

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY: JESUS DELIBERATELY CLAIMED TO BE THE MESSIAH MATHEW 21:01–11

The Last Week of Jesus Christ

Jesus began the last week of His life. He had spent the night before (the Sabbath evening) in Bethany with Lazarus, Mary, and Martha (Jn. 12:1f). He was now going to deliberately demonstrate that He was the Messiah, the One prophesied to be the Saviour of the world. He demonstrated without doubt He was the fulfilment of the prophecy, the One for whom all righteous men had longed and waited for.

- I. He deliberately began His last week in Jerusalem (v. 1).
- II. He deliberately fulfilled prophecy (vv. 2-5).
- III. He deliberately received the homage of the disciples (vv. 6-7).
- IV. He deliberately received the homage of the people (vv. 8-9).
- V. He deliberately stirred the people to ask the key question of life (vv. 10-11).

MATHEW 21:01–11 HOLY WEEK, PALM SUNDAY

The last week of our Lord's life has been known as Holy Week since the earliest of times. The Triumphal Entry was the first event of the week, taking place on the first day. It was and still is called Palm Sunday. □

I. *Mathew 21:01 Poverty of Jesus Christ*

Jesus' last week began in Jerusalem. Note the lowliness of Jesus. He had to depend upon friends for lodging. Up to the very end "the Son of Man had no place to lay His head" (Mt. 8:20; Lk. 9:58).

He also "approached Jerusalem" on foot. He had no horse, no donkey, no camel - no means of transportation. He had only what God had given Him as He entered the world, His feet, to get Him where He wished to go. How God's heart must be cut to the core by our concern for material comfort and ease. Jesus' face was always set toward saving and helping the world. Up to the very end, He went about His purpose untainted and unswerved by the world. What a lesson for us!

1. Christ began His last week in Bethphage.
 2. Christ sent two disciples on a special mission.
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MATHEW 21:01 BETHPHAGE

The name of the city means “House of figs.” It was a suburb of Jerusalem, lying toward the Mount of Olives. Note that Jesus arrived in Bethphage on foot, indicating that He had no means of travel except walking. □

II. *Mathew 21:02–05 Fulfilment of the Prophecy*

The Lord deliberately fulfilled the prophecy.

1. Christ sent two disciples into the city to secure a donkey and her young colt. He borrowed the two animals from another man, probably another disciple. One of three possibilities led the man to loan the animals.
 - a. The man was a disciple who would allow *the Lord* to borrow his animals. The emphasis, “The *Lord* needs them,” points rather strongly to this fact’s being at least part of what happened. The Lord (o kurios) would be a strong expression to use with an unbeliever. It was equivalent to Jehovah.
 - b. The Lord had made previous arrangements with the owner to borrow the animals. This was, of course, possible; but the possibility that the disciples would be questioned about borrowing the animals makes this unlikely.
 - c. The Lord demonstrated His Divine omniscience to further validate His claim of Messiahship. As God, He knew exactly where the animals would be, the questioning about loaning them, and the fact that the owner would loan them. This could easily be part of what happened.

The important thing to note is the strength and authority of Christ throughout this whole event. He assumed the position of Messiah, the Lord God (Jehovah) of all men, of their will and their property, even of their animals.

Thought 1. Every mission of the Lord — every task, no matter how small — is important. Going to fetch the animals was a small task, yet it was critically important in the proclamation of Christ as King. No task should ever be thought too small in the service of our Lord.

Thought 2. Note two things.

- 1) Jesus encourages and comforts us with the presence of others. He seldom sends us out alone.
- 2) How often has Christ had a mission to be done and there was no one present to do it, especially small and insignificant missions such as this one?

Thought 3. The colt was borrowed. Again, Jesus had nothing of this world’s goods. In order to fulfil the Scripture that the Messiah was to enter the city riding a colt, Jesus had to borrow the colt. How materialistic we become, thinking we must have

things in order to live! We even think we *cannot minister* effectively without the latest *material things* of the world (machines, equipment, methods). How unlike Christ!

2 Cor 8:9 *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.*

Thought 4. Note a significant fact: when the proclamation of His Messiahship was at stake, Christ let nothing stand in the way. It was essential that the people know that He was the Messiah. He did not own a donkey to fulfil the prophecy, so He went out to find one. Such determination and unswerving purpose should grip us in proclaiming that He is the Messiah.

