

Ministry of Grace

Matthew 21

Preface:

In the previous chapter of Matthew's gospel account Jesus and His disciples were on the other side of the Jordan River, in Perea, where He told the parable of the workers in the vineyard who all got paid the same amount no matter how long they had worked. The first workers had negotiated their pay, but all the others knew that the master would pay "whatever is right."

After telling the parable, perhaps as they were crossing the Jordan River, Jesus told them for the third time that they were going to Jerusalem where He would be betrayed, tortured, and killed, but that He would be raised from the dead. Shortly after this, James and John tried to persuade Jesus to give them the best seats in the kingdom. In response, Jesus taught the disciples that whoever wanted to be the greatest in the kingdom had to become the lowest of all and become a servant.

After they crossed over and came to the city of Jericho, Jesus healed two blind men. This was a demonstration of what He had just taught, as he became a servant to the two blind men and did for them as they had requested.

In today's lesson we will begin the final week of Jesus' earthly ministry leading to the cross. In this chapter He presents Himself as the Messiah and rightful King of the Jews.

The Triumphal Entry

Matthew 21:1-11

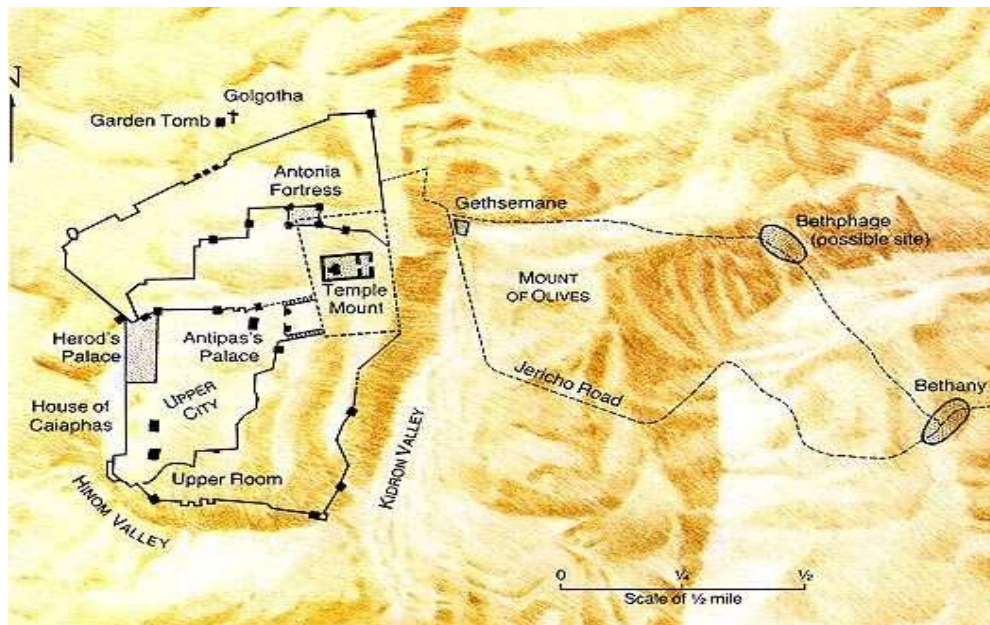
¹Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once." ⁴This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, ⁵"Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'" ⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. ⁷They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. ⁸Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" ¹⁰And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" ¹¹And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

Mark 11:1-11 – ¹Now when they drew near to Jerusalem, to Bethphage and Bethany, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples ²and said to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately as you enter it you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it. ³If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord has need of it and will send it back here immediately.'" ⁴And they went away and found a colt tied at a door outside in the street,

and they untied it. ⁵ And some of those standing there said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" ⁶ And they told them what Jesus had said, and they let them go. ⁷ And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it. ⁸ And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. ⁹ And those who went before and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! ¹⁰ Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!" ¹¹ And he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

Luke 19:28-40 – ²⁸ And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹ When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰ saying, "Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say this: 'The Lord has need of it.'" ³² So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them. ³³ And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" ³⁴ And they said, "The Lord has need of it." ³⁵ And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶ And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. ³⁷ As he was drawing near--already on the way down the Mount of Olives--the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, ³⁸ saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" ³⁹ And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." ⁴⁰ He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."

John 12:12-19 – ¹² The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. ¹³ So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!" ¹⁴ And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, ¹⁵ "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!" ¹⁶ His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him. ¹⁷ The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. ¹⁸ The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. ¹⁹ So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him."



