

Week 22

Matthew series: Ministry of Jesus (The King has returned)**Matthew 21: Who is the King**

This is what I would call a runaway chapter. It's easy to run this way and that way in Matthew 21. There are so many themes swirling around. We have Jesus entering Jerusalem. He clears the temple. We have the fig tree incident. Jesus authority is challenged, and two kingdom parables. I bet there are at least 15 sermons here in one chapter. Yet, Matthew, God, and the Spirit are trying to tell us something.

It's like were in an epic movie and the end is near. It's the beginning of the final battle. The dark mountain rises up. An ominous ship or army is seen as impenetrable. The hero looks small in the mist of an impossible battle. Darkness looms. Throughout Jesus ministry we have him swirling around Jerusalem. The Temple probably looked ominous in the middle of town. The scene opens with a panoramic of the city. There is little Jesus standing before these very large gates.

This chapter is highlighted by a triumphal entry into the holy city. Two parables compliment this event by describing the mood. The people wanted the king to return. Not just return, but take over. To establish the kingdom right here and now. The old scriptures scream out towards a prince of peace, but the people wanted a prince of war. This is a moody chapter full of interesting intrigue. This whole book, the prophesy, and ministry of Jesus have been heading towards this moment. The return of the King. Do you expect a king to return the way Jesus did?

Matthew 21:6 "The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; 7 they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them."

Deuteronomy 24:4 "Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey"

I am fascinated in how this gospel is constructed. Jesus is pictured as a king. The *sign king of the Jews* is above his cross. The word kingdom is spread out within this book. Clearly Jesus is in the line of king David. People call him the Son of David. The triumphal entry appears like a king returning from war on his donkey. The palm branches and cloaks are symbolic of a kingly parade. Hosanna is a cheer or praise for an exulted one. Things were looking up for Jesus.

Yet, swirling in the shadows were accusations of his authority. The religious rulers followed him everywhere. In chapters before, the disciples were fighting over who is the greatest. Nobody got the real story. They said they did by calling Jesus Son of David, Hosanna, Christ, and Lord. Yet, something was

missing. Jesus withers a fig tree: a symbol of Israel. The religious rejected him. The two parables are a stern discussion Jesus was having with these authorities over the kingdom. Jesus made it pretty clear that they had rejected everyone associated with God. I could imagine ominous clouds were building in the distance. This chapter smells of trouble brewing. Can you smell trouble in your life?

Matthew 21:23 “When he entered 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?”

Isaiah 53: 5 “But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.”

Some say that Jesus spoke in parables to confuse people. Is that really true? The authorities got the message. They were riled up after these witty stories. Some like to write books decrying that these parables are not real. Does it really matter? So much time is spent on discussing the validity of parables. Yet, the meaning is crystal clear. I feel that these stories are meat on the bone Jesus was throwing. Jesus used context and examples, yet the people hated that. A message beyond a coming king was being told. That message was that most people do not get God’s plan, kingdom, and way.

Matthew 21 is deep. Yet, it is simple. The king is there standing at the door. Jesus had said in Matthew 7 *here I stand waiting at the door, to be asked to come in*. He believed we all could have faith enough to move mountains. There were signs of the coming king. Those signs would come in the form of a withered fig tree, miracles, and the return of the Christ. I feel that Matthew used prophecy because he saw it. He saw the writing on the wall of the kings return in Jesus.

As I was reading Matthew and could see the Gospel of John clearly. They obviously knew each other. These writers saw the signs. Matthew sees the old testament in Jesus. Through Jesus life, it was prophesy on display. There are several pillars in this gospel. The big signs. The birth of Jesus is a pillar. Matthew 4 is a pillar with the temptation. This chapter is another pillar of the coming king arriving in the place King David reigned. The cross is another looming pillar to come.

Matthew 21:45 “When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them.”

Isaiah 28:16 “Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed. He who believes in it will not be disturbed.”

Read Matthew 21. Read the parables a few times. Can you see Jesus in these stories?

1. When you read the Bible, how do you interpret it? Imagine if you were a Jew who had just learned about Jesus. All your life you only knew the prophets, God the Father, and the laws of Moses. Jesus is not part of that upbringing. Matthew gives you his book and says read chapter 21. You see Matthew weaving together your favorite prophecies with the Jesus story. This might confuse you. Maybe you heard about the commotion in Jerusalem when that Jesus tried to enter the city on a donkey. Verses 9-11 are interesting. They really give a clear picture of the confusion. One verse has them throwing down cloaks and palms. They are welcoming this Jesus on a donkey as the coming king. Then right after that they shout Hosanna to welcome this king. Then in verse 10 some are asking who this is. In verse 11 they call Jesus a prophet. I get it now that Matthew has tried to sort this confusion out for them in this gospel. I bet Jews were confused at that time.

Who is Jesus to them? Is he a prophet, king, or this Christ they were waiting for? Who is Jesus to you? The trouble is in our perception. What do you want your savior to look like? What should he do for you? This is what Matthew was trying to dispel and warn us about. We expect God to be our slave. He should answer our prayer. He should provide all our needs. He should save us when we need saving. On the other hand, God should stay in heaven until we call. God is many things to many people.

Imagine your town ringing bells all over the city. Imagine an unannounced parade blocking the way into your city center. What if the person at the head of that parade was a good friend or a neighbor? What if you heard of them? Most likely you would be saying "what's going on? Who does he or she think they are stirring up the city. This triumphal entry was way more than just a parade. The carpenter's son was causing quite a stir.

Matthew 21:10" When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?"

Matthew 13:55 ""Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?"