2. Christ had a reason for making such detailed preparations to enter Jerusalem. He was deliberately fulfilling the prophecy of Zec. 9:9. The prophecy said four things.
 - a. “Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! [that is, Jerusalem]”: Jerusalem was to be told, given a threefold warning. Why must she be warned? Because what she expected was not going to happen, not as she anticipated.
 - b. “See, your King comes to you”: this was the first warning. Jerusalem’s King was coming, coming just as Jerusalem had expected. The people were correct in this part of their expectation. But there is danger in expectation, the danger of being so fervent in our own ideas that we miss what really happens. Fervent expectation can miss the event when the event occurs a little differently than what was expected. “Your King comes to you,” but He comes somewhat differently than expected.
 - c. “Your King comes...gently”: this was the second warning. The Messiah was coming in gentleness not as a reigning monarch. He was coming to win men’s hearts and lives spiritually and eternally, not physically and materially. (See Mk. 11:1-11; Eph 1:3; Mt. 29).
 - d. “Your King comes...riding on a donkey, on a colt...”: this was the third warning. The Messiah was coming not as a conqueror riding a white stallion but as a King of peace riding a donkey. He was coming to save the world through peace, to reconcile the world to the God of love, not to the God of hate and retaliation and war. He was not going to kill men and overthrow their governments (the Romans and Gentiles). He was coming to win men’s hearts and lives through the glorious news (gospel) that God loves and reconciles (Eph. 2:13-18).

Note the prophecy and the careful preparation Christ made to fulfil the prophecy. This is significant, for it means that Christ was dramatizing His Messiahship — dramatizing it so clearly that men could not fail to see that He was God’s Messiah. This was God’s will prophesied generations before Christ came. God wanted His Son to proclaim His Messiahship so clearly that the people could not mistake what He was doing.

Thought 1. Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, God’s very own Son. The great pains He took to fulfil this prophecy clearly showed what He was claiming. He was

deliberately working out God's will. He was doing exactly what God said He wanted His Son to do centuries before (Zec. 9:9). He was making the claim to be God's Messiah in a dramatic way. He was painting a picture so clearly that man could not fail to see what He was claiming. A deliberate decision is now required of us. We either accept His claim or not. As He *deliberately* fulfilled the prophecy, so we now *deliberately accept or deliberately reject* His claim.

Luke 1:78-79 *"Because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace."*

Luke 2:13-14 *Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests."*

John 14:27 *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."*

John 16:33 *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

Acts 10:36 *You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.*

Rom 5:1 *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Rom 14:17 *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

Eph 2:14 *For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.*

Col 1:20 *And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*

Psa 29:11 *The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace.*

Thought 2. Note two very significant things.

- 1) Christ did not come to execute justice but to save men spiritually through the forgiveness of sin. Christ came not as a judge to judge men for ignoring, neglecting, rejecting, and misinterpreting God; but He came as the Messenger of Peace to reconcile men to God by the cross (Eph. 2:13-18; Col. 1:20).
- 2) Christ is coming again, coming as Judge to execute justice among all men, both the saved and unsaved (See *Death*, Heb. 9:27; see Mt. 25:31-46; 2 Cor. 5:10).

MARK 11:07 DONKEY, COLT

In ancient days the colt was a noble animal. It was used as a beast of service to carry the burdens of men. But more significantly, it was used by kings and their emissaries. When they entered a city in peace, they rode a colt to symbolize their peaceful intentions (see the judges of Israel and the chieftains throughout the land, Judg. 5:10; 10:4). This differed dramatically from a conquering king. When a king entered a city as a conqueror, he rode a stallion.

Jesus was dramatically demonstrating two things for the people. First, He was unquestionably the promised King, the Saviour of the people: but secondly, He was not coming as the conquering king. He was not coming as a worldly potentate, in pomp and ceremony; not coming as the leader of an army to kill, injure, and maim. The people must change their concept of the Messiah. He was coming as the Saviour of Peace, the Saviour of all men. He was coming to show men that God is the God of love and reconciliation.

1. The colt was a symbol of peace. Jesus came to bring peace, as pointed out in the above discussion.
2. The colt symbolized service. It was a noble animal, an animal used in the service of men to carry their burdens. Jesus came upon the colt symbolizing that He came to serve men, to bear their burdens for them.
3. The colt symbolized sacredness. It had never been ridden before (Mark 11:2). Animals and things used for sacred or religious purposes had not to have been used before (Num. 19:2; Deu. 21:3; 1 Sam. 6:7). This detail points to the sacredness of the event. It pictured for everyone that Jesus was deliberately proclaiming that *He is the sacred hope*, the promised Messiah of the people. □

HEBREWS 09:27 DEATH (THANATOS)

Just as a man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgement,
Hebrews 09:23

The basic meaning of death is *separation*. Death never means extinction, annihilation, non-existence, or inactivity. "Death is the separation of a person from the purpose or use for which he was intended." (H.S. Miller. Quoted by Lehman Strauss. *Devotional Studies in Galatians and Ephesians*. Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Bros. Copyright 1957 by Lehman Strauss, p. 137.)

