

**Matthew 21:1 ¶ And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, Matthew 21:2 Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose *them*, and bring *them* unto me.**

**Matthew 21:3 And if any *man* say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them.**

Continuing from the previous chapter, we note that Jesus and His entourage are headed to Jerusalem from Jericho. The NIV Commentary notes, “The Roman military road from Jericho to Jerusalem was about seventeen miles long and climbed three thousand feet.” As we continue to read, it will become clear that this is a record of the events that we celebrate on Palm Sunday.

When they reached the village of Bethphage, a town on the southeast slope of the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of His disciples on an errand. They were to go into the village and immediately they would find an ass with her colt tied (implied to a post or something). They were to untie the animals and bring them to Jesus. If they were questioned by anyone, they were to say, “The Lord hath need of them.” They would then be allowed to proceed without further hindrance. Sounds like previous preparation had been made, but it could have been another miracle in progress.

**Matthew 21:4 All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Matthew 21:5 Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.**

As Matthew often points out, these things were being done in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy that all Jews recognized as foretelling the coming of Messiah.

*Zechariah 9:9 “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.”*

According to the grammatical structure, it would be clearer to say, “sitting upon an ass, indeed, on a colt...” It seems that the colt was so young that it could not yet be separated from its mother. Mark and Luke clearly note that the colt had never been ridden before (Mark 11:2 & Luke 19:30). The fact that it would meekly carry the Savior was another miracle.

I can hear some people eager to point out that Jesus was deliberately staging the fulfillment of prophecy to make it appear that He was the Messiah. Yes, I believe that is true; His ministry was full of acts done purposely in fulfillment of prophecy to identify Him as the Messiah. There were also, however, many things concerning Him that fulfilled prophecy over which He had no control—the place of His birth, His treatment at the hands of the religious leaders, the amount of money for which Judas betrayed Him, the time and manner of His

death, the fact that not one of His bones was broken, etc.

By His actions, Jesus is very clearly going to publicly declare that He is the promised Messiah.

**Matthew 21:6 And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, Matthew 21:7 And brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set *him* thereon.**

**Matthew 21:8 And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed *them* in the way.**

**Matthew 21:9 And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed *is* he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.**

The disciples did as they were commanded and brought the ass and colt to Jesus. They put their clothes on the colt for Jesus to sit on. A great number of people traveling with them spread their garments on the road in front of the colt and others cut down branches from the trees to line the way. As Jesus rode toward Jerusalem the multitudes went before Him crying, "Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest." I think many of these people actually thought that Jesus was going to be revealed as Messiah the King and deliver them from the Romans.

John tells us that even people from inside the city came out to honor Jesus as He rode into the city.

*John 12:12–13 "On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord."*

The actions of the people all reflect showing honor to a conquering king.

Luke gives us a bit more information.

*Luke 19:39–44 "And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples. And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out. And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."*

Some of the Pharisees that were among the people told Jesus to rebuke His disciples for what they were saying. Jesus declared that if the people refused to shout out the truth, the very stones would cry out. As He got near the city, Jesus began to weep because His people did not recognize the day of His coming as so

specifically prophesied by the prophet Daniel.

*Daniel 9:24–25 “Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks....”*

Notes from my journal in Daniel: From the time of the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem and the coming of Messiah will be 69 weeks or 483 years—seven weeks ( $7 \times 7 = 49$  years) + 62 weeks ( $3 \times 20 = 60 + 2 = 62 \times 7 = 434$  years) ( $49 + 434 = 483$  years or 173,880 days). Nehemiah 2:1-8 describes the decree signed by Artaxerxes authorizing the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem, including the walls. Jon Courson notes that this was on March 14, 445 BC. Based on calculations using a 30-day month, it has been determined that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the donkey presenting Himself publicly as their King on the date exactly 483 years to the day after the decree referenced in this verse (April 6, 32 AD).

Because the Jewish people as a whole did not accept Jesus as their Messiah, the truth was now to be hidden from them. Because they did not recognize “the time of their visitation,” the Romans would lay siege to the city and eventually destroy it. From the historical record, we know that this occurred in 70 AD.

**Matthew 21:10 And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?**

**Matthew 21:11 And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.**

Although Jesus was accompanied into the city by a multitude, there were yet multitudes that did not know Him and wanted to know who was causing such an uproar. This was the beginning of the week of Passover and research indicates that the population of Jerusalem that was usually around 80-100,000 swelled to over 3 million during Passover.

The people answered by identifying Jesus as “the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.”

**Matthew 21:12 ¶ And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves,**

**Matthew 21:13 And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.**

“moneychangers” = Those that changed Greek and Roman coins into temple coins, the required coinage for paying the temple tax.

Upon entering the city, Jesus headed for the temple. Boldly and without apology He began to throw out those who were doing business in the temple and threw

over the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of them that sold doves. As He did so, He quoted scripture: *Isaiah 56:7 "...for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people."* He then added the accusation that they had made it a den of thieves. He appeared to be making the same comparison that Jeremiah had made in his day.

