

Sent: Wednesday, March 11, 2020 1:20 PM
Subject: Last Nite's MOB Study on Matthew 21

"And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive!" (Matthew 21:22)

As Matthew 21 opens, Jesus and His disciples are "approaching" Jerusalem--the first time Matthew records anything about Jesus in Jerusalem! It's Passover Week and Jerusalem is "surging" with Jews from all over Israel--and even the known world at that time--for a sacred time of national celebration to remember how God rescued their fathers from bondage in Egypt, and brought "salvation" (deliverance!) through the "blood of a lamb" (the "paschal," or sacrificial, lamb!) This is the week planned by God Himself "before the foundations of the world"! The most climatic week, in essence, of all human history! Jesus (the "King") was coming, not to be crowned but to be crucified, and "give His life as a ransom for many" (as we learned in last week's lesson, in Matthew 21:28)! (You can't write a script like this unless you're God and have a miraculous plan!)

So why, you might ask, would Jesus present Himself as the long-awaited Messiah and actually make arrangements for His "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem at this time, despite His clear rejection by the Jewish leaders and His focus on preparing His disciples for the cross?

It was a fulfillment of Scripture, most importantly!

Zachariah 9:9 says: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion (Israel)! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you: He is just and endowed with salvation, humble and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal (son of a female donkey). (Zachariah prophesied this to Israel 500 years earlier, after Israel returned from their exile in Babylon, that "their king" was coming and that he would (of all things!) ride on a donkey, that had never been ridden before, into Jerusalem!)

Dr. Constable notes that "even though the nation as a whole rejected Jesus, it was an opportunity for individual people to believe by faith in Him, and receive salvation, and ultimate entrance into the kingdom of God"! And so, Jesus presented Himself formally to the people, as well as to the leaders of Israel, as their Messiah! And His words and actions confirmed that He was indeed the Messiah (and more)!

The people received Him--at least initially--with great jubilation, "spreading their coats and branches from trees in the road...and shouting "Hosanna"--much to the chagrin and anger of the Pharisees! But, as Luke 19:39-40 states, "if they were silent, even the stones would cry out!" (Luke also records how that when Jesus saw the people and the city, He "wept over it"--knowing the fate that would come eventually, when, in 70 A.D. Titus would besiege the city, destroy it, and kill many people! Also, in knowing the superficiality of the people's hearts, and how many would soon join the crowd in "crying out for His death"!)

Well, next we see Jesus entering the temple and "driving out those who were buying and selling and overturning the tables of the money-changers" and saying: "It is written! (quoting from Isaiah) My house shall be called a house of prayer; but you are making it a den of thieves!" But then, with deep compassion, using His authority and power to "heal the lame and the blind"!

And when the chief priest and scribes complained, about the children "shouting praises" in the temple, He quoted from Psalm 8 about how "out of the mouths of children God had prepared praise for Himself," thus claiming to be not only Messiah, but God (in the flesh)!

Then we read about the incident of the "fig tree" and how it was "cursed" and instantly withered, after producing leaves but no fruit--as an "object lesson" of Israel's failure to receive her Messiah, and of her soon coming destruction! The disciples are amazed as Jesus demonstrated again His authority over very nature! To which Jesus reminded them that if they had just a small amount of faith when they prayed, faith not in themselves or in their words, but in the power of the One to whom they prayed, all things were possible! And thus, our memory verse (which sounds on its surface as a bit unrealistic!): "And all things you ask in prayer, believing (again, in the One prayed to!), you will receive!" (The apostle John would later write, in I John 5:14-15: "This is the confidence we have before Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us! And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him!")

Well, wouldn't you know! The chief priests and elders--with their unbelieving hearts and, as J.J. said last nite, their "wildly misplaced" thinking--dared question Jesus' "authority to do these things"! And so, Jesus responded with three parables, all directed to them and other leaders of Israel, as a kind of resounding condemnation! The first two parables--that of the "two sons" and of the "vineyard"--both provide a virtual overview of the history of Israel's rejection of the prophets, but more importantly of Jesus Himself! The murder of "the Son" (Jesus) sent by the landowner (God) to the wicked tenants (Israel's leaders) of the vineyard (Israel) couldn't have been more indicative of the case against Israel!

Haven't you "supposedly Old Testament scholars," Jesus basically asked, ever read the Scriptures--about the "Stone" (symbolizing Himself!) which the builders (again, Israel) rejected which has become the Chief Corner Stone (King Jesus!). And He added (in verse 43, which some have called the "one of the key verses in the entire account of Matthew") that "the kingdom of God would be taken away from you and given to a people (best understood as the "church") producing the fruit of it"--indicative of a "new age" to come! (A Spirit-filled Apostle Peter would later proclaim, from prison, to the rulers and elders of the people (in Acts 4:11-12): "He is the Stone, which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the Chief Corner Stone! And there is salvation in on one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved!")

Matthew 21 closes, not on a particularly "triumphant note," with the chief priests and Pharisees clearly understanding what Jesus had spoken to them, but rather than accepting His words, and believing in Him, and repenting of their sin, they were determined to "seize Him" and put Him to death (which would soon come about anyway!)--but held their fire, "fearing the people"!

More on the Passion week in the weeks to come! Meanwhile, men, let's recognize and seek Jesus as King of our lives and pray for Him to do great and wondrous things in our world--according to His will and purpose--and for His glory!

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