The Bible speaks of three deaths.

1. Physical death: the *separation* of a man's spirit or life from the body. This is what men commonly call death. It is when a person ceases to exist on this earth and is buried (1 Cor. 15:21-22; Heb. 9:27).

1 Cor 15:21-22 *For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.*

Heb 9:27 *Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.*

2. Spiritual death: the *separation* of man's spirit from God while he is still living and walking upon earth. This death is the *natural state* of a man on earth without Christ. Man is seen as still in his sins and *dead* to God (Eph. 2:1; 4:18; 1 Jn. 5:12).

Spiritual death speaks of a person who is dead while he still lives (1 Tim. 5:6). He is a natural man living in this present world, but he is said to be dead to the Lord Jesus Christ and to God and to spiritual matters.

- a. A person who wastes his life in wild living is spiritually dead.

Luke 15:32 *"But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."*

- b. A person who has not partaken of Christ is spiritually dead.

John 6:53 *Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

- c. A person who does not have the spirit of Christ is said to be spiritually dead.

Rom 8:9 *You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.*

- d. A person who lives in sin is said to be spiritually dead.

Eph 2:1 *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.*

Col 2:13 *When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins.*

- e. A person who is separated from God is said to be spiritually dead.

Eph 4:18-19 *They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.*

- f. A person who sleeps in sin is spiritually dead.

Eph 5:14 *For it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."*

- g. A person who lives in sinful pleasure is dead while he lives.

1 Tim 5:6 *But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives.*

- h. A person who does not have the Son of God is dead.

1 Tim 5:6 *He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.*

- i. A person who does great religious works but does the wrong works is dead.

Rev 3:1 *“To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.”*

3. Eternal death: the *separation* of man from God’s presence forever. This is the second death, an eternal state of being *dead to God*. (1 Cor. 6:9-10; 2 Th. 1:9). It is spiritual death, separation from God, that is prolonged beyond the death of the body. It is called the “second death” or eternal death.

Rom 6:23 *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Rom 8:6 *The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.*

2 Th 1:9 *They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power. □*

III. **Mathew 21:06–07** *Homage of the Disciples*

Christ deliberately received the homage of the disciples. The disciples paid Him homage (reverence, recognition). They did exactly what He asked despite the uncertainty of the matter. They had no money to buy or rent the animals, and they were to be questioned about why they wanted the animals. Yet they obeyed — not questioning, not doubting.

Note the other act of homage: there was no saddle for their Lord. They cared about Him and His comfort, so they took their own cloaks and threw them across the animals. Again, this was an act of homage (reverence and recognition). In following Christ, the two men had lived a life of poverty, so they had little clothing. It cost them to use their clothing for such a humble act. The clothing would be soiled and smelly, but they cared and they worshipped through this act.

The point is that Christ was now unmistakably claiming the dignity and rights of a King. He was not washing feet now: He was deliberately accepting their homage and reverence.

Here is something of critical importance. In claiming the dignity and rights of a King, He was doing it in the most humble practice of His day: entering the city as a King of Peace. This was symbolized by riding a young colt, instead of riding the conqueror’s stallion. He was disclaiming all ideas of an earthly and material kingdom. He had come to save Jerusalem and the world through peace, not war.

Thought 1. There are three clear messages in this event.

- 1) We are to give homage to the Lord by obeying His commands. They may sometimes be difficult to understand and somewhat embarrassing, yet we are to trust and obey just as the two disciples did — not doubting or questioning.

John 14:21 *“Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”*

John 15:10, 14 *“If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. You are my friends if you do what I command.”*

1 John 3:22 *And receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him.*

1 Sam 15:22 *But Samuel replied: “Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”*

- 2) We are to give homage to the Lord by giving Him the best we have. He is worthy of all and all is due to him; so we are to do as the disciples did, give Him all — even the very best of our clothing if needed.

Mat 19:21 *Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”*

Mark 10:28 *Peter said to him, “We have left everything to follow you!”*

Luke 5:27-28 *After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. “Follow me,” Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.*

Luke 14:33 *“In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”*

Phil 3:8 *What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.*

- 3) We worship and pay homage to Christ when we give the clothes off our back. Such is a most noble ministry and assures great reward.

