

Triumphal Entry and Temple Cleansing
Lesson 22 – Life of Christ
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Our lesson today began where it left off last week, with Jesus in Jericho. He and his disciples spent the night at the home of Zacchaeus. As the morning began, Jesus shared a few lessons just before he left on the journey up the mountains to Jerusalem. Luke 19:9 and ten share that Jesus' purpose for staying with the tax collector, was because he “came to seek and to save the lost.” Then verse 11 tells us, “Now: while they were listening to this he went on to tell them a parable because he was nearing Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once.” The rest of our lesson centers on this thought: Was Jesus as Messiah now ready to set up his earthly kingdom?

The excitement had been building. On this trip to Jerusalem, Jesus was accompanied with more than just his own disciples. There were thousands of pilgrims, traveling at the same time to Jerusalem for Passover. Some had followed Jesus because of his teaching, others because of his miraculous healing power, and still others because they were curious about this Prophet. For many of these Jews, this Passover had been their first opportunity to come to the area of Judea to see for themselves this Jesus everyone was talking about.

However, I would like to present to you that Jesus would use even their excitement in these few days to separate believers from unbelievers; the curious from the committed; to draw a line in the sand

from which all of mankind must take sides. Would they be among the saved, or among the lost when Christ finished his mission by the end of this last week? So Jesus told them a parable.

Barnes in his commentary explained, “They were anxious for [Jesus to set up his temporal kingdom] and supposed that the time was at hand, and that 'now' as soon as they entered Jerusalem, he would assume the appearance of such a kingdom. To correct that notion seem(ed) to have been the main design of this parable.” In Luke 19:12,13 Jesus began his illustration, “A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed king and then to return. So, he called ten of his servants and gave them 10 minas. 'Put this money to work,' he said, 'until I come back.'”

Now, I thought that a prince became king immediately upon the death of the king. But from the time of the Persian Empire, young noblemen would be sent to work in different territories of the empire and then, if they did well, would be called to the capital to claim their rank as an official “king” of their region. Rome also chose regional kings such as Herod. Sometimes an offspring, who was called to officially receive their title, would be followed by a delegation from that territory who would either give their support of this promotion or their arguments against it. The Jews had spoken in descent in the case of Archelaus, who was later banished.

Now, while the nobleman in this parable was gone, he had

instructed men in his service to invest his wealth. This was a test. When he returned, he would know which servants had proved their dedication to him and these would be rewarded with positions of authority over cities in his realm. However, we learned of two groups who did not respect this nobleman's rule as the parable goes on. First, Luke 19:14 revealed, "But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, 'We don't want this man to be our king.'" In their enthusiasm, the disciples chose to think everyone would want Jesus as their King. However, they were also aware that Jesus offended the religious leaders several times. And that these leaders tried multiple times to diminish Jesus' respect among the people with their calculated questions. Rather than pacify them, Jesus continued to challenge them and during this week of Passover, would push them over the line to not only stand against him but to also plot his death.

Secondly, the parable pointed out one disloyal servant, out of the ten. The final servant to report to the returning king, chose to let the negative opinions of the king's character affect his service. "Then another servant came and said, 'Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. I was afraid of you because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.'" [Luke 19:20] The very qualities than earned this nobleman his commission to rule, were the deeds of authority this servant despised. Therefore this disgruntled servant was called a wicked servant and taken

to be executed by the king along with those who had petitioned to prevent the king's rule.

As we examined this parable, we see the line being drawn. Jesus was the Son of God. He had been given his authority to rule as Israel's Messiah by His Father. He exhibited the power, knowledge, understanding and compassion in his life that showed exactly how the Father desired him to rule. But some in his life rejected that authority and power.

Finally, in this parable, Jesus told his disciples he must leave them for awhile. He would give them responsibilities to accomplish while he was away, for which he would prepare rewards as they completed their tasks.