Notes:

Traveling up to Jerusalem from Jericho, Jesus and His disciples would have come first to the village of Bethany on the east side of the Mount of Olives. From there, the road split and offered two options for the remainder of the way to the temple mount. The northern route took them through the village of Bethphage. Everything within 2000 cubits of the walls of Jerusalem (a little more than ½ mile) was considered part of Jerusalem and Bethphage was inside this area. The name Bethphage means “the house of green figs.” Because of its apparent location on the northern slope of the Mount of Olives, the figs there ripened later than those on the southern and western slopes. Nobody knows for certain where Bethphage was located and although it is mentioned in all three gospel accounts, it is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible.

If we read John’s gospel account we see that Jesus stopped in Bethany (where Mary and Martha lived) to spend the night and went on from there to Bethphage and Jerusalem the next morning. Upon reaching Bethphage, Jesus instructed two of His disciples to go into the village and bring the donkey and her colt to Him. This was to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah which said:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (Zechariah 9:9)

You will notice that Matthew’s quotation of Zechariah is a little different than the original. Instead of “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!” Matthew quotes part of a parallel prophecy of Isaiah, “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your salvation comes ...’” It appears that the reason that Matthew combined these two prophecies is because the people of Jerusalem did NOT accept Jesus as their king (Messiah), but Matthew announced Him as such to Jerusalem anyway.

The Jews wanted their Messiah to come, but they wanted Him to come their way, as a conquering king. If He had come as a conquering King, He would have come mounted on a horse. Instead, Jesus came as a humble servant riding on a donkey colt, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah.

It is estimated that there were upwards of 2 million people in Jerusalem when Jesus made this triumphal entry. Part of the reason for this is the fact that it was the week of Passover. But another reason is that this day precisely marks the culmination of Daniel's 69th week and many Jews were there awaiting the return of their Messiah. The date had been known for years and the people were there in anticipation.

Not only did this occur on the very day predicted by Daniel and Jesus completely fulfilled the prophecies of Zechariah and Isaiah. In addition, Psalms 118 says:

Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We bless you from the house of the LORD. (Psalms 118:25-26)

The word "Hosanna" is a transliteration of the Hebrew word that means, "grant salvation," or "save us Lord." So, when the people proclaimed "Hosanna to the Son of David ..." they were exactly quoting the prophecy of Psalms 118.

Now, if we add all this together, we see that Jesus completely fulfilled several key prophecies of the Messiah, the Son of David. However, the common people and the religious rulers completely missed it. Upon His arrival in Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and they asked, "Who is this?" The crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee." As a side note, the Greek word translated "said" is in the imperfect tense, so it could be translated as, "The crowds kept saying." They repeatedly acknowledged that He was a prophet, but in spite of all the fulfilled prophecies, they failed to see their Messiah. How tragic!

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

Matthew 21:12-17

¹²And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. ¹³He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers." ¹⁴And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. ¹⁵But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant, ¹⁶and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, "'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise'?" ¹⁷And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there.

Mark 11:15-19 – ¹⁵And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. ¹⁶And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. ¹⁷And he was teaching them and saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers." ¹And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching. ¹And when evening came they went out of the city.

Luke 19:45-48 – ⁴⁵And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold, ⁴⁶saying to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers." ⁴⁷And he was teaching daily in the temple. The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of

the people were seeking to destroy him, ⁴⁸but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on his words.



Notes:

This is the second time that Jesus chased out the money changers and overturned their tables. During the first year of His ministry, right after He turned the water into wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, he came to Jerusalem for the Passover and cleansed the Temple:

The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." (John 2:13-16)

Now, in the last year of His ministry, after entering the city as the Messiah, He cleansed the Temple again. The place within the Temple where this occurred is called the Court of the Gentiles. This was the area that Gentiles were allowed to enter in order to learn more about the religion of the Israelites. Isaiah prophesied of salvation for foreigners and said this about His temple:

I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. "And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant-- these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in **my house of prayer**; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; **for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.**" (Isaiah 56:5-7)

However, instead of the Israelites inviting the nations into the temple (the court of the Gentiles) to pray and to learn of the worship of Yahweh, they had turned it into a commercial enterprise.

There were three primary types of enterprise that they carried on here. The first was to convert foreign money (primarily Roman and Greek) into the money that was authorized for the Temple. At Passover festival people came from all over the world and they brought the money of their country

of origin. The money changers charged a fee to convert their money into Temple money. The second type of enterprise that occurred here was to convert the Temple money into the smaller coins that were required for the temple tax and for the purchase of sacrificial animals. This they did also, for a fee. The third enterprise was to sell the sacrificial animals. Since it was impractical for the pilgrims to travel great distances with animals, they purchased the required sacrificial animals from the money changers, for a fee, of course.