Mat 25:34-36 *“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’”*

But there is a clear difference in giving old unusable clothes and giving the clothes off our backs. In order to minister, the disciples gave what they had. They gave the clothes they were wearing (see *the widow's mite*, Lk. 21:1-4).

IV. *Mathew 21:08–09 Homage of the People*

Christ deliberately received the homage of the people. And note that it was a “very large crowd” (v. 8). Apparently what happened was this. The crowd had begun to gather since early morning, excitedly looking for Him who had raised Lazarus from the dead. John told us this. In fact, he said there were so many people that the Pharisees said, “the whole world has gone after Him” (Jn. 12:17-19). There was the crowd of disciples already accompanying Him and the pilgrims on their way to the Passover Feast who had joined His caravan. There were also the residents of Bethany and Bethphage who had heard of His presence and the miracles, and those who were already in Jerusalem — citizens and pilgrims who were rushing out to search for Him.

We are led to imagine an enormous crowd of teeming thousands lining the roadway as Christ was helped atop the donkey to begin His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. There are several facts that point toward this conclusion.

1. Two or more million pilgrims gathered in Jerusalem every year for the Passover Feast (See *Passover — Jesus Christ's Death*, Mt. 26:2). Thousands upon thousands were strict religionists, believing in the Jewish Messiah.
2. The news being spread throughout the city and surrounding area concerned the miracles Christ had performed, a concentration of miracles for some days now which included the raising of Lazarus from the dead (Jn. 11:1f; 11:55-56). The very atmosphere was electric with the exciting news that Jesus was God's promised Messiah. Multitudes had heard that He was in Bethany and Bethphage (Mk. 14:1-9). As said above, there was the crowd who had turned around from Jerusalem to meet Him (Jn. 12:17-19); there was the crowd already travelling with Him (Mt. 21:29); and there was the crowd of citizens in Bethany and Bethphage who had begun gathering around Him (Mk. 14:1-9; Jn. 12:1f). The whole thrust of the picture points to teeming thousands searching for Him and rushing out to welcome Him when they heard He was coming. (Note the words of Mathew, “the crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted” v. 9.)

The crowds did two things.

1. They received Him as King. This is shown by two acts which were always done for Kings entering a city. They stripped off their cloaks and cut down tree branches, and they spread both out on the roadway before Him. They wished to honour and pay Him the homage of a King. They wished to show Him that they received Him as the promised King of Israel.

2. They received Him as Messiah. This is seen in what they shouted about Christ.

=> They shouted out, “Hosanna,” which means “save now,” or “save, we pray.”

=> They called Him “the Son of David,” which was the title of the Messiah. Note how often Jesus was called the son of David. (Mt 12:23; 15:22; 20:30-31; 21:9, 15; Acts 2:29-36; Rom. 1:3; 2 Tim. 2:8; Rev. 22:16.) It was the common title and popular concept of the Messiah. Generation after generation of Jews longed and looked for the promised deliverer of Israel. The people expected Him to be a great general who would deliver and restore the nation to its greatness; in fact, they expected Him to make the nation the centre of universal rule. He would, under God, conquer the world and centre the glory and majesty of God Himself in Jerusalem. From His throne, the throne of David, He would execute “the Messianic fire of judgment” upon the nations and peoples of the world (Mt. 1:18; 3:11; 11:2-3; 12:16; 22:42; Lk. 7:21-23). If Mathew can prove that Jesus’ roots go all the way back to David and Abraham, he will have shown how seriously man must take the claims of Jesus to be the Messiah (Mt. 1:1).

=> They shouted out, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” This means blessed is He who is sent by God to save His people; blessed is He who is sent with the authority of God.

=> They shouted out, “Hosanna in the Highest” which means “God save, we pray. Thou who art in the Highest, save now through Him whom You have sent.”

Thought 1. There are several critical lessons in this point.

- 1) We must proclaim Christ as our King. He is to be the King of our hearts and lives, to rule and reign over us. But note the critical question: What do we mean by King? The people of Christ’s day were willing to accept him as an earthly King; that is, they were willing to accept what authority and power He would use on their behalf. The farthest thought from their minds was the spiritual rule and reign of their lives. They wanted earthly and material benefits. How much like so many of us! We want His kingly power when in need (physically or materially), but we want nothing to do with His kingly authority over our lives.
- 2) We must welcome Christ as God’s true Messiah, the One who has come to truly save us. But again, what we mean by *save* is critical. We should not presume upon His earthly care and deliverance unless we are first willing to receive His spiritual care and deliverance (salvation and rebirth, the surrendering of all we are and have).
- 3) Every man should cry out, “Hosanna, save now, I pray O Lord.”