*Jeremiah 7:11 "Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen it, saith the LORD."*

By His actions, Jesus was asserting Himself as one in authority over the religious leaders who were responsible to maintaining the temple precincts.

I believe Adam Clarke was right when he quoted: "'Avarice,' says one, 'covered with the veil of religion, is one of those things on which Christ looks with the greatest indignation in his Church.'" This should give pause to a great many in church leadership today that operate the church as a business. The focus of what had begun in the temple as a service to assist the people who traveled great distances to make their sacrifices and offerings had turned to making a profit and taking advantage of the people.

Guzik pointed out that Isaiah had declared that the temple was to be a house of prayer for all nations. The outer courts where this business took place was the only place the Gentiles were allowed to enter and pray, and all the activity generated by these businesses made such prayer almost impossible.

**Matthew 21:14 And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them.**

**Matthew 21:15 And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased,**

**Matthew 21:16 And said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?**

Matthew notes that the blind and lame find their way to Jesus in the temple; and He healed them. People who were lame, blind, deaf, or mute were also only allowed into this outer court.

When the religious leaders saw the miracles He performed and heard the children praising Him as "the Son of David," the Messiah, they were very angry. They pointed out to Jesus what was being said obviously expecting Him to understand their anger. Jesus, however, basically approved what the people were saying. He quoted from Psalm 8, a passage in which the quote is used in reference to God; so Jesus is basically saying that He is God.

*Psalms 8:1-2 "O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens. **Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength** because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger."*

Note: “Strength” and “praise” are both appropriate translations from the Hebrew.

**Matthew 21:17 And he left them, and went out of the city into Bethany; and he lodged there.**

Jesus didn’t hang around to contend with the religious leaders any longer; He left and went to Bethany (probably to stay with Mary, Martha and Lazarus).

**Matthew 21:18 ¶ Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered.**

**Matthew 21:19 And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away.**

**Matthew 21:20 And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!**

The next morning Jesus headed back to Jerusalem. He must have left before breakfast was served because Matthew notes that He was hungry; in fact, the Greek implies that He left at the break of dawn. He spotted a fig tree; but when He came to it, there was no fruit on it—only leaves. So Jesus cursed the fig tree saying, “Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever.” It seems that the tree then withered away right before the eyes of the disciples, who couldn’t help but wonder at such a miracle.

I was listening to a Jewish believer, Jacob Prasch, who noted that there was an application to be made to believers today. Just as the fig tree was expected to produce fruit, so too are the followers of Jesus expected to produce fruit. What kind of fruit you ask? Paul provides the answer.

*Galatians 5:22–23 “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.”*

John tells us even more (Jesus speaking): *John 15:1–5 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit....As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.”*

Prasch also noted that Jesus was pronouncing judgment on Israel as represented by the fig tree; a people who pretended to serve God, but rejected His Messiah and, therefore, did not function as God had intended them before the nations; in effect, they produced no fruit. Coffman words it this way: “...let it be noted that the fig tree was not cursed for barrenness. The fig orchards were full of barren trees he did not curse. This one was cursed for its barrenness while professing by its leaves to be fruitful! That was exactly the case with Israel. They were barren spiritually; yet by their elaborate pretensions to righteousness, they advertised a true religion they simply did not possess.”

The prophet Joel refers to Israel both as a vine and a fig tree.

*Joel 1:7 "He hath laid my vine waste, and barked my fig tree: he hath made it clean bare, and cast it away; the branches thereof are made white."*

**Matthew 21:21 Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this *which is done* to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.**

**Matthew 21:22 And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.**

Jesus then responded by declaring (my paraphrase): If you have faith, without a shadow of doubt, you too can do what seems to be impossible. In fact, everything for which you ask in prayer with complete faith, you will receive. I liked the explanation in the NIV Commentary: "But belief in the NT is never reduced to forcing oneself to "believe" what one does not really believe. Instead, it is related to genuine trust in God and obedience to and discernment of his will. Such faith reposes on the will of God who acts."

In other words, if we know that what we ask for is in accordance with God's will AND we ask in complete faith for His will to be done, we can be assured that God will answer that prayer—even if what we ask seems to be impossible. One of the verses I always include in the scripture memory books I make for my grandchildren and as gifts is: *Luke 1:37 "For with God nothing shall be impossible."*

**Matthew 21:23 ¶ And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?**

**Matthew 21:24 And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things.**

**Matthew 21:25 The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him?**

**Matthew 21:26 But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet.**

**Matthew 21:27 And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.**

Eventually, Jesus arrived at the temple. He was immediately approached by the religious leaders who were still angry at His actions of the previous day. They demanded that He tell them who gave Him the authority to do such things (e.g., overthrow the tables of the merchandisers, represent Himself as a teacher of scripture, etc.).

As He often did, Jesus responded by telling them that He would answer their question if they would answer His. The NIV Commentary notes that this was an

accepted form of debate among rabbis. That question—Was the baptism of John done by the authority of heaven or of men? As they reasoned among themselves, they knew there was no good answer. If they agreed that he acted with heavenly authority, they were revealing themselves as heretics for not believing him; and what had John declared? That Jesus was the Messiah. If they declared that he was acting without God's authority, the people would turn against them because they believed John to be a prophet. Self-serving cowards that they were—they admitted that they could not answer Him. Jesus promptly declared that neither would He answer their questions.

