

Teachings of Jesus

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

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Jesus' Teaching in the Gospel of Matthew (Part XI)

21:1-6, The Triumphal Entry

Barclay:

"Jesus could not have chosen a more dramatic moment; it was into a city surging with people keyed up with religious expectations that he came."

Carson:

"The applause and the crowds were not manipulated; they would have occurred in any case. But the ride on a colt, because it was planned, could only be an acted parable, a deliberate act of self-disclosure... Secrecy was being lifted."

Interestingly, the text of Zechariah 9 mentions just one animal, not two.

Carson again:

"If we assume that Matthew understood Hebrew, the full quotation affirms that Jesus rode on the 'colt,' not its mother. Mark and Luke say the animal was so young that it had never been ridden. In the midst, then, of this excited crowd, an unbroken animal remains calm under the hands of the Messiah who controls nature."

Spurgeon:

"What a singular conjunction of words is here, 'the Lord' and 'hath need!' Jesus, without laying aside his sovereignty, had taken a nature full of needs; yet, being in need, he was still the Lord and could command his subjects and requisition their property."

All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet: Jesus deliberately worked to fulfill prophecy here. His "need" was not that of a physical need like fatigue, but instead was that of needing to fulfill what was written concerning the Messiah.

Your King is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey: Jesus came to Jerusalem as the Prince of Peace, in humility, yet with dignity. He came on a colt, instead of on a powerful horse, which would have been customary for royalty.

Poole:

Donkeys were at one time animals that people of status would ride on (Judges 10:4; 12:14). But after Solomon's reign the Jews obtained and started riding horses; so, like most of the rest of the world, at that point it was as only poor people rode upon asses, mostly reserved for burdens."

21:7-11, Jesus accepts adoration as the Messiah

Laid their clothes on them...spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road: All this was done in recognition of Jesus as a great person coming into Jerusalem in the season of Passover. Some recognized him as Messiah, many more as a great teacher, prophet and miracle worker.

From a worldly (or Roman) perspective, though, there was no real threat to the established order here, no reason to fear that this man would ever be an upset to the order of Caesar, or a challenger to the might of the Roman army.

Hosanna to the Son of David! This was the openly Messianic adoration of Jesus. They look to Jesus for salvation. "Hosanna" transliterates the Hebrew expression that originally was a cry for help, and means "save!" or "save now!", and was addressed to kings, e.g. 2 Samuel 14:4, 2 Kings 6:26.

By accepting this adoration, Jesus also showed that He wasn't afraid of the chief priests and the Pharisees. He knew they were plotting His death, but they could not know that was God's plan for His Messiah.

This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee: This continues the earlier identification of Jesus with Nazareth (Matthew 2:23). It would sound strange to many – especially to the religious establishment – that a prophet, let alone a great one, would come from the rather obscure city of Nazareth.

21:12-13 Jesus Cleanses the Temple

Drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple: This seems to be a different event from the cleansing of the temple courts described in John 2:13-22, which happened near the beginning of Jesus' ministry. But the purpose of the two events was the same, to drive out the merchants, who – with the knowledge and cooperation of the priests! -- cheated visitors to Jerusalem by selling them “approved” sacrificial animals at inflated prices.

Barclay notes, “A pair of doves could cost as little as 4p outside the Temple and as much as 75p inside the Temple.”

Note that Jesus' anger was against those who bought as well as those who sold. Jesus' action here is another, striking, form of teaching – that the entire established religious order and support of it was in need of reform, and was not in any way the source of salvation!

But this is not a call to violent overthrow; God alone (“My house”) reserves that right.

Spurgeon:

“I do not believe we shall thoroughly purify any church by Acts of Parliament, nor by reformation associations, nor by agitation, nor by any merely human agency. No hand can grasp the scourge that can drive out the buyers and sellers, but that hand which once was fastened to the cross. Let the Lord do it and the work will be done, for it is not of man, nor shall man accomplish it.”

My house shall be called a house of prayer: These merchants operated in the outer courts of the temple, which was the only area where Gentiles could come and pray. Therefore, this place of prayer had been turned into a marketplace, and a dishonest one (a ‘den of thieves’) at that!

i. Mark's record contains the more complete quotation of Jesus' reference to Isaiah 56:7: Is it not written, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations?” (Mark 11:17). The point was that Isaiah prophesied, and Jesus demanded that the temple be a place for all nations to pray. The activity of all those who bought and sold in the outer courts made it impossible for any seeking Gentile to come and pray.

ii. “In that uproar of buying and selling and bargaining and auctioneering prayer was impossible. Those who sought God’s presence were being debarred from it from the very people of God’s House.” (Barclay)

21:14-17, Jesus’ Compassion, and the Indignation of the Jewish Leaders

The blind and the lame came to Him: Jesus might’ve scared away the corrupt merchants and money changers when He drove them out the temple courts, but even that did not discourage the needy from coming to Him with their requests for healing.