2 Cor 6:2 *For he says, “In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.” I tell you, now is the time of God’s favour, now is the day of salvation.*

- 4) We must make two confessions.

=> Christ is *the Blessed* (who) comes in the name of the Lord.

=> “Hosanna in the highest”: salvation is “in the highest”; it is in Christ whom God has sent.

John 1:49 Then Nathanael declared, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel.”

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

John 18:37 “You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”

2 Cor 6:2 For he says, “In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.” I tell you, now is the time of God’s favour, now is the day of salvation.

1 Tim 6:15 Which God will bring about in his own time — God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Titus 2:11-12 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.

5) We must lay all that we are and have before Christ, not only our clothes.

V. **Mathew 21:10–11** *Response to Jesus Christ*

There was the question of the people in Jerusalem. All the city was *stirred* (eseisthe), that is, shaken. John reported that “the whole world has gone after him” (Jn. 12:19).

=> The Romans sensed that a popular uprising might be in the making.

=> The Herodians who were the Jewish ruling party, feared they would be overthrown, losing their power.

=> The Pharisees were stirred to new depths of envy and malice.

=> The common people were convinced that their day of liberation had finally arrived in Jesus of Nazareth. ■

MATHEW 26:02 PASSOVER AND THE DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST

“As you know, the Passover is two days away — and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.” Mathew 26:02

Note Jesus’ words “you know.” The disciples did know both facts. The Passover was only two days away, and Jesus had been telling them for months that He was to be killed. Why, then, was He pointing out facts that the disciples already knew? What Jesus was doing was *revealing* to the disciples that His death was tied to the Passover

(Mt. 26:17-19). The Passover throughout history had pictured His death. Christ was fulfilling the Passover with the shedding of His own blood upon the cross.

1. *Historically*, the Passover refers back to the time when God delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage (Exo. 11:1f). God had pronounced judgment, the taking of the first-born, upon the people of Egypt for their injustices. As God prepared to execute the final judgment, those who believed God were instructed to slay a pure lamb and sprinkle its blood over the door frames of their homes. The blood of the innocent lamb would then serve as a sign that the coming judgment had already been carried out. When seeing the blood, God would *pass over* that house.
2. *Symbolically*, the Passover pictured the coming of Jesus Christ as the Saviour. The “lamb without defect” pictured His sinless life (see Jn. 1:29), and the “blood sprinkled on the door frames” pictured His blood shed for the believer. It was a sign that the life and blood of the innocent lamb had been substituted for the first-born. The “eating of the lamb” pictured the need for spiritual nourishment gained by feeding on Christ, the Bread of Life. The unleavened bread (bread without yeast) pictured the need for putting evil out of one’s life and household. □

THE TEMPLE CLEANSED: AUTHORITY OVER GOD'S HOUSE MATHEW 21:12–16

Introduction

The cleansing of the temple took place on Monday, the day after the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Mark told us this.

*Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve. **Mark 11:11***

The scene was this: teeming thousands had lined the roadway for Jesus' triumphal entry. As He rode along to the shouts of welcome from the crowds, He was led right up to the steps of the temple. He entered the temple, as Mark said, "looked around at everything," and observed all that was going on. He stood off to the side observing all the corruption. After some time, heartbroken and weary, He left and returned to Bethany to spend Sunday night. When He arose on Monday morning, He returned to the temple to cleanse it of those who profaned its sacredness.

Four things should be noted about the temple during the last week of our Lord's life.

1. Jesus was ending His ministry in the temple, His Father's house of prayer, the place where God's presence dwelt in a very, very special way. He is about to complete His life upon earth, a glorious ministry fulfilling the will of God perfectly. The night before, as He stood off by Himself in the temple observing all that was taking place, His thoughts were very contemplative: meditating upon His Father; upon His life now about to be completed; upon the great sacrifice He was to pay for man's sins; upon the corruption of the temple taking place all around Him; upon the worshipping that should have been taking place; and much more. His heart was drawn ever so close to God, yet it was broken and weeping within. Right before Him was a picture of the terrible sin for which He was to die. The temple itself, the place where men should be able to draw close to God, was corrupted by men. It had become anything but a house of prayer. It was a place for commercialism, for man's greed.
2. Jesus was revealing who He was by cleansing the temple. He was proclaiming to all generations that He had the right to determine how the temple was to be used and to purge it of corruptions. As God's Son, the temple was His dwelling place, the place where the worship of God was to be especially known.
3. Jesus was revealing how men were to treat and use the temple of God.
4. Jesus began and ended His ministry by cleansing the temple. The two cleansings were separate events which marked the opening and closing of His ministry. The importance of the temple as God's house of prayer and worship was thereby demonstrated.

