

## **Lesson #22- Matthew Chapter 21 Questions for Discussion (With Help for Teachers):**

1. The first eleven verses of this chapter tell of Jesus coming into Jerusalem five days before His crucifixion and death (also found in Mark 11:1-11, Luke 19:28-44, John 12:12-19). We commonly refer to this as the triumphal entry. Discuss what you believe are important points of this event.

### **Help for Teachers:**

- **Riding on “an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass”:** Jesus and His disciples arrived at Bethphage and the Mount of Olives, which are the suburbs of Jerusalem and considered part of the city. Jesus had made it clear that He was going now into Jerusalem with the purpose of finishing the work He has come to earth to accomplish (Matt 20:28). Jesus sent two of His disciples to procure an ass and its foal and told them to tell the owners that “The Lord hath need of them”. Unfamiliar with the customs of the day, we would have expected the King to ride into town on a dashing stallion, like our fairy tale stories. But the animal a king rode in that time and region said everything about his purpose. If a king came riding a horse, he was likely on a war horse and coming to conquer in battle. But if a king rode in on a donkey, he was on a peaceful mission. We see examples of this in 1 Kings 1:33 and 2 Samuel 16:2. Our King was on a mission of peace for His elect as He rode into Jerusalem. The donkey He rode was borrowed; His kingdom was not of this world, and He entered Jerusalem meekly, no trumpets blasting or heralds going ahead or army following. Though it is true that for the world, His advent brought a sword rather than peace (Matt 10:34), His suffering secured peace with God for the people who would come to Him by faith (Eph 2:14-17). We see in prophesy an entirely different mode of transportation when Jesus comes the second time to earth. The description in Revelation is of a conquering King with all the glory and splendor one could imagine, riding on a white horse (Rev 19:11-16)! Some scholars also note that O.T. judges rode donkeys (Judges 5:10, 12:14) and Jesus’ next stop was the temple, where He would condemn those that defiled the temple and overturn tables. The prophesy of Zechariah stated that “he is *just*, and having salvation”.
- **Fulfilment of prophesy:** In verse 4 Jesus plainly says that this event took place to fulfill the prophesy that was recorded in 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.” We often feel that chaos reigns in our world and that the only constant is instability. World events, and even local politics in our hometowns are shocking. We see nations in turmoil and even our nation, seemingly sold out to wickedness and self-destruction, most leaders without integrity and driven by self-indulgence. Can you see that the inhabitants of Israel would have felt the same confusion and

despair? They were overcome by one conquering foreign army after another and now occupied under the iron fist of Rome. Their own religious leaders had become politicians with self-interests and little regard for the welfare of the common people. Corruption was rampant, at every level of society. Day to day life was, for many, subsistence living. Like today, many had resigned themselves to the fact that they were helplessly driven by the winds of fortune; just along for the ride with no idea where the trip would end, and no real expectation that it would end well. And then enters Jesus... and out of the chaos He declares that He is coming into town according to a plan that was established by the unchanging God and prophesied hundreds of years earlier so that there could be no doubt! It was happening now! The Eternal King was riding a donkey! He was here to bring salvation and peace to His people! There was cause for hope and rejoicing! The plan would not be altered! The plan would triumph because it was the King's plan, and He will receive the glory He deserves! Don't miss in the prophesy the personal invitation to "the daughter of Zion"; the masses may reject Jesus, but He calls His people to Himself, and in nothing will He fail!

- **The shouts of the multitude:** Multitudes of people became excited when they saw Jesus ride into the city. It seems they did identify Him with the prophesy of Zechariah. They took their clothes and cut down palm fronds and made a path with them before Him, as was the custom when a dignitary visited a city, to make the way easy and welcoming. And as He went, the people all around Him shouted "Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest." Hosanna means "save now". The multitude called Him "son of David", so they connected Him with the promised seed of David, that by prophesy was to deliver and rule forever (2 Sam 7:12-13, 2 Sam 22:51, Luke 1:32-33, Isa. 9:6-7, Isa. 11:1-10, Isa. 16:5, Isa. 32:1-2, Jer. 23:5-6, Amos 9:11-12,). And they acknowledged that this was the work of God... He comes in the name of the Lord, and we are imploring heaven to save now. Putting it all together they were shouting, "Save us now, you are the promised King to sit on the throne of David and deliver us and to bless us, you are sent by the Lord in heaven, and we are asking the Lord in heaven to save us now" (paraphrase).
- **The final evaluation of Jesus by the multitudes:** Sadly, it seems that on the surface the multitudes were finally turning to Jesus in faith, but in the depths of their heart there remained unbelief and unrepentance. In verse 10 the uproar had gotten the attention of the whole city and they wanted to know who all the commotion was about. Again sadly, the answer of the celebrating multitudes was, "This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee." What happened to "son of David"- King of the highest heaven? Jesus was indeed Prophet, Priest, and King, but why did they select "prophet" as their answer? In the eyes of most of Israel, Nazareth was a low-rent city in the slummy region of Galilee. Why didn't they identify Him with Bethlehem,