2. I would like to bunch the cleansing of the temple and the withering fig tree together. Let's look at verses 12-22. Jesus comes into the city on a donkey. We can sometimes forget that. He then enters the temple. There was always the thought that the Christ Messiah would enter the temple. He would establish the throne of David. He would be the one who crushes the head of the serpent. The Jewish nation had been through a lot over the centuries, yet they were waiting for a king on a donkey.

Imagine what was happening when Jesus got off the donkey and walked into the temple court area. I bet the people were stunned in the moment. This is really it. This Jesus is really going to take over. He will establish the kingdom right here and now. Jesus drove out the people selling things. He was setting things right. The scriptures had said he would in Isaiah and Jeremiah. The time had come. Yet, something was wrong. Jesus did everything except take over.

So, what does this chapter section mean? Jesus did indeed come in to establish the kingdom. He was also there to avenge God the Father, not the people. When everyone in the temple court had fled, there was the Son of God standing alone in his temple. The fig tree part is interesting. Jesus had always said to look for the signs. The old scriptures talked about figs and vines being the sign of Israel. Imagine Jesus withering the fig tree and clearing the temple. It looks more

like an Israel cleansing than a Roman cleansing. The king returned to a withered Nation. He came not for war but to clean house.

Matthew 21:19 “And seeing a fig tree by the side of the road, he went to it and found nothing at all on it but leaves. Then he said to it, “May no fruit ever come from you again!” And the fig tree withered at once.”

Isaiah 34:4 “All the host of heaven shall rot away, and the skies roll up like a scroll. All their host shall wither like a leaf withering on a vine, or fruit withering on a fig tree”

Jerimiah 7:11 “Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your sight? You know, I too am watching, says the Lord.”

3. Verses 23-27 are very interesting. I bet most of the time we pass them by. The temple cleansing is way more interesting. The withering fig tree and the parables are much more fun to read. Yet, this little section packs a wallop. All through this book the religious rulers are picking on Jesus about following the law. Everything was about being clean in the sight of the Lord. Baptism was important to them. They did not pick on John for baptizing people. That was the correct thing to do. Jesus then pulls the rug out from under their religious feet.

Why did John baptize? Was it from God or men? All along they questioned Jesus authority. Did you notice that they did not question John? When confronted by Jesus, they did not dare answer that baptism was theirs. It was their way of looking clean for people. I doubt they really believed that baptism was ordained by God. It was tradition and symbolic. What if God wanted clean hearts more than clean bodies? What if God was paving the way to Jesus through John?

In the end, they could not answer. All they had been doing was for their benefit. They knew it. It had little to do with pleasing God. So, Jesus refused to say who he had authority from. Why? Because they knew. Who do you look holy for? Do you say thanks for food all the time? Do you pray lofty prayers that look smart? Is it heart felt or an act? Deep down we all know the truth. Matthew is saying that we better not be looking holy when were clearly not holy before God.

Matthew 21: 27 “So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.” And he said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these thing”

Matthew 23:27 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside, are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean.”

4. It’s the tale of two parables. This is great stuff. This whole chapter has been about the return of the king. It’s also the rebuke of the current owners of the kingdom. God chose the Jewish people to be his kingdom on earth. They were to be his royal priests. Yet, they had become robbers, thieves, and murderers of God’s children. Jesus came for many reasons. Yet, I feel the biggest of them all was to set the kingdom back on its feet. Things were a mess.

The first parable is about two boys. The first represents the religious authorities. The second is those of us who feel less worthy for the kingdom. John 3:16 says that all are welcome who believe. I have said many times that Matthew repeats themes in this gospel. Matthew 11 says all can come to

Jesus who are weary. Sometimes we think that being holy gets us in. Sometimes we think that being clean gets you in. Those that feel unworthy need to be saved from themselves. They know it too. Jesus as their savior fits. That's what this parable is all about.

The second parable is about the coming king. Those left in charge were the religious authorities. I can't imagine the rebuke our modern religious authorities would receive. How many temples or churches would be cleansed? Would anyone notice the signs of the times? Do churches really embrace the harlots and tax collectors today? We are in the very same spot today that the religious community was in Jesus time. The second parable is a warning to us about missing the kingdom right under our noses. I seriously doubt Jesus would be welcomed in most places of worship today.

Matthew 21:45 "When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them"

Isaiah 53:4-5 "Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. 5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed."

What it means?

I need to take a breath. This chapter is tough. I certainly did not do it justice. Yet, here we are. What if your body was a temple? What if Jesus came into your life? This whole book is training ground. It's the story of Jesus but so much more. The people had a picture of who Jesus is to them. Was he a carpenter's son, prophet, rabbi, or the Christ? Matthew is staring us in the face with the last two parables. Who did you expect? What is Jesus allowed to do in your life?

The sign of the times is withered. Our nation and many others look tired and withered. We need our temples to be cleansed. How could Jesus possibly enter our lives today. We are a mess spiritually. I don't want to dish the church. I love what many churches are trying to do. Teaching people about Jesus in this day and age must be tough. Yet, we are running a muck in many worship settings. Matthew wanted a clean church. He wanted right teaching and sound doctrine. We see it in his writing. The creeds and modern doctrines are built on Matthew's words.

We own the kingdom right now. How is the kingdom doing? Some of you have not been to church in a very long time. Why? Is it rumors, bad experiences, or the churches inability to reach you? Jesus won't come in unless we ask. In Egypt, God heard the people's cries for help. It's not recorded but I bet God heard the cries in Jesus time. There are many reasons Jesus came. The return of the king to Jerusalem was not by accident. Neither is your temple being invaded by Jesus either.

Matthew 21:7 "they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them."

1 Corinthians 6:19 "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own."

Exodus 3:7 "The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering."

