

## Matthew 21B

- Today we study the entry of Jesus into the city of Jerusalem in preparation for His death on Passover
  - Last week we followed Jesus walking up the road from Jericho and into Bethany and Bethphage
    - He summoned His disciples to retrieve a young donkey waiting for Him in Bethphage
    - And now Jesus will ride the donkey into the city through the east gate of the city walls
  - Also remember from last week that this is the tenth of Nisan, the first month on the Jewish calendar
    - We're four days from Passover and Jesus is entering the city on a Sunday, the day we traditionally call Palm Sunday
    - And though Jesus has come to Jerusalem for the Passover on three prior occasions during His earthly ministry, this time is different
    - And the crowds gathered outside the city seem to sense that difference, as we see in our study today

[Matt. 21:6](#) The disciples went and did just as Jesus had instructed them, [Matt. 21:7](#) and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid their coats on them; and He sat on the coats.

[Matt. 21:8](#) Most of the crowd spread their coats in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in the road.

[Matt. 21:9](#) The crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were shouting,  
"Hosanna to the Son of David;  
BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD;  
Hosanna in the highest!"

- After the disciples retrieve the donkey from Bethphage and bring it to Jesus, they place their cloaks on the donkey to form a make-shift saddle
  - And then Jesus sat on the coats and the donkey began to take Him into Jerusalem, just as Zechariah 9 foretold would happen

- And as the donkey moves down the road, members of the crowd place their coats on the ground for the donkey to walk over
- While this may seem odd to us, it was a well-understood tradition in that day
- Within the ancient east, it was customary to greet a king's arrival in this fashion
- We can see a simple example of this when King Jehu of the Northern Kingdom of Israel was coronated

**2Kings 9:13** Then they hurried and each man took his garment and placed it under him on the bare steps, and blew the trumpet, saying, "Jehu is king!"

- So the crowd places coats under Jesus and in the path of the donkey as a symbolic statement that Jesus is the king
- Clearly, the people are hoping that Jesus' arrival in the city will lead to His coronation and the start of the Kingdom
- But notice in v.8 that while most were placing coats on the road in honor of the king, others chose to use palm branches
  - Matthew says only that they were branches of trees, but John tells us they were specifically palm branches
    - Palm branches had a distinct meaning for Jews of that day: they were a symbol of national liberation
    - It's like the way the French lined the roads of Paris waving tiny American flags when our troops liberated their city in WWII
  - Similarly, the Jewish people waved or lay down palm branches to indicate their joy to greet a liberator
    - The Jews first used this symbol to greet the Maccabees when they defeated the Greeks to liberate Israel in the 2nd century
    - In 1 Maccabees, a historical account of that period, we read:

**Simon and his men entered the fort singing hymns of praise and thanksgiving, while carrying palm branches and playing harps, cymbals, and lyres (1 Macc 13:51).**

- In fact, Jewish coins that were minted in that period and in the centuries after had a palm branch as the symbol of the nation



- So palm branches became a symbol in first century Jewish culture of a military conquerer liberating the nation
- So we have two groups with different perspectives greeting Jesus as He arrived into Jerusalem
  - Some in this crowd greeted Jesus with coats on the ground while others greeted Him with palm branches
  - The first group saw Jesus as their Messiah sent to defeat Satan's Kingdom and establish the Kingdom of God on earth
  - But the second group saw a Moses-like conquerer coming to defeat Rome, liberate Israel and establish a new Davidic Dynasty
- Remember I told you last week that during our study of Jesus' final week, we will be doing some myth-busting along the way
  - Traditions play a big part in our Easter celebration, and some are proper and true to the Bible
    - But there are some traditions that are extra-biblical (not in the Bible) and a few are actually unbiblical (against the Bible)
    - And one of those unbiblical traditions is the way we typically commemorate Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem
  - We commonly call that day Palm Sunday to remember the ones who were laying down palm branches in front of Jesus
    - But the ones in Jesus' day who had the palm branches were making a political statement, not a religious statement
    - They were celebrating a military leader bringing a political victory, not a Messiah preparing to rule over God's Kingdom
  - Therefore, that's not how we should remember that moment either
    - The better way to remember Messiah's entry into Jerusalem would be to call the day Cloaks Sunday