When our Lord entered Jerusalem, He did not go up to the palace of the King nor to the courts of the rulers, but He went up to the temple, the House of God. His kingdom was

not of this world, not physical, but of heaven and spiritual. His authority and rule were in the temple of God and in the hearts of men. Therefore, He went up to the temple of God to cleanse it and to teach men how the temple was to be used.

- I. The temple (church) is to be a place where people are not exploited (v. 12).
- II. The temple (church) is to be a house of prayer (v. 13).
- III. The temple (church) is to be a place for ministry (v. 14).
- IV. The temple (church) is to be a place where wonderful things are done (v.15).
- V. The temple (church) is to be a place where Christ is praised (vv. 15-16).

MATHEW 21:12–16 TEMPLE

One must understand the layout of the temple in order to see what was happening in this event. The temple sat on top of Mount Zion and was thought to have covered about thirty acres of land. It consisted of two parts, the temple building itself and the temple precincts or courtyards. The Greek language has two different words to distinguish which is meant.

1. *The temple building* (naos) was a small ornate structure which sat in the centre of the temple property. It was called the Holy Place or Holy of Holies, and only the High Priest could enter its walls, and he could enter only once during the year, on the Day of Atonement.
2. *The temple precincts* (hieron) were four courtyards which surrounded the temple building, each decreasing in their importance to the Jewish mind. It is critical to remember that great walls separated the courts from each other.
 - a. First, there was the Inner Court of the Priests. Only the priests were allowed to enter this court. Within the courtyard stood the great furnishings of worship: the Altar of Burnt Offering, the Brazen Laver, the Seven Branched lamp stand, the Altar of Incense, and the Table of Showbread.
 - b. The Court of the Israelites was next. This was a huge courtyard where Jewish worshippers met together for joint services on the great feast days. It was also where worshippers handed over their sacrifices to the priests.
 - c. The Court of the Women was the third Courtyard. Women were usually limited to this area except for worship. They could, however, enter the Court of the Israelites when they came to make sacrifice or worship in a joint assembly on a great feast day.
 - d. The Court of the Gentiles was the last courtyard. It covered a vast space, surrounding all the other courtyards, and was the place of worship for all Gentile converts to Judaism.

Three facts need to be noted about the Court of the Gentiles.

1. It was the courtyard farthest removed from the centre of worship, the Holy of Holies which represented God's very presence.
2. A high wall separated the Court of the Gentiles from the other courts, disallowing any Gentile a closer approach into God's presence. There were, in fact, tablets hanging all around the wall threatening death to any Gentile who went beyond his own courtyard.
3. It was in the Court of the Gentiles where so much commercialism took place. There was a regular commercial market within its walls. How did a commercial market ever get into the temple of God? Very simply, greed. Worshippers needed animals, (oxen, sheep, doves), incense, meal, wine, oil, salt and other items for their sacrifices and offerings. Pilgrims from foreign nations needed money exchanged. At some point in the history of the temple, the priests had decided to take advantage of the market themselves instead of letting retailers on the outside reap all the profits. So the priests began to set up booths within the court of the Gentiles and to lease out space to *outside* retailers. These often turned out to be family members. The owner of the booths or space was the High Priest or Annas. The courtyard was filled with booth-like spaces where worshippers could find any kind of service they needed. The atmosphere was one of commercial traffic and commotion, not of worship and prayer.

Remembering the teeming thousands who attended the great feasts, we can imagine the loudest commotion and our picture would still come short of the actual scene. Who can picture thousands of animals with their peculiar noises, wastes, and smells within the temple of God? And for what? What would cause men to so abuse the worshipping centre of God? As said above, money, the greed of men. It is no wonder Christ did what He did. He could not do otherwise, for He was the Son of God, the Messiah sent into the world to bring about a true worship of God. And there was no hope of worship within the Court of the Gentiles. Prayer and worship were impossible. □

1. Mathew 21:12 Temple/Church, Not a Place for Exploitation

The temple or church is to be a place where people are not exploited. Note what Jesus did to show this.

