

Matthew 21

Jesus challenges Israel as He enters Jerusalem.

- This chapter marks the beginning of the final and most important week in the story of Jesus' earthly ministry.
- In this chapter Jesus challenges many of the critical notions of Jewish spirituality in his day.

1. Humble Messiah. (Triumphal entry into Jerusalem) (21:1-11)

“¹ And when they had approached Jerusalem and had come to Bethphage, to 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 there and a colt with her; untie them, and bring them to Me. ³ And if anyone says something to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them." ⁴ Now this took place that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, ⁵ "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold your King is coming to you, gentle, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'" ⁶ And the disciples went and did just as Jesus had directed them, ⁷ and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid on them their garments, on which He sat. ⁸ And most of the multitude spread their garments in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees, and spreading them in the road. ⁹ And the multitudes going before Him, and those who followed after were crying out, saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David; *Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord*; Hosanna in the highest!" ¹⁰ And when He had entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?" ¹¹ And the multitudes were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee."

- The humble posture of Jesus' entry was in keeping with his calling and coming sacrifice but it was lost in the expectation of the people who expected Jesus to present himself as the Messiah (Son of David).
- The word "Hosanna" originally meant "God save us" but in Jesus day was probably just a cry of praise to God.
- It was estimated that nearly 3 million people would be in Jerusalem for the Passover feast. Jesus' entry was no doubt in the midst of thousands of others making their way to the area.
- The blindness of Israel cannot be covered by their false hope and empty praise.

2. Spiritual temple. (The cleansing of the temple) (21:12-17)

¹² And Jesus entered the temple and cast out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who were selling doves. ¹³ And He said to them, "It is written, '*My house shall be called a house of prayer*'; but you are making it a *robbers den*." ¹⁴ And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. ¹⁵ But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were crying out in the temple and saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became 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 infants and nursing babes Thou hast prepared praise for Thyself?*'" ¹⁷ And He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and lodged there.

- The practice of Jesus' day was to require pilgrims from outside Jerusalem to exchange their currency for "temple money" that could then be used to purchase animals for sacrifice. The operation became a commercial windfall for the locals who often inflated the rate of exchange.
- The OT quotations come from the Septuagint (Greek copy of the Hebrew).
- In this passage we have both sides accusing the other of malpractice.
 1. Jesus is pointing out the commercial exploitation of the spiritual rituals of sacrifice. Locals were selling sacrificial animals to out-of-towners as a business for profit.
 2. The priests and scribes were questioning Jesus willingness to accept praise that was reserved for Messiah. They were not upset by the money changers but were upset by Jesus' receiving the praise of children.
- The point of the report in Matthew's account is - The blindness of Israel is that even in their temple they cannot see the light.
- Another insight on Jesus' actions might draw attention to the fact that the poor and unconnected could now also give sacrifice. Many poor were probably excluded by the economic competition created by the money changers.

3. Fruitful nation. (The cursing of the fig tree) (21:18-22)

¹⁸ Now in the morning, when He returned to the city, He became hungry. ¹⁹ And seeing a lone fig tree by the road, He came to it, and found nothing on it except leaves only; and He said to it, "No longer shall there ever be any fruit from you." And at once the fig tree withered. ²⁰ And seeing this, the disciples marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree wither at once?" ²¹ And Jesus answered and said to them, "Truly I say to you, if you have faith, and do not doubt, you shall not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it shall happen. ²² And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive."

- The drama of Jesus' illustration with the fig tree may have at least two points of significance to the broader context.
 1. It no doubt is a picture of Israel's fruitlessness.
 2. Remember that this is probably taking place in full view of Mount Zion on which the temple stands. Jesus suggests that the disciples will be given the power to replace the temple mount and its system with a new covenant system. This certainly was true. There is no indication that the early church ever worshiped at the temple on its mountain.
- Jesus is not suggesting that true believers will be able to "by faith" change the landscape of the earth but rather that they will be able to displace powerful religious systems that are no longer valid.

4. Obedient sons. (The parable of the inconsistent sons) (21:23-32)

23 And when He had come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him as He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?" 24 And Jesus answered and said to them, "I will ask you one thing too, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. 25 The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?" And they began reasoning among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Then why did you not believe him?' 26 But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the multitude; for they all hold John to be a prophet." 27 And answering Jesus, they said, "We do not know." He also said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

28 But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go work today in the vineyard.' 29 And he answered and said, 'I will, sir'; and he did not go. 30 "And he came to the second and said the same thing. But he answered and said, 'I will not'; yet he afterward regretted it and went. 31 Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The latter." Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you that the tax-gatherers and harlots will get into the kingdom of God before you. 32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax-gatherers and harlots did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him.

- Jesus' authority is questioned as usual. He tries to get the priests and elders to examine their own hearts by asking them a question which they will not answer because of their commitment to preserving their system and place in it.
- Jesus claimed that sinners would get into the kingdom while the leaders would refuse to see the way. This must have been very hard for the leaders to hear.
- The next parable expands Jesus' challenge.

5. Responsible servants. (The parable of the landowner and his evil servants) (21:33-46)

33 Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who *planted a vineyard and put a wall around it and dug a wine press in it, and built a tower*, and rented it out to vine-growers, and went on a journey. 34 And when the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce. 35 And the vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third. 36 Again he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them. 37 But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 38 But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and seize his inheritance.' 39 And they took him, and threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. 40 Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers?" 41 They said to Him, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers, who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons." 42 Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, '*The stone which the builders rejected, This became the chief corner stone; This came about from the Lord, And it is marvelous in our eyes*'?" 43 Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be

taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it. 44 And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust." 45 And when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them. 46 And when they sought to seize Him, they feared the multitudes, because they held Him to be a prophet."

- Jesus is the son of the landowner who is rejected and killed with the result that Israel is judged. The leaders of Israel understood the point of the parable but could not apply it to themselves.
- Jesus is clearly referred to as "the stone" with a number of implications.
 1. He was rejected by Israel .
 2. He became the corner stone on which the church is built.
 3. He will be the source of stumbling for many who will, in stumbling over him, be broken to pieces.
 4. He will one day judge many who will be pulverized.