

## Matthew 21A

- We've reached the final major section of Matthew's Gospel, a section that takes us through the final week of Jesus' earthly life and the days after His death
  - In this section we'll study Jesus' entry into the city, the Last Supper, Jesus' trial and crucifixion, His resurrection and His post appearances
    - On the calendar, these events take place over a very short period of time, barely 6 days according to Matthew's account
    - But the retelling of these events requires almost a third of Matthew's Gospel
    - So obviously, they are very important and worthy of careful consideration
  - And even before we begin that study, we have a brief moment at the end of Chapter 20 to cover, which bridges us into the final section

**Matt. 20:29** As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed Him.

**Matt. 20:30** And two blind men sitting by the road, hearing that Jesus was passing by, cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!"

**Matt. 20:31** The crowd sternly told them to be quiet, but they cried out all the more, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"

**Matt. 20:32** And Jesus stopped and called them, and said, "What do you want Me to do for you?"

**Matt. 20:33** They said to Him, "Lord, we want our eyes to be opened."

**Matt. 20:34** Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him.

- As you remember, Jesus had been in Perea on the eastern side of the Jordan river
  - But then Jesus crosses the Jordan back to the western side and now He's headed up to Jerusalem for the last time
    - And the road up from the Jordan River valley runs by the ancient town of Jericho before reaching Jerusalem soon after
    - Jericho is set in a mountain range that runs parallel to the Jordan river on the west side of the valley

- The road first passed through the ancient Jericho of the Old Testament times which Joshua and the Israelites invaded
- The OT Jericho was in ruins by Jesus' day, so about a mile away stood a new settlement of Jericho built by Herod the Great
  - That city was built around Herod's summer palace, where Herod later died
  - Today there is also a third Jericho, a modern Arab Jericho which extends toward the Jordan river
- So in Matthew's account, Jesus has passed by the old Jericho and was now entering Herod's Jericho where He encounters two blind men
  - The other Gospel writers only mention one of these men, who Mark names as Bartimaeus
  - But by Matthew we learn there were actually two men involved, so perhaps Bartimaeus was the more insistent or more vocal
- The men hear that the Messiah was approaching, so they begin to cry out loudly for Jesus to have mercy on them
  - They say Lord, Son of David, which is a term that refers to the Messiah's role as King sitting on the throne of David in the Kingdom
    - In effect, they are declaring Jesus to be the King over Israel
    - Which leads some in the crowds to become uncomfortable with their cries
    - Matthew says in v.31 that some in the crowd were telling them sternly to be quiet, meaning they were being rebuked
  - Luke reports that these people were in the front of the crowd:

**Luke 18:39 Those who led the way were sternly telling him to be quiet; but he kept crying out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"**

- Remember, this scene is taking place near Jericho, home to one of King Herod's four palaces
- So men loudly proclaiming Jesus is rightful heir to the throne of Israel is a statement of insurrection to the Romans

- So no doubt the crowd was nervous about that, but for the same reason, we can see their statement as a clear demonstration of faith
  - These men knew where they were and how dangerous their speech might be, yet they persisted as Jesus approached
  - They keep yelling out for Jesus in a desperate hope for mercy
- Being blind is never easy, but in ancient times it was an especially terrible fate
  - The blind were unable to work for the most part, and as a result Jewish society viewed them as worthless and a burden
    - And to make matters worse, the Pharisees taught that blindness was a judgment from God
    - So Jewish society felt justified in withholding their pity leaving blind people with literally no source of support
  - As a result, the blind were limited to begging for subsistence, and without the ability to see, they were vulnerable to anyone and anything
    - They might be cheated or abused by strangers if not ignored altogether
    - And they were susceptible to animal attacks and to exposure to the elements
  - So we understand their persistence and desperation, because for them healing could be the difference between life and death
    - But we also understand that after Jesus was rejected in Chapter 12, He no longer heals crowds indiscriminately
    - Back in Chapter 12 we found another time when people were asking is Jesus the Son of David?
    - And at that time the Pharisees said no, Jesus was Satan, and the crowds agreed with their assessment
  - That led Jesus to reject this generation of Israel and withdraw the offer of the Kingdom
    - Since that time Jesus only heals those who first demonstrate faith in Him and usually only in a private moment
    - So certainly these men have demonstrated faith by their persistent cries and so Jesus will attend to them

- When Jesus reaches them, He stops and calls for them to come to Him for a private audience
  - Mark describes the moment this way:

**Mark 10:49** And Jesus stopped and said, “Call him here.” So they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take courage, stand up! He is calling for you.”