the city of the King? On the surface, there are “multitudes” in the United States today that identify with Christianity, attend and/or hold membership in churches, but in effect deny Him before men. They celebrate what they think will be the material blessings or community acceptance that comes with identifying with Jesus but are unwilling in their heart to surrender to Him as Lord. That seems the case with this multitude on Palm Sunday. They definitely wanted a king to come to them in peace on a donkey, but they definitely wanted that king to trade the donkey for a horse and lead them to glory over their material problems, to the end that they could enjoy great earthly treasures and personal glory in a kingdom of their personal making. As soon as it was evident that Jesus wasn’t there to begin the revolt, the entourage dissolved. We have that same problem and call it “prosperity gospel”. This false teaching has sadly captured the heart of many greedy Americans and is sweeping across continents where third-world poverty-stricken souls are being deceived with promises (lies) that connect Jesus with material wealth.

2. Upon entering Jerusalem, Jesus goes to the temple. What events happen at the temple and what do you think we should take from these events?

### **Help for Teachers:**

It appears that Jesus made a beeline straight to the temple, the “temple of God”. The meek Jesus made a wreck of what He found there (this is the second time Jesus cleared the temple, the first is recorded in John 2:15). He first “cast out” the merchants and then he turned over their tables and chairs. The Son of Man came into His temple and cleaned house. Can you imagine what the disciples were thinking? Even more than that, imagine what the religious leaders were thinking, the Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, and priests who headquartered in the temple and approved and probably profited personally from the merchandising Jesus destroyed had to be shocked and indignant. And they were.

These leaders of the people had done their best to discredit Jesus through theological debate, accusations, trapping Him in His words, and any other means they could devise, and ended up embarrassed each time. Now Jesus literally marches in as though He owns the temple (He does) and takes charge, as if He is the God of the temple (He is).

Interesting to me is that no authority, not even the temple guard, is recorded to have tried to stop Him or arrest Him (certainly not Scripture but tradition, is the story that “his face shone, and beams of light darted from his blessed eyes, which astonished these market-people, and compelled them to yield to his command”. Interesting... Proverbs 20:8 says, “A king that sitteth in the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes.”) It’s as though even His enemies recognize that He is righteous in His

actions and to publicly oppose Him would, once again, only bring them deeper discredit with the people.

All their efforts had failed, and it seems that this latest event where Jesus walked into the temple and cleaned house, seals their determination to rid themselves of Jesus. Defeated at every turn, they were already taking council with a group they had always been at odds with (Matt 12:14). In Mark 3:6 we see that they had put aside their differences with the Herodians, both having in Jesus a common enemy, to find a way to destroy him. Now they stoop to an all-out murder plot.

Some things for us to note are:

(1) The King, as He was just treated upon entering the city, didn't march to the palace or the court, but to the temple. His kingdom is not of this world, and that should correct our priorities.

(2) Business can be necessary and honorable, in its place. Money making under the guise of Godliness provokes the wrath of God. Be sure the church isn't deceived into such practices: "Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself." [2 Tim 6:5].

A soapbox moment: what does it say to the world if the church merchandises "Christian" products to support ministry? Even worse, to make personal profit or pay salaries? I don't think it is wrong, for instance, that a group of young people from a church hold a car wash to finance a ministry they wish to participate in, or a camp they wish to attend. But if they do, they should wash cars to provide a valuable service to people who want their car washed; they should not be advertising that it is a car wash for any kind of church ministry, to provoke a charitable response from the world at large. It is honoring to God to work and cheerfully give to the service of God from the fruit of our honest labor. It seems we should be careful not to portray our King as a charity in need of support. We have received freely; we are commanded to give freely. ("Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give." Matt 10:8)

(3) The practice and the people Jesus had previously run out of the temple, recorded in John's gospel, had returned. The nature of sin is to creep back in if we do not "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:" [1 Peter 5:8].

Two more events happen at the temple to further distress the chief priests and the scribes. First, having cast out the moneychangers (which were quite important to the priests and scribes), Jesus turns His attention to blind and lame people that these religious leaders paid little attention to, and He heals them.

Then, as they watch Jesus heal the blind and lame, children begin taking up the saying, “Hosanna to the Son of David”! Matthew records that these priests and scribes were now “sore displeased”. As Paul writes about in 1 Corinthians 1:25-27, the wise and powerful leaders of Israel are confounded, and their glory stripped, by the infirm and by the helpless children, that the glory of God may be seen brilliantly shining through as He rescues and lifts up all those that come to Him by faith, treasuring His worth!

3. In verses 17-22 is the famous story of the fig tree. What happened? What does it mean? What lesson did Jesus use it to teach?

#### **Help for Teachers:**

Jesus left the temple and returned to Bethany for the night. The next morning, He and the disciples headed back into Jerusalem and as they walked Jesus was hungry. Seeing a fig tree in the path, He went over to it and found no fruit, only a lot of leaves. Jesus cursed the fig tree, “Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever”. The fig tree quickly withered, to the amazement of the disciples.