And – not only did they turn the court of the Gentiles into a materialistic, money-grubbing, financial institution, they also turned it into a stockyard where the sacrificial animals were kept and offered for sale. That is why He said: **My house shall be called a house of prayer**, (quoting Isaiah) **but you make it a den of robbers** (quoting Jeremiah). And – what makes it even worse is the fact that the person in charge of this enterprise was none other than the former High Priest, Annas (father-in-law to the current High Priest, Caiaphas).

After Jesus chased the moneychangers out of the Temple, he sat down and healed people. This made the chief priests and the scribes angry. Their anger got even worse when the young boys began crying out “Hosanna to the Son of David!” (a Messianic title) The word translated “children” is *pais*, which refers to a person younger than an adult. These were probably boys above the age of 12, since children under that age were not allowed in the Temple, and neither were girls.

Not only had Jesus disrupted their money-making venture, but He was now doing things that only the Messiah was supposed to do. Clearly, to the chief priests and scribes at least, this was not the Messiah. It didn’t matter that He was fulfilling Messianic prophecy and quoting Messianic Scripture as He did. The Messiah would not come into Jerusalem lowly and riding on a donkey. If He were the real Messiah, He would have come on a war horse and He would have gotten rid of the Romans in the Temple, not the money changers.

Keep in mind that only a few days later, Jesus would be arrested and brought before the High Priests Annas and Caiaphas, along with the chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees. There is no way He would receive a fair trial under those conditions.

The bottom line is that there should have been power and praise in the House of God. It was supposed to be a House of Prayer, not a den of thieves. The expression “den of thieves” or “den of robbers” comes from **Jeremiah 7:11**. It is significant that this prophecy was delivered by Jeremiah to the religious leaders of Judah while he was standing in the entrance to the temple, condemning them for oppressing the strangers and shedding innocent blood. He was warning them that judgment was coming to them if they did not change their ways. And, in fact, judgment did come, for it was during Jeremiah’s lifetime that Judah was conquered and carried off to Babylon. The religious leaders of Jesus’ day didn’t listen to Jeremiah’s warning of God’s judgment, and they did not listen to Jesus either. It was only about 40 years after Jesus arrived as the Messiah and warned the religious leaders of judgment, that Rome finally destroyed Jerusalem and scattered them to the four corners of the world.

Jesus Curses the Fig Tree

Matthew 21:18-22

¹⁸In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he became hungry. ¹⁹And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he went to it and found nothing on it but only leaves. And he said to it, "May no fruit ever come from you again!" And the fig tree withered at once. ²⁰When the disciples saw

it, they marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree wither at once?" ²¹And Jesus answered them, "Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' it will happen. ²²And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."

Mark 11:12-14; 20-24 – ¹²On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. ¹³And seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. ¹⁴And he said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it.

²⁰As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. ²¹And Peter remembered and said to him, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered." ²²And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. ²³Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. ²⁴Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

Notes:

If we think about it, it may seem strange that Jesus would be looking for figs on the tree in the spring time. However, fig trees have two crops. The first, which is called the breba crop, is produced early in the spring on the previous year's growth. These figs show up just as the tree is producing leaves. These were the figs that Jesus was after. Although Matthew makes it sound like the tree withered instantly as Jesus pronounced the curse, Luke makes it clear that the tree was cursed on one day and it was seen to be withered on the next day.

The Authority of Jesus Challenged

Matthew 21:23-27

²³And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" ²⁴Jesus answered them, "I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. ²⁵The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?" And they discussed it among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' ²⁶But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet." ²⁷So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

Mark 11:27-33 – ²⁷And they came again to Jerusalem. And as he was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to him, ²⁸and they said to him, "By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?" ²⁹Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. ³⁰Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me." ³¹And they discussed it with one another, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' ³²But shall we say, 'From man?'"--they were afraid of the people, for they all held that John really was a prophet. ³³So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

Luke 20:1-8 – ¹One day, as Jesus was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes with the elders came up ²and said to him, "Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority." ³He answered them, "I also will ask you a question. Now tell me, ⁴was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?" ⁵And they discussed it with one another, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why did you not believe him?' ⁶But if we say, 'From man,' all the people will stone us to death, for they are convinced that John was a prophet." ⁷So they answered that they did not know where it came from. ⁸And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

Notes:

The day after Jesus chased the money changers out of the temple, He was back, doing what He does best, teaching the people. As He did, the chief priests and the scribes demanded that He tell them by what authority He had chased out the money changers and by what authority He was teaching. According to the Law of Moses, they were the ones who had the authority to teach the people. As scribes and priests, they were supposed to educate the people on what God expected of them. However, their perspective of God and the Law was so skewed that they, the teachers of Israel, were not even able to see the Lawgiver Himself in their presence.