**Mark 10:50** Throwing aside his cloak, he jumped up and came to Jesus.

- The same crowd that earlier had been trying to silence the men now encourage the men to stand up and answer Jesus’ call
- So Bartimaeus stands up, and as he does, he casts aside his cloak
- This is a very interesting and telling gesture because a cloak was an indispensable part of ancient attire
  - For the common man, a cloak was one of the most important possessions he owned
  - A cloak protected a person against cold and rain, it was a shield against the harsh sun and a tent during sandstorms
  - It was his blanket at night and in desperate times, it might be sold for a night in a shelter and a meal
- So a cloak was not cast aside casually, and that was especially true for a blind man
  - When a blind man casts anything in the midst of a crowd, he would not expect to find it again
  - Because the moment that cloak left his hands, someone in that crowd would have picked it up and made it his own
  - A blind man is helpless to stop theft, since he couldn’t identify his property, let alone the thief
  - So a blind man always holds on to what he owns tightly
- But not Bartimaeus... he casts aside his cloak when Jesus called for him
  - And this suggests Bartimaeus was expecting to be healed and with his eyesight restored, he knew he would find his property
  - It’s the mark of someone who had absolute confidence and faith in Jesus’ power to heal

- So in v.32 Jesus asks the man what do you want from Me, since all they had asked was for mercy
  - So the men specify they want their eyes opened, and moved by compassion Jesus grants them their sight
  - And they then become disciples of Jesus, following Him to Jerusalem
  - In Mark's Gospel we see the connection between faith and Jesus' healing even more clearly

**[Mark 10:52](#)** And Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and began following Him on the road.

- The connection between faith and healing during the latter part of Jesus' ministry is clearly evident, but we must be careful in what we do with this truth
  - It's true that faith is a prerequisite for receiving the blessings of a relationship with Jesus
    - As the writer of Hebrews says

**[Heb. 11:6](#)** And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

- Without faith it is impossible to please God, and our faith includes an expectation that we will be rewarded
  - And at times that reward may include a temporary physical healing of one kind or another
    - I say temporary because eventually we all die...no healing lasts forever
    - And that's where this truth can be distorted and manipulated until it's made into a lie
  - Generally speaking, faith is a prerequisite for pleasing God and receiving reward or blessing
    - But just because we have faith doesn't mean we will always receive what we want, especially in the area of healing

- As I just said, we all die eventually, so eventually our requests to be healed will be answered no
- And that's a good thing, because the death of this body makes possible the receiving of the next body, which is much better
- So be wary of any teaching that suggests that God will always heal you
  - Saying that God will always heal us when we have faith is the equivalent of trying to push on a rope
  - A rope only works in one direction...it's only useful for pulling, not for pushing
- Similarly, faith is necessary for pleasing God and receiving reward, but that relationship only works in one direction
  - We can't turn that formula around on God by declaring that reward *always* comes for those who have faith
  - Faith is necessary to receive blessings like healing, but it is not sufficient...God's will must also be inclined to grant us healing
  - And self-evidently, God's will is not always for us to be healed
- Returning to our text, Matthew includes this moment on the road to Jericho because it foreshadows what's about to happen as Jesus enters Jerusalem
  - In a few days, Jesus will be met by hundreds if not thousands alongside the road leading from Bethany into Jerusalem
    - As they greet Jesus, they will declare Hosanna to the Son of David, Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord
    - They will celebrate the arrival of their King, Who they assume is preparing to rule over their nation
  - But Jesus isn't coming to rule, and so as He did with these blind men, Jesus does not acknowledge their call for Him to be King
    - He will only respond to those who come to Him in faith
    - The nation of Israel as a whole will not receive their kingdom in this day
    - And Jesus will soon die for their sins...we will study that moment now, beginning with the next section

[Matt. 21:1](#) When they had approached Jerusalem and had come to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples,

[Matt. 21:2](#) 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.

[Matt. 21:3](#) “If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord has need of them,’ and immediately he will send them.”

[Matt. 21:4](#) This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

[Matt. 21:5](#) “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.’”

- Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem comes from the east, and the east side of the city is marked by a series of mountain ranges and valleys
  - On the top of the two ranges to the east stand two small villages called Bethany and Bethphage
    - Bethphage stood directly the east side of Jerusalem on top of the Mt. of Olives
    - At this point, Jesus stops walking and directs two disciples to enter Bethphage looking for a donkey
  - In fact, Jesus gives the men explicit instructions on where to find a donkey and her colt, and to bring both the mother and the foal to Him
    - And if someone asks what they are doing, Jesus says just tell them the Lord has need of it and they will immediately allow it
    - This is the only time in Matthew’s Gospel where Jesus refers to Himself as Lord (Yahweh), which is the proper name of God
  - Mark says this happened just as Jesus predicted, when a crowd did object to the disciples trying to take the animals
    - Yet the crowd relented when the disciples gave the response Jesus commanded
    - And so they brought the two animals back to Jesus
- As strange as all this sounds to us, it wasn’t altogether unusual for someone to borrow a donkey or for a dignitary to ride a donkey

- Just as we have rent-a-car services today, it was common to have rent-a-mule services for travelers in that day
  - Mules and donkeys were a common form of transportation in that day, especially near a large city like Jerusalem
  - And a donkey was not associated with poverty or degradation
  - They were an appropriate way for a dignitary to enter Zion
- Horses were extremely rare in common day life and almost exclusively used for war
  - Mules and donkeys, on the other hand, were associated with peace
  - So kings and princes would commonly ride mules and donkeys in peace time instead of horses so as not to send the wrong signal
  - You may remember that Solomon rode a mule to his inauguration in 1 Kings 1
- Luke tells us that this foal had never been sat upon, so Jesus was getting a rent-a-mule with zero miles on it and it had that new-mule smell
  - In Jesus' day, an animal reserved for royal use could not be used for common purposes
  - So by requiring an animal that had not been used for any common purpose, Jesus was indicating He was royalty
- Obviously, the Father has made this provision available for His Son which means God was working well ahead of time to bring it about
  - Consider all the things that had to happen at just the right time to make this possible
    - The Lord first had to bring the coal to birth at the right time and place
    - Then He had to ensure someone tied it up at the right place and time
    - And then He had to prepare the hearts of the people to accept the disciples' explanation
- This is such a simple and obvious display of God's sovereignty

- We like to say God didn't make us robots, but that doesn't mean He doesn't control our actions
  - Everything happened according to God's will, and yet the people involved made personal choices according to their own desires
  - Yet behind the scenes the Lord moved hearts and heads to achieve a specific outcome...and the Lord does this all the time
  - His sovereignty over all details on earth is what gives us confidence to place our faith in His word
  - Including in His promises that He will provide for us according to our needs
- You may have heard Christians saying God owns the cattle on a thousand hills, which is a verse taken from Psalm 50
  - And when we say this, we mean it literally as an encouragement that God has the means to provide us anything we need
  - Everything in the Universe belongs to God, so He can put it to work in any way He wishes
- In this case, someone owned those animals, yet they were God's property, so He made the decision to give these animals to Jesus
  - And time and time again, the Lord makes provision for Jesus in this way
  - Jesus lived during His entire ministry owning nothing in human terms...Jesus Himself said He had no place to lay His head
  - Yet because God owns everything ultimately, when Jesus needed something, He received it just in time
  - We're going to see this happen again when the time comes for Jesus and the disciples to share a Passover meal
- Furthermore, nothing we own is truly ours, because it remains God's property even as He allows us to possess it for a time
  - Think of your possessions like a book you borrow from the library
  - We have checked it out, and we possess it for a time and enjoy it while we have it, but eventually it goes back to the library

- And after it does, someone else is going to check it out and enjoy it
- So while it may have felt like our property for a time, we knew it wasn't forever
- We should approach our possessions with that same understanding...our needs are met by God and what we possess belongs to God
  - So when we truly need something, we should have confidence to know the Lord will provide it in the nick of time through some means
    - I'm not saying those means will be supernatural...they are most often natural
    - But they will often come in surprising ways, and usually just when we need them most
    - Which means we must have patience to wait if we are going to see the provision the Lord has planned for us
  - And when we do receive things through whatever means, hold on to them loosely knowing they are only passing through your hands
    - They remain the Lord's possessions, and just as He gave them to you for a time, they still remain the Lord's property
    - And one day He will ask you to pass them on to someone else, whether while you are alive or after you die
    - It's better for you to release them while you're alive while you may still gain the credit for generosity than to hold on to them
  - If we live with this outlook, two good things will happen
    - First, we will waste much less time worrying about possessions
    - We all spend way too much time and energy focused on gaining and maintaining possessions that we lose in the end
  - Secondly, if we wait for God to provide what we need to serve Him, our faith will grow tremendously
    - Because nothing builds your faith faster than recognizing how little you need and how much you depend upon God for it
    - I had a missionary friend once tell me that Christians in developed countries miss the blessing of dependence on God