The very words of the text are important when we study. Notice here the words: “*henceforth*” - from this time right now and going forward, and “*for ever*” - this tree will not ever again grow fruit.

Understanding the words, we now must pay attention to the surrounding text to grasp the point of the cursing of the fig tree. To only hear the question of the disciples as they witness this event and the immediate answer of Christ concerning faith and mountains, is to miss the greater point that leads to seeing the glorious wisdom of God in the mystery of His redeeming work for all mankind (Rom 16:25-27, Eph 3:1-21). We will look more carefully at the following points as we discuss question #4, but summarizing the text:

1. We saw that Jesus came to the temple, the center of Israel’s worship. He walked in and asserted His authority as the Lord and God of the temple. He wrecked the place and offended the leaders, who had not sought the righteousness of God by faith, as Moses taught, but had sought it by the keeping of the law.
2. A fig tree is a metaphor for Israel in Scripture. Jesus comes to the fig tree, hungry for fruit that abounds to His glory by Israel’s obedience; there is none. (Paul says something similar about us in Phil 4:17-20). Jesus makes the statement we are trying to understand above, “Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever”. Having rejected their Messiah and King, national Israel has fallen over the Truth (Rom 9:31-32) and from this time forward and forever is withered and will not be productive.

3. In answering the questions of the disciples in verses 20-22, Jesus begins opening their understanding that Israel's problem is unbelief and makes clear that faith will be the defining characteristic of God's people.
  4. Jesus goes into the temple again and as He teaches, His authority is challenged by the unbelieving leaders. Jesus uses a parable and then makes its meaning perfectly clear, to illustrate the point of the withered fig tree. National Israel's status as the people of God, to which all the nations come to see God, is gone. Now, from the nations (gentiles), God will bring out a people (Paul refers to them as the "Israel of God- the church [Gal 6:16]) to take His glory to all the nations and honor Him by faith. They will now be counted for the seed (Rom 9:6-8) and inherit the blessings of Abraham (Gal 3:6-29).
4. When the Pharisees challenged Jesus' authority in verses 23-46, Jesus answered with a question that the Pharisees declined to answer because whatever answer they give would trap them in their hypocrisy. He followed this by a parable. What was the parable and discuss its meaning?

#### Help for Teachers:

The parable is of a man that had two sons. He commanded both sons to go and work in his vineyard for the day. One of his sons at first refused, but then has a change of heart and goes to work as the father had commanded. The second son seems, by his words, immediately obedient, but never actually went to work. The question Jesus posed was, which of the two sons was truly obedient?

The temple leaders correctly answer that the one that initially refused, but then repented and went to work was the one that was obedient. The other was a liar.

Jesus then condemned them by their own words saying, "Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you". Jesus reminded them of how John the Baptist had come preaching repentance, and to prepare the way of the Lord. Many that were considered the sinners of society, though they had initially been disobedient, turned in obedient faith at John's preaching. On the other hand, the religious leaders to whom Jesus was speaking made a pretense of being righteous, but never obeyed God by coming to Him in faith.

In the ensuing parable, a householder, representing God the Father, made and provided for a vineyard, *the world*. He placed husbandmen to do the work in His vineyard; that was represented by *Israel*. Israel was disobedient and refused to do the work to produce the fruit that would glorify God (righteous works by faith). Servants were sent to bring the wicked husbandmen into rational obedience. That would be *prophets and preachers*, who Israel persecuted and killed. Finally, the householder sends his own son

to bring these husbandmen back to their senses, but they kill the son also. The son is *Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God*; they crucify Him. What will the Husbandman then do? What did God do? He will “miserably destroy those wicked men” is the answer of the blind leaders of the Jews, he will “let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons” they say, oblivious that their answer is to their own condemnation.

And then Jesus makes it clear, national Israel has rejected the chief cornerstone, the only foundation for any building that will last. Because they have, God has taken the kingdom from them (national Israel) and given it to others (“a nation”, all those that are obedient to God by faith, even of the gentiles).

Another important way of seeing the cursing of the fig tree is as the failure of the entire human race and its moral and religious attempts at appeasing God. We were created for the purpose of producing fruit, that is works, that would bring glory to God that created us in His image. Adam and Eve sewed together fig leaves in a vain effort to cover themselves by their own works, so that God wouldn’t see their nakedness, but their failure couldn’t be concealed from God by anything they did.

This fig tree was covered with leaves that made it appealing from a distance, but when Jesus approached and examined the tree for fruit, it was completely without, failed in its purpose. That’s how we are when we offer our self-righteousness or our religiosity as a covering for sin.

The work that Jesus did on our behalf is imputed righteousness for us. Because we are made new in Him, we legitimately do produce fruit that glorifies God... by faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ through the blood that He shed. When the disciples expressed their shock over how quickly the fig tree withered, Jesus replied saying, “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. And all things, ***whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.***” Prayer and faith enable fruit. “Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness”. (Romans 4:3).