- Because it was those who lay down their coats who recognized Jesus as Messiah
- Obviously, this is not a major point of theology, and I'm not suggesting we start a movement in the church over it (#cloaksnotpalms)
  - I'm using this simply as an example to illustrate how we tend to accept traditions without question, and without fact-checking
  - And if we do this, we will eventually adopt behaviors and beliefs that aren't correct and some of those errors may be significant
  - Many false doctrines have grown out of tradition (e.g., infant baptism, calling ministers "priests", etc.)
- But there's an even bigger problem when we accept tradition blindly
  - Eventually, we may start to see tradition as equal to Scripture or we may come to value our traditions *over* Scripture
  - When that happens, we will stop looking to Scripture for our spiritual answers and rely only on what our traditions tell us
  - So when we discover that our tradition contradicts the Bible, we need to have the humility to say, "I was wrong" and change
- Back to Matthew, the crowd is greeting Jesus with coats and palm branches, and the crowd is also singing to Jesus from Psalm 118
  - They sing "Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord" taken from that psalm
    - It's a Messianic greeting that rabbis taught Israel to proclaim when the Messiah arrived
    - Everyone was singing it, indicating that the crowd was there to greet Jesus as the Messiah
    - But remember in that crowd there were two different views of understanding what the Messiah was coming to do for Israel
  - As usual, there were Pharisees following Jesus and as they hear the crowd singing this Messianic greeting, Luke tells us they object

**Luke 19:39** Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples."

[Luke 19:40](#) But Jesus answered, "I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!"

- The Pharisees recognized the meaning of the crowds chatting of course, and they move to silence the crowd
- They ask Jesus to rebuke them, which effectively means they were expecting Jesus to renounce any claim to being Messiah
- Of course, Jesus does the opposite...He tells the Pharisees that if this crowd didn't proclaim Psalm 118, the rocks would have done it
  - Jesus is affirming a basic and powerful biblical truth best summarized by Isaiah 55:11

[Is. 55:11](#) So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;  
It will not return to Me empty,  
Without accomplishing what I desire,  
And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.

- The Lord says that His word is the most powerful force in the Universe and it will always accomplish what God desires
- The Lord speaks of His word like it's an agent sent forth with a mission
- And the Lord says it will not return without succeeding in the matter for which He sends it
  - And Psalm 118 declared that as Messiah arrives, "Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord" would be sung in recognition of His arrival
  - And since that word has gone forth, it would be accomplished... nothing will stop it, not even the Pharisees
- In fact, Jesus says that even if the Pharisees had somehow managed to silence the crowd, then the rocks themselves would have cried out
  - The Creation itself is bound to obey the word of God, because His will be done!
  - So the only question is whether we will participate in that obedience or not

- On that day, some in the crowd were willing to participate in obeying Psalm 118, but there were others (like the Pharisees) who were not willing
  - Which takes us back to Chapter 12 again, when Jesus declared that the nation of Israel had committed the unpardonable sin
    - When Israel rejected Jesus' claim to be Messiah, Jesus declared they would not see the Kingdom set up in that day
    - And if you remember, Jesus gave the nation an ultimatum, which we found recorded in Luke

[Luke 13:34](#) "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it!

[Luke 13:35](#) "Behold, your house is left to you desolate; and I say to you, you will not see Me until the time comes when you say, 'BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!'"

- Jesus told Israel that since they would not receive Him as Messiah in that day, the Kingdom would be withheld from them
  - Israel's house (meaning their temple, their ruling dynasty, their nation) would become desolate for a time
  - And Jesus would not return for Israel until they say "Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord!"
- There's that phrase again from Psalm 118...that's the Messianic greeting that Jesus said would mark His return and the arrival of the Kingdom
  - And now we see the crowd doing exactly what Psalm 118 requires
  - So are we now seeing that Psalm fulfilled as Jesus rides into Jerusalem? Is this the moment He brings them the Kingdom?
- No, and the Pharisees' continuing dispute with Jesus over His identity proves that it isn't the moment
  - And Matthew inserts a statement in Chapter 21 to make clear that not everyone was on board with this Messianic declaration

[Matt. 21:10](#) When He had entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?"