1. He went into the temple (Court of the Gentiles) where God's presence was to be and where He and others should be able to worship in quietness and meditation. But what He found was the very opposite: commotion, commercial selling and buying.
2. He reacted in the power and cleansing judgment of God — the kind of power and cleansing judgment that causes men to tremble before God (Phil. 2:9-11).

3. He ran through the temple doing three things: (a) He chased out *all* who were buying and selling; (b) He threw over the tables of the money-changers; and (c) He threw over the chairs of the dove dealers.

John 2:16 *To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"*

1 Cor 11:22 *Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!*

Lev 19:30 *"Observe my Sabbaths and have reverence for my sanctuary. I am the Lord."*

Eccl 5:1 *Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong.*

Jer 7:30 *The people of Judah have done evil in my eyes, declares the Lord. They have set up their detestable idols in the house that bears my Name and have defiled it.*

Zep 3:4 *Her prophets are arrogant; they are treacherous men. Her priests profane the sanctuary and do violence to the law.*

Thought 1. There is serious warning here. The temple was corrupted for money; the church can be. People who came to worship were taken advantage of; they were used for material gain. Note something that should really speak to the church. The people were sold items that were necessary for their worship. They were not just items that would help them in their spiritual growth and their worship; they were essential items. Without them, the people were not able to worship.

Now think for a moment. If the items were necessary for their worship and growth, what was wrong with what they did? The words of v. 12 tell us: "Jesus... drove out all who were buying and selling there." The buying and selling of the items for worship and growth were necessary and good, but not within the temple. They were to be done outside the temple walls, off the temple grounds. The temple and church are not the place for commercialism.

Thought 2. People's desire for worship and spiritual growth is not to be used for material gain, neither by the church nor within the church. Church leadership has to be responsible for protecting its worshippers from abusing the hallowed ground set apart for the worship of God.

Thought 3. Legitimate things, such as buying and selling items that help us grow, can be used wrongly. *Where* something is done is critical. Buying and selling is not to take place in God's church. The point is: worship should be the preoccupation on a person's mind when he is within the church.

Thought 4. Jesus' anger can be fierce. Note who aroused such fierce anger in Him.

- 1) Those who abused God's temple (church).

- 2) Those who exploited others.
- 3) Those who made it impossible for others to truly worship God.

Thought 5. Note what happens to the man who abuses God's temple and exploits others: he is "driven out."

II. *Mathew 21:13 Temple/Church is a House of Prayer*

Jesus proclaimed the temple to be a house of prayer. This was an Old Testament quotation from two passages.

Isa 56:7 *"These I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations."*

Jer 7:11 *"Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching!" declares the Lord.*

Christ made two points.

1. The temple was to be a house of prayer *for all people*. This included the Gentiles as well as the Jews. All people should have been able to worship in quietness and peace within God's temple. No one should have been barred, separated, or discouraged from worshipping God in His temple. All should have been welcomed.

Note something else. The temple (church) was called a house of prayer, not a house of sacrifice, offerings, teaching, prophecy, or preaching. Everything done within the House of God was to lead to prayer, the *worship of and communion* with the Father.

2. The temple was not to be used for commercial purposes. It was not to be a place of buying and selling, marketing and retailing, stealing, and cheating. It was not to be profaned. The temple was the House of God, God's House of prayer. It was to be a place of sanctity, refined and purified by God Himself. It was to be a place of quietness and meditation, a place set aside for worship, not for buying and selling where man gets gain.

Psa 23:6 *Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

Psa 84:10 *Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.*

Psa 122:1 *I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord."*

Thought 1. The temple or church is a piece of ground and a structure that is set apart for the worship of God. This is the very difference between it and all other grounds and structures. It is specifically set apart and dedicated for the sole purpose of worshipping God. It should, therefore, be used for that purpose. Once it is set apart for Him and His worship, God expects it to be His and to be used for that purpose alone.

Thought 2. There are plenty of markets surrounding the church, places where all services involving buying and selling can take place. The church is to be the house of prayer, not a market place, not a place where man is to get gain. It is not to be profaned, either to a minor degree or to a major degree, by becoming a “den for robbers.”

Thought 3. A person's thoughts are to be centred upon God when he first steps on the hallowed ground of God's temple. While he is on the grounds of God's temple, he is to be praying and meditating upon his Lord. There should be nothing to distract his thoughts until he steps off God's property. Just think! How revered would God's temple, our churches, be if we really brought them back to God's original purpose? How far away have we really gone from true worship centres, from the house of prayer?

III. *Mathew 21:14 Church, A Place of Ministry*

The temple or church is to be a place for ministry. Jesus used the temple as a place for ministry and by this He demonstrated that it was to be a place of ministry for all men.