But there would be some who pretended to be among them who would align themselves with his enemies. Judas was just one, that we know of who would do so. Peter would later warn the early church of this fact: “2 Peter 2:1 related, “But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them, -bringing swift destruction on themselves.” If anyone rejects Jesus as having died to be their Savior, even in this day of grace, they too are “bringing swift destruction on themselves.” There can be no fence straddling! “Whoever has the Son, has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.” [1 John 5:11] The disciples

had made their choice. The religious leaders were about to make theirs.

But just as they had put his clear warnings about his death out of their minds, the disciples now fell into line behind Jesus to begin this final, fateful journey toward Jerusalem, and quickly dismissed this parable from their minds.

The main road from Jericho to Jerusalem winds up the hills, from the valley of the Jordan, climbing lower hills, such as the Mount of Olives, on its way to Mount Zion, where Jerusalem was. At the distance of about two miles from Jerusalem, the road passed between two villages, Bethany and Bethphage. Jesus seemed to pause on the road to prepare for a special event that would further compel people to choose sides this day.

Luke and Mark described Jesus' instructions to direct his disciples to find "a colt" while Matthew's account described his instructions as: "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me." We might recall that Matthew wrote his gospel to present Jesus as the promised Messiah. He included this detail about the colt's mother being there to present this event as fulfillment of the Messianic prophecy in Zechariah 9:9: "Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey." Luke and Mark, however, only refer to the colt Jesus chose to ride upon. The

mother was probably following along right behind.

The amazement of this colt standing there with it's mother, completely ready for Jesus to use, without prior arrangement, seemed to pass over the heads of the disciples, who simply followed directions and brought them to Jesus. John wrote in chapter 12:verse 16 that, “At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things were written about him and that these things had been done to him.” But quickly, they began to realize Jesus was making a statement by choosing to ride into Jerusalem in this way. They placed their cloaks over the back of the donkey to let Jesus ride more comfortably, and then the crowd, who had gathered while they prepared the colt, began to also place their cloaks on the road before him.

In Matthew 20:8 the event is described in this way, “A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' 'Hosanna in the highest heaven!’” Mark 11:10 added the phrase: “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!” And Luke in 19:37,38 added: “When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: 'Blessed is the king who comes in the

name of the Lord!' 'Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!'" It was more than a parade, it was a pronouncement of the arrival of the King, the Messiah. Were his servants ready to receive him?

Mark 11:11 tells us, "Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve." Remember, Bethany was just two miles back down the hill, near Bethphage, where the donkeys had been found. For those who love animals, I believe it was at this time that they were returned to their owners.

However, the disciples could not turn off their joy, even as they entered the Temple courts. So, when Jesus dismounted, the celebration continued praising God as they followed him into the courts. Here the Pharisees designated which side they had chosen by saying, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" [Luke 19:39,40] This chanting was not a dignified response and should not continue in the sacred courts of the Temple! However Jesus muted their objection by saying, "I tell you,...if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out!"

Jesus was referring to another prophetic passage lamenting the shedding of innocent blood from Habakkuk 2:11, "The stones of the wall will cry out, and the beams of the woodwork will echo it." But while the religious leaders were indignant, the people from all around Jerusalem were excitedly chatting about the coming of Jesus that day. "When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked,

'Who is this?' The crowds answered, 'This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.' [Matthew 21:10,11] they too must decide if they would embrace this prophet as their Messiah, or reject him as a fraud.

The gospel according to Mark continued in 11:12-14 "The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, 'May no one ever eat fruit from you again. And his disciples heard him say it.'" For those of us who have never cultivated such a fig tree, this curse sounds out of character for Jesus. But there are a few details which help us understand and add poignancy to this illustration.

The first detail is contained in this scripture from Mark. His statement about it not being the season for figs actually helps us understand why Jesus expected fruit. One website answering the question, "why this tree was cursed by Jesus," related: "When the fig leaves appear about the end of March, they are accompanied by a crop of small knobs, called taqsh by the Arabs, a sort of fore-runner of the real figs. These taqsh are eaten by peasants and others when hungry. They drop off before the real fig is formed. But if the leaves appear unaccompanied by taqsh, there will be no figs that year."