[Matt. 21:11](#) And the crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee."

- Notice that many in the city was asking what's the fuss all about and who was this man coming into the city?
- Despite Jesus' three-year ministry of miracles and teaching, there were still many in Jerusalem who didn't even know Him
- And even among those who did know of Jesus' ministry, they only identify Jesus as a prophet from Nazareth and not as the Messiah
  - Matthew's point is that there was anything but a consensus about Jesus' identity
  - So though we see this crowd embracing Jesus as He arrives, they were certainly in the minority
  - And that's why this is not the moment that the Kingdom arrives for Israel
- Because when Jesus made His proclamation in Luke 13, He was stipulating the requirement for His return to Israel and for receiving the Kingdom
  - And His standard was that *all* Israel must accept Him before He returns
    - If an individual Jew accepts Jesus as Messiah, that individual is saved by their faith just as we were
    - But that doesn't bring about Jesus' Second Coming nor does it result in the Kingdom arriving for the nation of Israel
  - Only when every living Jew on earth receives Jesus as their Messiah will Jesus return
    - All Israel, the entire nation, must receive Jesus as Messiah, and when that happens, Jesus will come to them
    - And at that time, Israel will be singing Psalm 118
    - But at this moment, only some are singing it, while others like the Pharisees are trying to stop it
  - It was the Pharisees' rejection of Jesus that caused Israel to lose the Kingdom in that day and we see that continuing here

- A future generation of Israel will declare Jesus to be Messiah without objections and He will return to them in that day
- By the way, if you're wondering how all Israel comes to proclaim Jesus as their Messiah, you find the answer in Zechariah 12
- And we will study that passage as part of our Revelation study
- As Jesus enters the city, He goes directly to the Temple, and as I explained last week, this will be His pattern for the next four days
  - Jesus is fulfilling the requirements of the Passover, which required that the Passover lamb be kept in the household for four days
    - During those days, the lamb is inspected to ensure it's spotless and without defect
    - So as our Passover Lamb, Jesus too must be inspected for four days in His house, the temple
  - Sunday is the first of those four days and on this day, the Lord makes a statement about the purpose of the house

**Matt. 21:12** And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves.

**Matt. 21:13** 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."

- Passover was one of three feasts on the Jewish calendar when adult Jewish males made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem
- As many as three million Jewish men (often accompanied by their families) would descend upon Jerusalem during this week
- As Jesus enters the Temple grounds, He encountered a common and sad sight
  - The court of the Gentiles surrounding the temple building itself was transformed at Passover into a merchant's bazaar
  - Two principle forms of commerce took place at this time in the temple
- First, money was being changed, much in the same way we change our money at an airport when we take a trip to a foreign country



- For Jews living under Roman occupation, the Temple was a bit like visiting a foreign country
  - Under Roman rule, the only coins that could be used to buy and sell in Judea were Roman coins
  - But the the temple authorities considered Roman coins to be idols since they bore the imprint of the Caesar's image
- Since the temple authorities forbid the use of Roman money in the temple, Jews who came to the temple had to exchange their coins
  - Soon in the outer court of the temple, enterprising businessmen sent up booths to exchange Roman coins for a fee
  - Worshippers would enter the court, exchange their drachmas for shekels, and then make their offering to the temple in shekels
  - Of course, the temple authorities took a cut from the profits of those businessmen as payment for allowing them to operate
- But the commerce didn't stop there...the worshippers usually needed to purchase a lamb to sacrifice at Passover
  - Because when a family traveled long distance for the Passover, it was impractical to bring the animal with them
    - Worshippers often traveled for many miles on foot to meet the obligations of the feasts and temple service
    - So instead of bringing the animal with them, they brought money to buy an animal in the temple grounds
  - And you can be sure that those animals were priced accordingly...like buying a sandwich in the airport
    - This was yet another source of profit for the temple priests
    - After changing their money (for a price), the family then went to the lamb booth to buy a lamb
    - The priests were profiting on both transactions
  - And if a families tried to avoid those fees by bringing their own lambs to the Temple, the priests still found a way to fleece their flock
    - The priests required that every lamb brought for sacrifice be inspected to ensure it was spotless and suitable