Note that the actions of the religious leaders proved that they were not truth seekers; their motives were strictly selfish. I liked Ellicott's statement: "For those who were not willfully blind and deaf, the words that He had spoken, the works which He had done, the sinless life which He had led, were proofs of an authority from God."

**Matthew 21:28 ¶ But what think ye? A *certain* man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard.**

**Matthew 21:29 He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went.**

**Matthew 21:30 And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not.**

**Matthew 21:31 Whether of them twain did the will of *his* father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.**

**Matthew 21:32 For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen *it*, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.**

Jesus now proceeds to press His advantage and presents a parable directly connected to His debate with the religious leaders. My paraphrase—A certain man had two sons, both of whom he approached individually and asked to go and work in his vineyard for the day. One son told his father no, but later repented of his decision and went to work as requested. The other son told his father he would go, but then decided not to. So, Jesus asks, which one did the will of his father? They correctly answered—"The first." Jesus then makes the application. Those who first rejected Jesus as the Messiah but then chose to accept Him and follow Him (many of which were comprised of publicans and harlots—people who readily admitted their need for a Savior) were compared to the first son. Those who represented themselves as being obedient to God and serving Him according to His will (the religious leaders) but actually rejected His Son, the Messiah, were compared to the second.

Jesus emphasized that their treatment of John declared that truth. He came preaching the truth in righteousness and the religious leaders rejected him, but the publicans and harlots believed him. Even after witnessing many miracles testifying to the truth of John's declaration of Jesus as the Messiah (including the changed lives of those who chose to become His disciples), they refused to repent and believe.

Jesus declared that those who chose to follow Him (like the first son) would “go into the kingdom of God before you.” In other words, there was still time for them to change their mind, repent and believe.

**Matthew 21:33 ¶ Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country:**

**Matthew 21:34 And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it.**

**Matthew 21:35 And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.**

**Matthew 21:36 Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise.**

**Matthew 21:37 But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son.**

**Matthew 21:38 But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.**

**Matthew 21:39 And they caught him, and cast *him* out of the vineyard, and slew *him*.**

Jesus begins yet another parable. My paraphrase—There is a certain landowner that plants a vineyard and provides carefully to ensure that it produces well. He then leased it out to some men and traveled to a far country. When it was time to harvest the fruit, he sent three of his servants to collect his share of the fruit. The men leasing the vineyard beat one servant up, killed one and stoned the other. The landowner decided to send more of his servants, but they received the same treatment at the hands of the men leasing the vineyard. Finally, the landowner decided to send his son (and Mark tells us it was his only son), thinking that they would surely honor the owner’s son. He was wrong. They saw the heir coming and decided to kill him and seize his inheritance. So they caught him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

**Matthew 21:40 When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?**

**Matthew 21:41 They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out *his* vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons.**

Jesus now poses a question—When the owner of the vineyard returns home, what will he do the men to whom he leased the vineyard? They immediately answered that he would kill the evil men and choose more trustworthy men as caretakers of his vineyard—men who will give him fruit from the vineyard.

**Matthew 21:42 Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?**

**Matthew 21:43** Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.

**Matthew 21:44** And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

Once again Jesus quotes scripture to make His point.

*Psalms 118:20–23 “This gate of the LORD, into which the righteous shall enter. I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation. The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the LORD’S doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.”*

He is obviously making a comparison between the son in the parable and the stone that the builders rejected. I think it is also obvious that He is drawing a comparison between the religious leaders of Israel and the men leasing the vineyard. They had proven themselves wicked and not interested in serving the owner of the vineyard. Just as the tenants of vineyard abused and killed the owner’s servants, so too had the leaders of Israel abused and killed the prophets of God. Just as the tenants had taken hold of the son and taken him out of the city to kill, so too would they take hold of God’s only Son and take Him outside the city to kill Him. Jesus is prophesying His own death.

The Jewish people thought that they were guaranteed entrance into the kingdom just because they were the sons of Abraham. Jesus is declaring that those who rejected Him would never enter the kingdom of God. It would, in fact, be given to a predominantly Gentile nation (from the Greek) that actually produced the desired fruit of serving God in faith and obedience.

Jesus emphasizes the truth that the Son, the stone, would either break you to the point of faith and repentance or destroy you for rejecting Him.

**Matthew 21:45** And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them.

**Matthew 21:46** But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet.

The religious leaders were smart enough to realize that Jesus was comparing them to the wicked tenants. I liked the way Coffman worded it: “With a genius surpassing that of any mortal, Christ wove eternal truth into the fabric of the parables. He held the completed picture up before his enemies, as one might hold up a mirror; and at last, confronted with a likeness of themselves as plain as any photograph, they got the point!”

Although they wanted to arrest Him, they didn’t for fear of the multitude that considered Him a prophet of God.