a donkey!'***

But they went in obedience (vs. 6). There's a lesson in that for us. How often do we question something the Lord asks and think, *'this doesn't make sense'*. Or we question the logistics and how it will all work out.

- But Jesus has all things worked out. He doesn't send you on failed missions. When we follow God's Word in obedience we'll see things fall into place. No matter how it works out, our obedience is the success no matter the outcome.
- Luke 19:32 reminds us that these disciples *'found it just as He had said to them.'*

This again is a clear example of the divine omniscience and foreknowledge of Jesus. He knows all things. He knows what's going on in your heart, in your thoughts, in the secret place. Nothing is hidden from Him. That either brings great comfort to you or great terror. I pray it's a comforting reality for you today.

And as they retrieve this donkey and colt, the owner did ask what was going on, but the disciples responded just as they were told to do – ***the Lord has need of them.***

This would have been a strong declaration to the person of Jesus. Again, this term Lord was equivalent to Jehovah. Jesus is more and more letting people see who He truly is.

All of these things are fulfilling Scripture and identifying Jesus to be the Promised One, the long awaited for Messiah that the Old Testament Scriptures prophesied of. Many have seen the things Jesus has done in the Galilee region. But Jesus hasn't spent a lot of time in Jerusalem. There's still many that don't know fully who He is. In fact, this is the first time Matthew records Jesus being in Jerusalem, though we know He did visit here at other times.

This is the purpose of the Triumphal Entry, it's to make a public revelation of who Jesus is.

21:4-5 - *All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: ⁵ "Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your King is coming to you, Lowly, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.'* "

This very scene that is unfolding in Matthew 21 was prophesied some hundreds of years earlier. In Scripture it's estimated that there are over 300 prophecies of the Messiah that were fulfilled by Jesus. The chances of one person fulfilling just 8 is 1 to the 17th power (that's 1 with 17 0's after it). It's an astronomical number.

- There are many books today that claim to be of divine origin. But none of them (aside from the Bible) has any claim to fulfilled prophecy. The Bible however has hundreds of specific detailed prophecies that have come to pass just as they claimed – hundreds of years after it was written!

And this passage in Zechariah 9:9 is one of them. But there's a bit of a change up, Matthew leaves out some key phrases.

- **Zechariah 9:9**, *"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey."*
- **Rejoice greatly** is not in Matthew's quotation. This would not be a time of rejoicing. Though there will be great fan fare to begin with, we know how the week will unfold. It will end with the cries of *Crucify Him!* The people were unwilling to accept Him (in large part) as their Messiah. Jesus will weep over the city because of their unwillingness to receive Him (Matthew 23:37; Luke 19:41-42).

- ***He is just and having salvation*** is also not in Matthew's quote. Yes, Jesus came to save and show grace, but many rejected Him. There will come a day at His second coming (the true Triumphal Entry) when the lost sheep of Israel will recognize Him and He will bring salvation to those who repent and judgment to those who continue in rebellion (Zechariah 12:10; 14:3-9, 11).

I love how it says, ***Behold, your King is coming to you, Lowly, and sitting on a donkey...***

It's not a scene that would typically inspire strength and dominance. He's lowly and riding on a donkey. Jesus comes with humility. It's strength under control. He's not needing to flex His muscles or wield a sword. This is an entrance of peace.

21:6-7 - So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. 7 They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set Him on them.

These disciples acted in obedience, and they came with the donkey and the colt. They sat Jesus upon this colt. Luke's gospel tells us this colt had never had anyone sit on it before.

- Now imagine what it would be like to sit on an animal that is not used to having anyone on it. That animal is typically going to freak out! It's going to be welcome to the Rodeo! But that's not the scene here.
- This colt is completely in submission to Jesus – carrying his Creator into Jerusalem. You'd have to think he was fulfilling what he was created for. And this colt enjoyed the ride of his life. Imagine, carrying Jesus into Jerusalem, the crowds singing out. He could have gone with his natural instinct and bucked and heehawed the whole way. But he enjoyed a smooth ride.
- It's the way it can be for us too. We can either buck and fight and make some noise, or we can bring ourselves into submission of the One who made us. One way is a bumpy unenjoyable ride, the other results in a peaceful ride. Which ride are you on today?

Now you may think it's kind of odd to come riding in on a colt, the foal of a donkey. Couldn't you have done something a little more regal or majestic Jesus? How about a white stallion, or a chariot with all the bells and whistles (get the hydraulics going, lights underneath, stereo blasting). Why a donkey?

- Though the Romans had a particular pageantry to their victorious triumphal return from war, it was a common Jewish practice for a king to ride in on a donkey when coming in peace. If he were going to war, a horse was indeed the right choice.
- Jesus came on a donkey because He was coming with an offer of peace. Peace by dying on the cross to pay the penalty for their sin and ours. Jesus not only shows His kingship coming in on a donkey, but He depicts the nature of His reign, one of peace and humility. His reign is not marked with violence but gentleness.
- But make no mistake about it, He will return a second time and this time He returns riding a white horse and a sword proceeds from His mouth by which He declares war on those in rebellion to Him. He came the first time as a Servant King, but He will return as the Conquering King.

21:8-9 - *And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: "Hosanna to the Son of David! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!' Hosanna in the highest!"*

Just as the disciples took their cloaks and put it on the donkey, so too the crowds took their cloaks and spread them on the road, laying out the red carpet treatment for Jesus. Some took palm branches and spread them out too. This is why it's called Palm Sunday.