Knowing that a direct answer would not placate them, Jesus challenged them to describe the authority of John the Baptist. After all, if they had believed that John had been sent by God, they would have believed Jesus. However, since John's message was against everything the chief priests and scribes stood for (religious formality in place of true faith), He knew they would not support the notion that John was sent from God. On the other side of the coin, the people believed that John had been a prophet and the chief priests and scribes were afraid of what the people would say and do if they denied him being a prophet. Therefore, they said that they couldn't answer that question. In so doing, they gave Jesus the opportunity to deny answering their question.

One apparent axiom of God is, if we refuse to learn what God has already taught us, we will not be able to learn new truth. Since the chief priests and scribes refused to believe what John had clearly declared (the Kingdom of God is at hand), they could not recognize the King even in their presence, being witnessed to by miracles and fulfilled prophecy.

The Parable of the Two Sons

Matthew 21:28-32

²⁸"What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' ²⁹And he answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind and went. ³⁰And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go. ³¹Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. ³²For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him."

Notes:

Having refused to answer the question of where His authority came from, Jesus didn't wait for the chief priests and scribes to challenge Him further. Instead, He taught three parables. The first two are contained in this chapter and the third is presented in the next chapter of Matthew's gospel account.

The first parable is a continuation of the condemnation of the religious leaders not believing in John the Baptist's ministry. It is about two sons who were sent by their father to go into the vineyard to work. The two sons represent two classes of people. The first son is a portrayal of the common people, including tax collectors and prostitutes. They knew they were not religious like the chief priests and scribes, but when faced with their own unrighteousness, they were willing to repent and be baptized because they believed John's message.

The second son represents the self-righteous religious leaders who, on the surface, claim to be obedient to God. The reality, however, is that they rejected the Father's message, like the son who agreed to go out and work in the field, but did not do it. When John the Baptist came, they made a show of great interest in his teaching, but they would not repent of their sins and be baptized because they were unable to see themselves as sinners.

When asked which of the sons did the will of the father, the scribes and Pharisees were quick to condemn the second son and praise the first. As a result, Jesus told them that they, like the second son, were the disobedient ones and would not enter the kingdom of heaven because they did not believe John's message. However, the tax collectors and prostitutes who recognized their own sinfulness and repented, would receive forgiveness and be ushered into the kingdom.

The Parable of the Tenants

Matthew 21:33-46

³³"Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. ³⁴When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. ³⁵And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. ³⁶Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. ³⁷Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' ³⁸But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.' ³⁹And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. ⁴⁰When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" ⁴¹They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons." ⁴²Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? ⁴³Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. ⁴⁴And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him." ⁴⁵When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. ⁴⁶And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.

Mark 12:1-12 – ¹And he began to speak to them in parables. "A man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the winepress and built a tower, and leased it to tenants and went into another country. ²When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. ³And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ⁴Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully. ⁵And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed. ⁶He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, 'They will respect

my son.' ⁷But those tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' ⁸And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. ⁹What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. ¹⁰Have you not read this Scripture: "'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; ¹¹this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?'" ¹²And they were seeking to arrest him but feared the people, for they perceived that he had told the parable against them. So they left him and went away.

Luke 20:9-18 – ⁹And he began to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while. ¹⁰When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ¹¹And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. ¹²And he sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out. ¹³Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.' ¹⁴But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.' ¹⁵And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? ¹⁶He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When they heard this, they said, "Surely not!" ¹⁷But he looked directly at them and said, "What then is this that is written: "'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone?'" ¹Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."

Notes:

The second parable is also about a vineyard. In this case the tenant farmers represent Israel and the master of the house is God Himself. Jesus tells them of the goodness that the Father has shown them. He rescued them from Egypt and planted them in a land of milk and honey. He blessed them materially and spiritually. In King David, He gave them a leader who was a man after God's own heart. All He asked of the people was that they would tend His vineyard and bear fruit for His glory.

From time to time, God sent prophets, but they rejected them, mistreated them and even killed some of them. One of them, the prophet Isaiah even prophesied to Israel regarding a vineyard as a reminder and a warning.