- Spotless means no evident defect, and the priests went to extraordinary lengths to inspect each lamb
- And almost without exception, they managed to find a disqualifying defect with every lamb brought into the temple
- So what did the family do if their lamb was found to be defective?
  - If a family's lamb was disqualified, how did the worshippers meet the obligations of the Passover?
  - Well, the priests had a solution...they offered to take the defective lamb as a "trade-in" toward a new, spotless lamb
  - So then the worshipper exchanged some money, traded in their used lamb for a brand-spanking new, certified spotless lamb
- So the priests made money on the sale of these "certified spotless" lambs but they weren't done profiting
  - Because when the next unsuspecting family entered the temple with their defective lamb, they were likewise directed to buy a replacement
    - And the lamb that second family purchased was none other than the same "defective" lamb traded in earlier by the first family
    - Apparently, in the meantime that lamb had experienced a miraculous healing of some kind
  - In other words, the entire temple operation around Passover (and at all times of the year) had become a scam to make money off
    - So Jesus comes into the grounds of the temple, and He appears to go crazy, and in a sense He is going mad
    - He's experiencing righteous anger on behalf of all those worshippers who came with honest intentions
    - And as they came, they were abused financially and spiritually by evil and greedy men...and that makes Jesus angry
  - As Jesus turns over the tables, He quotes from Isaiah 56 where the Lord promises that Israel will have special place in the Millennial Kingdom

**Is. 56:5 To them I will give in My house and within My walls a memorial,  
And a name better than that of sons and daughters;  
I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off.**

**Is. 56:7** Even those I will bring to My holy mountain

And make them joyful in My house of prayer.

Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar;

For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples."

- Prayer is an act by which we humble ourselves before God and acknowledge Him in all His ways
- And the temple would be a place where that kind of heart would be welcomed and encouraged and honored
- Instead, the environment Jesus encountered in the temple in Jerusalem on that day was exactly the opposite of what God intended
  - Those who came with a heart of humility and submission to God had become targets for con-men and scoundrels
  - Those men were taking advantage of the worshippers' willingness to be obedient and submitted to God's will
  - Those merchants and priests were taking advantage of that heart of prayer for their own advantage
- And that makes Jesus mad, violently angry in fact, and we should remember that when we think about those who continue to fleece the flock today
  - Of course, their con-man's schemes have changed over time...we don't change money or buy lambs today
    - But there is always a new scheme and they always work the same way...they turn our desire to obey God into opportunity
    - They tell us that when we do what they tell us to do, we're pleasing God and He will reward us for it
  - This makes our Lord angry and one day He will bring His wrath down on those who take advantage of believers

**2Pet. 2:1** But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

**2Pet. 2:2** Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned;

[2Pet. 2:3](#) and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

[2Pet. 2:14](#) having eyes full of adultery that never cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having a heart trained in greed, accursed children;

[2Pet. 2:15](#) forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;

- We know that bad actors are abusing many in the church today, but it's always been that way
- Just be assured that your Lord is not fooled and He will handle it His way
- On this day in Jerusalem He handled it by shutting down business, at least for a moment
  - And we should follow His example in that regard...never allowing our pursuit of God to become a pursuit of earthly things
  - And God forbid we should turn another believers' desire to obey God into an opportunity to enrich ourselves at their expense
- That's the main reason that VBVMi doesn't charge for our services or materials...we never want to cross that line
  - It's also why this church doesn't pass the hat...we want our motives to remain pure
  - We don't want to be mistaken for one of those other ministries that are trying to fleece the flock of God
  - So we have positioned ourselves far from that line to avoid even the appearance of impropriety
- I encourage you to test your own heart in these things...knowing that the Lord dwells in your body...you are the house of God in this age
  - So for this time, the Lord wants your house to be a house of prayer
    - And you can't serve God and wealth at the same time
    - Pick one and if you're unsure of which one to pick, ask me