The crowds began to sing out a familiar Messianic Psalm that was often sung around Passover: **Psalm 118:25–26**, *"Save now, I pray, O Lord; O Lord, I pray, send now prosperity. ²⁶ Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! We have blessed you from the house of the Lord."*

Save now, is what the crowds were desiring at this moment. The term **Hosanna** means, *save now!* They were hoping for Jesus to be their political Messiah, the one to overthrow Roman rule and oppression. They've been waiting for this. They're out there waving Palm branches which was a very patriotic, nationalistic thing to do. They're wearing their red Make Israel Great Again yarmulka's. But as we've already seen, Jesus was coming with an entirely different mission. He wasn't coming to save them from a political entity, He was coming to save them from a spiritual enemy. The greatest need was to save them from their sin.

- Though they wanted a king to take back the throne of David, they needed a Saviour to rule from the throne of their hearts.

This is why so many turned within a few days from singing *Hosanna*, to *Crucify Him!*

This is why we must be willing to set aside our preconceived notions and let our perspectives be reshaped by the Word of God.

- Are we those that go to the Lord with the attitude of *save now. Do this now Jesus*. Do we praise the Lord for what we hope to get from it. Are we seeking Jesus to benefit selfishly?
- May our praise and devotion to Jesus not be circumstantial. Too many people have turned to Jesus out of wrong motives or misguided desires and have become disillusioned when He didn't meet their demands.
- Jesus has come to take care of our greatest need – our sin. He has brought us back into peace with God. That is reason enough to praise Him in good or bad until the day we die.

Here's Jesus for the first time in His ministry accepting and receiving such widespread praise. We read in Luke's gospel that the Pharisees became indignant, especially with the crowds attributing Psalm 118 to Jesus (they knew it was a Messianic Psalm, they just didn't like Jesus as the Messiah). And Jesus said, *'I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out.'* (Luke 19:40)

Jesus allowed this praise for a couple reasons. First of all, to fulfill prophecy as mentioned earlier. Secondly, to lead the religious leaders to have Him killed.

- "When Jesus rode into the city, He proclaimed His Kingship, but He also signed His own death warrant." ¹

21:10-11 - *And when He had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, "Who is this?" ¹¹ So the multitudes said, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee."*

It's interesting to read that *all the city was moved*. They were moved with excitement for what they hoped was going to change for them. But the change they wanted was not the change Jesus had for them at that time.

It's only when we surrender our lives to the reign of Jesus that we will truly be moved. Moved with a love and a joy that comes by a life captivated by Him. I

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). *Wiersbe's expository outlines on the New Testament* (p. 130). Victor Books.

pray He has your heart today; that you are truly moved by who He is. Have you answered that question, ***Who is this?***

And the people should have known who this is because this day was prophesied some 600 years before this (Daniel 9:24-26).

Much of the crowd just saw Jesus as a prophet. Yet this noteworthy statement provides the picture of Jesus fulfilling the Old Testament as the perfect prophet, priest and king. We've already seen Him as the King (21:5), but now we see Him taking the role of priest in the temple.

21:12-13 - Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. ¹³ And He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.' "

There was quite a scam going on in the temple at this time. People were required to bring their sacrifices, but they also had to be examined by a priest. Well, the priest would find a flaw and make them go and buy a new sacrifice there (usually a dove). And in the temple your Roman money was no good, you had to exchange it for the Temple shekel, but they would charge an exorbitant exchange rate. They were ripping people off. Instead of this being a place of worship and prayer, the priests were preying on and profiting off of the people.

Jesus quotes from Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11. In saying, "*My house*" Jesus was once again affirming His authority and deity. He has the right to say these things because He is the Lord of the temple.

The priests and Jewish leaders would have been shocked to see this being done in the temple. They maybe thought, who does He think He is. Does He have authority to do this? As a matter of fact, He does. This is the house of the Lord Jesus.

We're told in Scripture that we are the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16). Are we allowing things in that are corrupting or defiling? Are there things that need to be overturned and cleansed? May we live in constant communion with God, where our lives are a house of prayer rather than a den of thieves.

21:14-17 - Then the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. ¹⁵ But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” they were indignant ¹⁶ and said to Him, “Do You hear what these are saying?” And Jesus said to them, “Yes. Have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise’?” ¹⁷ Then He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and He lodged there.”

Jesus continued ministering to people but the more good He did, the more upset the religious leaders got. When the children sang out praise that was reserved for the Messiah, they thought this was His opportunity to silence them and deny His divine position. But Jesus didn't silence them. He accepted their praise, once again affirming His deity and Messiahship.

- Sadly the religious leaders weren't upset about greed in the temple but about praise to Jesus.
- Jesus quotes from Psalm 8:2 which is a Psalm all about the praise of God. In receiving this praise (even from babes) He was deliberately accepting praise that God alone is due. Jesus is making a bold statement about who He is in front of these religious leaders. He's forcing their hand, and it's one that's going to carry out the greatest of travesties. Yet it was ordained of God to bring about our salvation.

Has praise been perfected from us? That only happens when we stop trying to demand Jesus to do what we think needs to be done, and we lovingly worship Him because of all He's already done.

Points to Ponder:

1. The Triumphal Entry reminds us that Jesus is fulfilling Scripture so accurately and completely. God's Word can be trusted fully.
2. The Triumphal Entry shows us that Jesus will often move in ways that are not in line with our expectations, but results in a better outcome.
3. The cleansing of the temple reminds us to examine our own lives. Have we allowed corruption to creep in that dishonors the Lord and hinders our fellowship with Him?