The most fascinating thing about this parable of the tenant farmers is that even though it is about the very people Jesus was speaking to, they failed to see themselves in the parable. As a result, when Jesus asked them what should be done to the tenant farmers, they pronounced judgment against themselves. It is reminiscent of King David when the prophet Nathan told a parable about a rich man and a neighbor with a single sheep. The parable was really about David who had Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, killed so he could marry her. David condemned himself as he pronounced judgment on the rich man. In the same manner, when Jesus asked the chief priests and scribes what should be done to the tenant farmers, they judged that the tenant farmers should die, not knowing that it was themselves that they were judging.

As soon as the chief priests and Pharisees condemned themselves, Jesus quoted **Psalms 118:22-23** to explain that He was that Son and the religious leaders were the tenant farmers.

The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. (**Psalms 118:22-23**)

This was a well-known Psalm and the chief priests and Pharisees recognized that Jesus was condemning them by their own judgment. And – if you will recall, just the previous day the crowds were also quoting Psalms 118, saying, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” So, when the chief priests and Pharisees realized that Jesus had been talking about them, they became even more determined to get rid of Him once and for all. But, because of the crowds, they couldn’t do anything at the moment because the people believed Jesus to be a prophet.

So What?

In Israel at the time of Jesus, the people were very familiar with many of the tenants of their religion, especially those that had to do with their Messiah. They knew that their Messiah would come and free them from their oppressors and set-up a kingdom here on earth. They knew this because of what their Scriptures told them about their coming king who would bring peace and prosperity. For instance in the second chapter of Isaiah the prophet said:

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. (Isaiah 2:2-4)

However, they overlooked the Scripture passages that told them about His suffering. In the 53rd chapter of Isaiah’s prophecy he said:

Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. (Isaiah 53:1-3) [NASB]

They liked the parts where their Messiah would be a conquering king. That was exciting and filled them with hope. But they didn’t like where it said He would be humble and where it said He would suffer. They ignored those passages. As a result, when He arrived on a donkey, the people welcomed Him with Messianic praise, but they didn’t believe Him to be the Messiah. They claimed He was a great prophet. Along with the religious rulers, they were comfortable in their religious views and the formality of their religious practices. In fact, they were proud of it, but they would not submit to God even while He was standing right in front of them. They claimed they were submitted to God, but even that was mere formality.

They were self-righteous and didn’t listen to Jesus even when He was chastening them for their false religion. He told them that they were like the son who claimed to obey his father, but never ventured outside that comfortable place to do their father’s will.

I wonder how many of today's professing Christians would fit the mold of the religious leaders of Jesus' day. They know what the Bible says. They believe **John 3:16**. They believe they're going to heaven when they die. They even look forward to the rapture so that they will be safe when the Day of the Lord comes. But, they don't like James telling them to submit themselves to God. And, although they claim to have presented themselves as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, as Paul challenged the Romans, they have long since jumped off the altar and are busy living their worldly lives.

I wonder – if the rapture came today, would they be taken? Would they even know that it had happened? Or, would they, like the religious leaders of Jesus' day, refuse to believe it because it didn't happen the way they thought it was going to happen? I wonder how many people who are in church right this minute claiming Jesus as their Savior, have never submitted to Him as Lord?

Now What?

I truly believe that most of you are willing and eager to do God's will. You're willing to submit to His Lordship in spite of how difficult it is. You know you're not perfect. In fact, you sometimes wonder why Jesus would be willing to die for your sins. You struggle to be obedient to Him and repeatedly beg for His mercy. Don't give up! Let me assure you, His mercy knows no limits for the ones who humble themselves before Him.

But I also know that there are some of you here today who will miss the rapture the same way the religious leaders missed the Messiah when He came. You will miss it because your faith is little more than a formality. You're convinced you're a Christian, especially when you're around other Christians. You're a good actor! But, in private, when you're all by yourself and nobody's looking, you would rather indulge your sin nature than to submit to your Lord and Savior. You're more in love with the world system and yourself than you are in love with Him. You want what you want, and you want it the way you want it. Just like the scribes and Pharisees.

But ... You can change all that right now! You can surrender to Him and let Him have control. Is it easy? No! But is it worth it? Absolutely! And ... there is no better time to make that change than right now. He is a loving Master and He will reward you with what is right. Will you give in to Him?

Perhaps you're somewhere in the middle right now. You know for certain that you're saved and will be going up in the rapture with the rest of us. But ... you also know that you have let too much of the world get into your life. Will you be wearing a crown when you enter into the pearly gates, or will you enter with the smell of smoke on you?

My friends, the rapture is just around the corner. The trumpet blast could occur at any moment. Let's get ready for it. We're going to take a few minutes of silence right now for each one of us to sit face-to-face with God. Now is the time to surrender and take His yoke upon you. Now is the time to surrender! Now is the time!

Let's pray.

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