Two wonderful things happened when the temple was cleansed of its corruptions.

1. The worshippers, those in need (symbolized by the blind and lame), were able to come to Christ to worship and have their needs met quietly.
2. Christ was able to take His rightful position within the temple. He was able to become the prominent figure and to receive the worshippers and to minister to those who had any need.

Thought 1. People are barred, kept away from the church, when corruption is within its walls. It may not be only buying and selling; it may be divisiveness, grumbling, complaining, gossiping, and a host of other sins. But nothing will keep people away from the church quicker than sin within the church.

When such sins are removed and the church is purified, then Christ can and will be known to have His rightful place in the church. People can then come and be helped. They can worship and have their needs met.

Thought 2. The needy are often barred, cut off, and unwelcome by society. Such is not to be true of the church. The church is to have open arms and a pure heart, welcoming all, no matter how poor and needy. In fact, the church is to be the very worship centre for ministry.

IV. *Mathew 21:15 Purpose of the Temple*

The temple is to be a place where wonderful things are done. The term *wonderful things* (*thaumasios*) means wonders, wonderful things, wonderful works. It refers to all the things Christ was doing in the temple. This is the only time the word is used in the New Testament. What a beautiful description of what the church is to be: a place where wonderful things are to be done for God.

Eph 3:20 *Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.*

V. Mathew 21:15–16 Temple/Church: A Place of Praise

The temple is to be a place where Christ is praised. Note three things that happen in this scene.

1. Children are in the temple (Court of the Gentiles) crying, “Hosanna to the Son of David.” Apparently, these children had participated with their parents in the Triumphal Entry the day before and were now witnessing the ministry of Christ to the lame and blind. They pick up the chorus which they had either sung along with their parents or heard sung the day before. The chorus, of course, proclaims Jesus to be the Messiah. It is most unlikely that the children were playing, as some suggest. Two facts suggest a seriousness in what the children were saying: Christ’s clearing out all the commotion and noise and the extreme seriousness and hallowedness of His ministry to the people coming to Him. It is very difficult to picture too much commotion allowed by Christ in His serious moments of ministry; and He certainly would not have allowed the commotion and disturbance of His meeting by a group of children playing around. He would have dismissed them along with the others if they had not been serious in their worship and praise. It would be particularly difficult to picture Christ’s allowing commotion after what He had just been through.
2. The religionists (chief priests and scribes) are displeased and object to what they see and hear. They do not like the “wonderful things” being done in the temple, nor do they like Jesus’ being praised in the temple. They object for at least three reasons.
 - a. They are angered. Their own establishment and procedures for handling things have been disrupted and, in their minds, declared “no good” or else “less good” than what they should be.
 - b. They do not like Jesus’ being proclaimed the Messiah of God.
 - c. They do not like the unseemly behaviour occurring: ministering to the needs of common men, healing the lame and blind (v .14), and teaching (see Mk. 11:18; Lk. 19:47).

Note that these are the very reasons people often become disturbed in the church today.

3. Christ insists that He is to be praised. He simply replies to the objections, “God Himself has taken the mouths of these children and provided (brought forth) the praise you hear. And it is perfect praise because it is brought forth by God Himself and heaped upon His Son. The church is to be a place where God’s Son is to be praised.”

Thought 1. Self-examination is called for. Is Christ really praised in our church? Really acknowledged and proclaimed as the Messiah, the Son of God?

Thought 2. Children should be encouraged to praise God.

- 1) Note how the children were in attendance when Christ taught and ministered (Mk. 11:18; Lk. 19:47). They were welcomed by Him and felt comfortable around Him.

2) Note how Christ stood up for the children against the leadership (priests).

Thought 3. The children follow the example of their parents. They had seen and participated with their parents in praising Christ the day before. Now they praise Him on their own as they witness His ministry and teaching.

Thought 4. Some leaders make the same three tragic objections in churches today.

- 1) They object to the old way being changed, especially if it affects one's position, recognition, or authority.
- 2) They object to Christ's being proclaimed the Messiah, the Son of God. Some are willing to acknowledge Him as a great teacher and only as a great teacher. They deny Him as the Saviour of the world who died for the sins of men.
- 3) They object to a public praising of God and to a ministry that helps the needy within the church walls.

Thought 5. Note something. Christ says that God Himself raised up these children to praise Him and His ministry within the church. If a church ceases to praise Him, the likelihood is that God will raise up another to fill its voices with the praise and ministry of His Son. ■