Jesus had the agricultural right to expect this tree, which was full of leaves, should have had the pre-fig nobs that he could eat. Since it

“was not the season for figs,” they would not have been harvested yet, and so either pre-fruit or actual maturing figs should have been on that tree. However, the lack of either showed that the tree was not going to be fruitful.

Secondly, in the old testament, God used the illustration of the fig tree as a picture of Israel. Jesus knew that the religious leaders of the Jews had rejected him and were actually going to search for an excuse to have him killed. As he walked toward Jerusalem once again, Jesus focused on all of the events to come this week that we have read as history. Jesus would be accused falsely, given over to the Roman government and crucified as the King of the Jews. He would be rejected by the very same crowds who had shouted “hosanna,” which means, God, save us.

Jesus cursed the fig tree, knowing that Jerusalem itself would be cursed, and destroyed by the same government the rulers would use as a tool to crucify him. And in 70 A.D., Titus would starve them out, burn down their homes, strip the Temple, and break down the very stones the Jews thought were sacred.

While the disciples wondered at the cursed fig tree, Jesus wept for the future of the symbolic “fig-tree-nation.” “As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, 'If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes. ...They will not leave one stone on another,

because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you.” [Luke 19:41] Again, the Nobleman approached his capital but only to the praises of the children, this time.

Matthew 21:12-17 recorded the next entry into Jerusalem and how Jesus reacted as he again entered the Temple courts this day. The blind and lame had heard Jesus was in Jerusalem and found him in the temple, and he healed them. He found the religious leaders waiting to see what he would do. “But when the chief priests and teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, 'Hosanna to the Son of David,' they were indignant.” [Matthew 21:15-16]

Now, I have heard children take up a chant, day after day, whether it be for a sports team or birthday celebration! Bible scholars are unsure if this happened at the same time as when the Pharisees challenged Jesus to stop the disciples from chanting Jesus' praises, or the following day. But Jesus' answer was again to quote scripture, “...have you never read, 'From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise,’” which came from Psalm 8:1,2. However, if the leaders were angry to hear children sing his praises, they had no idea of who Jesus really was. So Jesus showed them.

In chapter 21:12,13 Matthew recorded: “Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those

selling doves. 'It is written,' he said to them, 'My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of thieves.'" In this declaration, Jesus is making claims of authority, purpose and condemnation.

In the Old Testament, God used his prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah to warn his people about their heart attitudes. Both confronted the Jews just before the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires would conquer them and take them into exile. One reason God would allow these evil empires to conquer his people, was because their religious leaders were misusing the poor and gaining personal wealth instead of helping the downtrodden. Isaiah referred to the Temple as a "house of prayer" for all nations and Jeremiah referred to the leaders using it as "a den of thieves". [Isaiah 56:7; Jeremiah 7:11]

As pilgrims converged on Jerusalem for Passover, traveling from nations at some distance, they did not bring the required lamb for sacrifice with them on the journey. At least one court of the Temple had been set aside for local shepherds to use as a place to offer their lambs for sale for this sacrifice. Ellicott described the scene Jesus saw in this way: "One of the courts of the Temple was therefore assigned for the purpose, and probably the priests found their profit in the arrangement by charging a fee or rent of some kind for the privilege of holding stalls..... but also the pilgrims brought with them the coinage of their own country ... and their money was either not current in Palestine, or,

as being stamped with the symbols of heathen worship, could not be received into the Corban, or treasury of the Temple. For their convenience, therefore, money-changers were wanted, who, of course, made the usual 'argot' or profit on each transaction."

Jesus entered this court, with all of these transactions on-going, and he felt the righteous indignation of his Father. God had dwelt in the Holy Place of this Temple to be near to his chosen people, Israel. And now, the people had to go through all of this haggling to approach the Temple, the House of Prayer. How could Israel worship the Lord God if they felt ripped-off when they purchased their offering? How could they pray if they had a grudge against the merchants who took advantage of them?

