

UNEXPECTED KING

Lesson 9

Matthew 21:1–27

RECAP

Take a moment to share about your experience with last week's "Spiritual Practice" and "On Mission" sections.

BIG IDEA

In both the triumphal entry and temple cleansing, Jesus combined two paradoxical images: royal authority and humility. The crowds watched with anticipation, waiting for a revolutionary conqueror. However, as Jesus rode in on a donkey, He was declaring Himself as the Messiah with humility rather than earthly power. Additionally by cleansing the temple, Jesus demonstrated authority by reclaiming the temple from the religious elite. He also showed His authority through cursing the fig tree. Jesus' provocative actions and teachings led many of the bystanders to either accept His identity or reject it. These scenes defy expectations—Jesus is the unexpected King.

CONTEXT

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem bears a weight of significance because it is the first time the gospels¹ mention His entrance into the city as an adult.² Jesus began His time in the city with two actions designed to draw attention that provoked the crowds, chief priest, and elders to consider Jesus' messianic claim. Both the triumphal entry and the temple cleansing are filled with scriptural fulfillment from the Old Testament.³

READ MATTHEW 21:1–27

¹ As Jesus and the disciples approached Jerusalem, they came to the town of Bethphage on the Mount of Olives. Jesus sent two of them on ahead. ² "Go into the village over there," he said. "As soon as you enter it, you will see a donkey tied there, with its colt beside it. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone asks what you are doing, just say, 'The Lord

¹ The Synoptic Gospels are Matthew, Mark, and Luke, called synoptic because they share many of the same stories and discourses of Jesus' life on earth.

² **Luke 2:41–42** mentions His time in the city as a child.

³ These Old Testament fulfillments will be explored further in this lesson.

needs them,' and he will immediately let you take them."

⁴ This took place to fulfill the prophecy that said,

⁵ "Tell the people of Jerusalem, 'Look, your King is coming to you. He is humble, riding on a donkey—riding on a donkey's colt.'"

⁶ The two disciples did as Jesus commanded. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt to him and threw their garments over the colt, and he sat on it.

⁸ Most of the crowd spread their garments on the road ahead of him, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ Jesus was in the center of the procession, and the people all around him were shouting, "Praise God for the Son of David! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Praise God in highest heaven!"

¹⁰ The entire city of Jerusalem was in an uproar as he entered. "Who is this?" they asked.

¹¹ And the crowds replied, "It's Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

¹² Jesus entered the Temple and began to drive out all the people buying and selling animals for sacrifice. He knocked over the tables of the money changers and the chairs of those selling doves. ¹³ He said to them, "The Scriptures declare, 'My Temple will be called a house of prayer,' but you have turned it into a den of thieves!"

¹⁴ The blind and the lame came to him in the Temple, and he healed them. ¹⁵ The leading priests and the teachers of religious law saw these wonderful miracles and heard even the children in the Temple shouting, "Praise God for the Son of David."

But the leaders were indignant. ¹⁶ They asked Jesus, "Do you hear what these children are saying?"

"Yes," Jesus replied. "Haven't you ever read the Scriptures? For they say, 'You have taught children and infants to give you praise.'" ¹⁷ Then he returned to Bethany, where he stayed overnight.

¹⁸ In the morning, as Jesus was returning to Jerusalem, he was hungry, ¹⁹ and he noticed a fig tree beside the road. He went over to see if there were any figs, but there were only leaves. Then he said to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" And immediately the fig tree withered up.

²⁰ The disciples were amazed when they saw this and

asked, “How did the fig tree wither so quickly?”

²¹ Then Jesus told them, “I tell you the truth, if you have faith and don’t doubt, you can do things like this and much more. You can even say to this mountain, ‘May you be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ and it will happen. ²² You can pray for anything, and if you have faith, you will receive it.”

²³ When Jesus returned to the Temple and began teaching, the leading priests and elders came up to him. They demanded, “By what authority are you doing all these things? Who gave you the right?”

²⁴ “I’ll tell you by what authority I do these things if you answer one question,” Jesus replied. ²⁵ “Did John’s authority to baptize come from heaven, or was it merely human?” They talked it over among themselves. “If we say it was from heaven, he will ask us why we didn’t believe John. ²⁶ But if we say it was merely human, we’ll be mobbed because the people believe John was a prophet.” ²⁷ So they finally replied, “We don’t know.”