- A missionary is typically very aware of their dependence because they lack for most things and live off donations, etc.
  - It's living as close to Jesus' lifestyle as we can get today, and it forces us to recognize God provides everything
  - Similarly, when we lose a job and feel the insecurity of no paycheck for a time, we're reminded of our dependence on God
  - So expect the Lord to provide according to your need (not your wants)...and don't hold on to what He gives you too tightly
- But now to the bigger question....why did Jesus need to ride a donkey now after having walked everywhere for the entirety of His ministry?
  - Matthew gives us that answer in vs.4-5 quoted from Zechariah 9
    - In Zechariah 9:9 Israel was told that their Messiah would arrive in a humble fashion, riding on a colt, a juvenile donkey
    - The first coming of the Messiah was a ministry of humility, in keeping with His plan to make Himself a sacrifice for our sin
  - So in keeping with that humble mission, He enters Jerusalem in a particularly humble fashion that fulfills the Scriptures
    - And as we begin the final week of Jesus' earthly life, we're going to see a lot of Scripture fulfilled
    - And we're going to correct a lot of misconceptions and false traditions about the events of this week
    - In particular, the timeline of the events that follow offers us an opportunity to do both
- We will study this moment in greater detail in weeks to come, but for now we can see how the timeline offers fulfillment of one Old Testament prophecy
  - Jesus is about to enter the city of Jerusalem through the east gate, on a Sunday, the first day of the week
    - Mark says Jesus arrives at the temple late in the day so He quickly leaves to spend the evening outside the city in Bethany
    - Following Sunday night, Jesus will return to the Temple each of the next three days prior to Passover

- Over these days, Jesus will teach in the temple grounds and be interrogated by various religious leaders trying to discredit Him
  - Those four days Jesus spends in the temple from Sunday through Wednesday are a fulfillment of Scripture
  - Specifically, Jesus is fulfilling a commandment associated with the Passover feast described in Exodus
- In Exodus the Lord gave Israel the Passover observance, where He told them to select a lamb on the tenth of Nisan

**Ex. 12:3** “Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying, ‘On the tenth of this month they are each one to take a lamb for themselves, according to their fathers’ households, a lamb for each household.

**Ex. 12:4** ‘Now if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his neighbor nearest to his house are to take one according to the number of persons in them; according to what each man should eat, you are to divide the lamb.

**Ex. 12:5** ‘Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats.

**Ex. 12:6** ‘You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight.

- The lamb was selected on the tenth of Nisan, and it was kept in the house of the family for four days until the fourteenth
- During these days the family would continually inspect the lamb looking for any spot that might disqualify it
- Then at twilight on the 14th, the spotless animal was sacrificed and consumed that night...nothing was to remain at morning
- We know from John’s Gospel that Jesus was our spotless Passover Lamb sacrificed for the sins of the world so He too must be inspected for four days
  - The tenth of Nisan fell on a Sunday the particular week Jesus’ died
    - So Jesus arrives in Jerusalem on that day, and He immediately proceeds to the house of God for four days of inspection
    - Starting Sunday and continuing for part of each of the next three days, Jesus is inspected by the religious leaders
    - This process of inspection will show once again that Jesus is qualified to be our sinless, spotless Lamb

- So this entry into Jerusalem is not an opportunity for Jesus to reign or rule over Israel...He is entering to fulfill the Passover
  - Therefore, each detail in the account reflects the requirements of that feast
  - And even the timing of the events will mirror the Passover so that even as Israel celebrate the feast Jesus is at work fulfilling it
- We will study the events in detail, the timeline in detail, the movement of Jesus in and out and around the city in detail
  - We will trace it all so that we can see the sovereignty and wisdom of God at work to bring all these events to the appointed end
  - By the way, in the middle of it all we have the single most important discourse that Jesus gives on the subject of end times
  - Be sure to be a part of this study