The blind and the lame were restricted to the “court of the Gentiles”; they could not go closer to the temple proper, and were not allowed to approach the altar to offer sacrifices. After purging the court of the Gentiles of merchants and robbers, Jesus was now free to minister to the outcasts who had congregated there.

They were indignant: This was the chief priests’ response to the wonderful things that Jesus did. Greed and corruption in the temple courts didn’t bother them, but praise of Jesus did!

Regarding the praises of children, Clarke notes:

“It was a common thing among the Jews for the children to be employed in public acclamations; and thus they were accustomed to hail their celebrated rabbis. This shouting of the children was therefore no strange thing in the land: only they were exasperated, because a person was celebrated against whom they had a rooted hatred.”

Spurgeon:

“Luther was greatly encouraged when he found that the children met together for prayer. He said, ‘God will hear them. The devil himself cannot defeat us when the children begin to pray.’”

He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and He lodged there:

During the Passover, thousands of pilgrims clogged greater Jerusalem, and it was common for many to stay in the surrounding villages. Bethany was close by, and Mary and Martha lived there (Luke 21:37).

21:18-22, The Lesson of the Fig Tree

He was hungry: Some wonder why Jesus would be hungry in the morning leaving the home of Martha and Mary. We don't know, but Jesus was fully human, experience hunger just like us, and for whatever reason, got the munchies (okay, that's not an exact translation of the Greek).

Let no fruit grow on you ever again: This is really strange, in that this curse by Jesus is a "destructive" miracle. And it was effective as any other miracle; the fig tree to wither away. Another destructive miracle was the herd of pigs in Matthew 8:30-32, which Jesus directed away from people and down a hill into the sea.

Found nothing on it but leaves: This explains the destructive miracle. This fig tree was a picture of false advertising, having leaves, but no figs. This should not be the case with these particular fig trees, which customarily did not bear leaves apart from figs. In this acted-out-parable, Jesus warns of the coming judgment upon an *unfruitful* Israel. It shows God's disapproval of those who oppose Jesus, who are "all leaves and no fruit".

How did the fig tree wither away so soon? Jesus explained that this miracle was the result of a prayer made in faith (if you have faith and do not doubt). He then encouraged His disciples to also have this kind of faith, trusting that God would hear them too.

And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive: This is a promise to those who are following Jesus. Jesus is not saying that we can manipulate God's will if we just "pray right", but rather is stating an objective fact. It's important to keep in mind that God assists His children in prayer. Romans 8:26-27:

"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."

21:23-27, Jesus Confounds the Jewish Leaders

The chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching: In His previous visit on the day before, Jesus drove out the moneychangers and merchants from the temple courts. Now He returned

there to teach, obviously unafraid of any backlash from the religious leadership.

By what authority are You doing these things? Jesus answers by questioning their competence to judge such an issue! Their ability to judge John the Baptist and his ministry was a measure of their ability to judge Jesus as well (“The baptism of John: where was it from?”).

We do not know: Notice how they carefully calculated the political consequences of either answer. They didn’t seem interested in answering the question *honestly*, just cleverly. They were more interested in the opinion of the crowd than the will of God, so Jesus didn’t answer their question!

Jesus kindly and compassionately met the needs of hurting people, as we see over and over again. But He shows little patience with those who arrogantly questioned Him hoping to trap Him in His own words.

21:28-32 The Parable of the Two Sons

Son, go work today in my vineyard: Jesus is pointing out that there are many, who though sons, chose the wrong path. They are like the second son. He was holding up a mirror to the religious leaders who were opposing Him:

- They said that the Word of God is authoritative,
- They talk about doing the Father’s work,
- They keep up the external appearance of religion,
- But their faith is not really in God

21:33-41 The Parable of the Wicked Servants

The Old Testament often used the picture of a vineyard to speak of Israel (Deuteronomy 32:32, Psalm 80:8, Jeremiah 2:21, and especially Isaiah 5:1-7).

He will destroy those wicked men miserably: The message of this parable is clear. With this answer, the chief priests and elders understood what the wicked servants deserved. Truly, those who rebel against their master this way deserve judgment. They knew the owner of the vineyard had the right to expect the fruits in their seasons. In the same way, God looked for fruit from Israel’s leadership, but found little (remember the fig tree!)

Have you never read the Scriptures: This manner of speaking to the chief priests and elders of Israel must have really angered them. Jesus is speaking to the leading theologians of Israel as if they have ever read the very Scriptures they teach and consider themselves experts in!

The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone: Jesus here quotes Psalm 118 to remind them that their rejection of Him said more about their guilt and coming judgment than it said about Jesus Himself. Though they reject Him, He remains the chief cornerstone, fulfilling the great Messianic promise of Psalm 118.

What they fail to realize is that at this moment, Jesus is not on trial; those who are looking to trap Him are!