And Jesus responded, “Then I won’t tell you by what authority I do these things.

QUESTIONS

The Triumphal Entry

1. What is the significance⁴ of Jesus entering Jerusalem⁵ at this point in His ministry?

⁴ “Jesus intentionally declares his identity to the nation. The circumstances of his entry will produce a variety of reactions among the people. At the Passover season, messianic excitement tended to run high. With pilgrims crowding into Jerusalem not only from the various regions of Palestine but also from the Diaspora, hope for the appearance of the Messiah was ready and ignited....Jesus’ descent from the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem evokes images of Zechariah’s prophecy of the Lord’s fighting against the nations with his feet on the Mount of Olives and liberating Jerusalem (**Zechariah 14:3–21**). Wilkins, Matthew J. *Matthew: The NIV Application Commentary*. Zondervan, 2004. 686

⁵ “The road into Jerusalem from the east came over the shoulder of the Mount of Olives, the hill which overlooks the city across the Kidron valley. Matthew’s mention of the Mount of Olives in addition to the specific location of Bethphage may be intended not only for geographical clarity but because the area had its own messianic connotations (**Zechariah 14:4; Ezekiel 11:23, 43:1–5**), because it recalls David’s exile and return, and because it will soon be the site of Jesus’ last great discourse (**24:3**).” France, R. T. *The Gospel of Matthew: The New International Commentary on the New Testament*. Eerdmans, 2007.

2. How did the disciples and crowds react to Jesus' entry into Jerusalem? (**Matthew 21:8–11**)

Why do you think they responded this way?

3. There are multiple Old Testament references in this passage. In **Matthew 21:5** Jesus referenced **Zechariah 9:9** and the crowd's response to Jesus (**Matthew 21:9**) referenced **Psalms 118:25–26**. As you read over the following passages, note what you learn about Jesus' identity.

- a. **Psalms 118:25–26**

²⁵ *Please, LORD, please save us.*⁶

Please, LORD, please give us success.

²⁶ *Bless the one who comes in the name of the LORD.
We bless you from the house of the LORD.*

⁶ In **Matthew 21:9**, the crowds said "Praise God for the Son of David!" which in the original language is *Hosanna*/Ὡσαννά. In **Psalms 118:25** the way it is translated is "save us." "The phrase 'save us' (Hosanna) is related to the noun rendered 'salvation.' The congregation requests the Lord to continue to do his wonderful acts so that they will 'prosper.'" Barker, Kenneth L., et al. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Zondervan, 2004. Bible Gateway Plus

b. **Zechariah 9:9**⁷

Rejoice, O people of Zion!

Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem!

Look, your king is coming to you.

*He is righteous and victorious,
yet he is humble, riding on a donkey—
riding on a donkey's colt.*

c. How might the crowds have misunderstood Jesus and His mission?

d. What are some of the misunderstandings you've had about Jesus throughout your spiritual journey?

⁷ "All of this, in the context of approaching Passover, would suggest to the Jewish-Christian implied reader the fervor surrounding the appearance of a religious revolutionary conqueror. But Jesus' choice of animal is not a mighty steed, symbolizing military authority and brutal conquest, but a donkey with her foal, thus fulfilling the prophecy of **Zechariah 9:9** which speaks of a king who comes in humility (**Matthew 20:29**)." Bauer, David R. *The Gospel of the Son of God: An Introduction to Matthew*. IVP Academic, 2019. 205-206

Cleansing of the Temple

4. After reaching the temple courts, what was Jesus' main accusation⁸ against those in the temple? (**Matthew 21:13**)

5. What else did Jesus do in the temple? (**Matthew 21:14–16**)

6. Why do you think the chief priests and experts of the law responded negatively to Jesus' interactions at the temple (i.e. driving out money changers, turning over tables, healing, and the children's praise)?

⁸ "The rationale for Jesus' seemingly bizarre behavior is in fact scriptural. As he clears the area of those engaged in these various commercial transactions, Jesus begins to fulfill the prophecy that a day would come when no 'merchant' would remain in the house of the Lord (**Zechariah 14:21**). Then he explicitly quotes portions of **Isaiah 56:7** and **Jeremiah 7:11**. As it stands, what was intended to be a 'house of prayer' (**Mark 11:17** includes the phrase 'for all the nations')—namely the court of the Gentiles—is so filled with commotion that neither Jew nor Gentile can easily pray here. 'Den of robbers' does not necessarily mean that all the merchants sold their goods at inflated prices, but it does suggest at least that Jesus considered many of them generally corrupt. And if 'robbers' is given the meaning it most probably has in **26:55** and **27:38, 44** (insurrectionist), then Jesus may be accusing the leaders of having converted the temple into a 'nationalist stronghold.'" Blomberg, Craig. *The New American Commentary: Matthew*. vol. 22. Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992. 314–315.

The Withered Tree

7. How are the temple cleansing and the cursing of the fig tree stories connected?⁹ (**Matthew 21:18–22**)

8. What does it mean to have faith to do the same works Jesus did?

a. How have you experienced this type of faith?

b. In what ways do you think faith and authority or power are connected?

⁹ “Jesus came to God’s temple looking for fruit but found none (**Matthew 21:43**). A fruitless fig tree judged by God was a common prophetic analogy (**Jeremiah 8:13; Hosea 2:12; 9:10, 16–17; Micah 7:1–8**). Consequently, when Jesus ‘cursed’ the Fig tree it was a symbolic act of judgment against the ‘house’ of Israel (either the temple leadership or the temple itself)—a dramatic performance like the prophets of Old [**Jeremiah 19:1–15**].” Duvall, J. Scott and J. Daniel Hays. *The Baker Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*. Baker Books, 2020. 839

The Authority of Jesus

9. What was Jesus doing when the chief priests and elders confronted Him? (**Matthew 21:23**)

a. What do you think was the intention of Jesus' enemies?

b. What do their questions imply about how they saw Jesus?

10. Jesus answered the leaders' questions by asking a question of His own. Why did the leaders struggle to respond to the question? (**Matthew 21:25–27**)¹⁰

¹⁰ "Jesus replies with a question of his own. He asks about the origin of John's baptism. Is it 'from heaven or of human origin?' If they acknowledged a heavenly source, then Jesus' response will be to ask why they did not respond ('believe'). On the other hand, if they say that John was acting only as a mortal being, then the crowd will be skeptical of them, because the multitude regarded John as a true prophet. ... The leaders feel the weight of popular opinion and sense being rejected by them as a result, but they do not want to admit any opening to Jesus. They contemplate their answer not in terms of truth but in terms of how it will play. Their trap has sprung back on them. The narrative power of the account resides in that very sense of reversal." Bock, Darrell L., and Benjamin I. Simpson. *Jesus According to Scripture: Restoring the Portrait from the Gospels*. Baker Academic, 2021. 323-324.

11. How do you view Jesus' authority in your own life?

12. Each of these stories tells us more about Jesus, the unexpected King. What is one thing you have learned about Jesus from this lesson, and how will it impact how you live?

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

In what would naturally be the greatest image of power, Jesus' triumphal entry in all four Gospels is described as humble. "An image of Jesus' willingness to choose the hidden way of love rather than power."¹¹ As you reflect on this passage consider how you may be able to imitate this sort of humility among your peers and spheres of influence.

Practices Includes:¹²

- refraining from image management.
- deliberately keeping silent about accomplishments and talents.
- refusing the impulse to name-drop.
- backing away from becoming the center of attention; drawing others out.
- avoiding favoritism; honoring others as God does.

What is God calling you to as a reflection of humility?

¹¹ Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us*. IVP Books, 2015. 190

¹² *Ibid.* 190

ON MISSION

In our western context it is not far-fetched to assume most individuals have an awareness of Jesus as presented in the Gospels. Although some may not share your religious beliefs or have any faith affiliations, many still seem drawn to the person of Jesus. Jesus' humility, authority, and peace, along with His teaching and actions can attract even non-believers. As you continue with your week, consider having a conversation with an unbeliever, or someone who comes from a different religion, and talk about how they see Jesus.

Note: Think of this as a step to begin a conversation, not necessarily to convince or persuade someone. Allow yourself to prepare in prayer before you enter into this conversation. Follow Holy Spirit's prompting as you have the conversation.

PRAYER REQUESTS

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SERMON NOTES

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