Matthew Henry in his writings brought this concern down to our age. "If Christ came now into many parts of his visible church, how many secret evils he would discover and cleanse! And how many things daily practiced under the cloak of religion, would he show to be more suitable to a den of thieves than to a house of prayer!" Although the religious leaders rationalized their thievery as a "service" to the pilgrims. How often do we rationalize our attitudes of grumbling, during our worship, to our own selfish preferences or insecurities?

Our Lord Jesus is the righteous Son of God. He Himself was the one holy sacrifice to be given for the sins of all people. "How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit

offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God?" [Hebrews 9:14] Since Jesus cleansed us, just like he cleansed his Temple, shouldn't we now serve Him? He cleared a path for the people to worship the One true God. Isn't it our duty to clear a path today for all to worship Him since our believing hearts are his temple today?

Rather than complaining that we dislike how "they" do our services today, shouldn't we join "them" by volunteering to greet the new people, serving in child care, serving coffee or being in the prayer room to facilitate those who have little or no experience in coming before the Lord with their prayers and requests? Our service to Him is to show others who He is in our lives. Perhaps in this way, more will be led by the Spirit to their point of belief in Jesus, the cleanser of souls.

However, "...while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. 'By what authority are you doing these things?' they asked. 'And who gave you this authority?'" [Matthew 11:23-25] "These things" referred to the Triumphal Entry, the praises given by the disciples and children, his healings as well as the cleansing of the Temple. Jesus presented himself as Messiah, the Son of God. Yet the religious rulers were not falling to their knees before him in worship, but rather, challenging his authority. They had already decided to chose the other side of the "line". They were not for him, but against him. So, with this question they again attempted to place a wedge between him

and the people saying he had no authority to do these things.

In their world, no one became an instructor, or rabbi, until they had been given authority to do so. Ellicott explained, “The right to take the place of an instructor was, as a rule, conferred by the scribes or their chief representative, on one who had studied 'at the feet' of some great teacher, and been solemnly admitted... to that office.” These leaders had investigated and had not found any such commission from any great teacher they knew to have been bestowed on Jesus. Therefore they knew he could not boast of such a human teacher's credential.

If they could get Jesus to say God had given him this authority, they could cry “blasphemy” and arrest him then and there. They decided that they must separate Jesus from the affections of the people if they were to control the enthusiasm he had created. But Jesus knew their designs. So, he countered their question with a question of his own. “I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism – was it from heaven, or of human origin? Tell me!” [Matthew 11:29,30]

John had testified that Jesus was the Messiah. He had told the priests and Levites who questioned John's authority too, that he himself was Messiah's forerunner by saying, “I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'” [John 1:23] After Jesus' temptation, John told his own disciples referring to Jesus as he came near them, “Look, the Lamb of God!” [John 1:35] Some of John's

disciples followed Jesus from that time on, recognizing that John believed Jesus was Messiah. Yet the religious leaders did not accept what John had said and would not accept John as being anything but a fanatic.

Matthew gave his account of the discussion and answer given by these chief priests and elders of the people. [Matthew 21:25b-27] If they revealed their own doubts about John, they people would turn against them, because “they all hold that John was a prophet.” [verse 26] But if they answered Jesus that John was sent from God, then Jesus would challenge them by asking why they didn't believe John's testimony about Jesus being Messiah. They were caught. Therefore, they lied for their answer, “We don't know.” [verse 27] So, Jesus' answered truthfully, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

Luke relates that Jesus was teaching daily in the temple. [Luke 19:47,48] “But the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill him. Yet they could not find any way to do it, because all the people hung on his words.” The leaders of the Jewish people had made their choice. They rejected Jesus as their Messiah. They saw him only as a problem to be solved, by killing him. They counted his death as a small price to pay to keep Rome from rising up against them.

John described their deliberation in chapter 11: verses 45-53.

During a meeting of the Sanhedrin, Caiaphas, the acting high priest, prophesied of God's purpose in all of their rejection. Their solution was to seek to kill Jesus, reasoning, “You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.” [verse 50] He didn't know that his comment was a prophesy of the divine purpose of Jesus' life and death. “He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one. So from that day on they plotted to take his life.” [verses 51-53]

While the leaders rejected and plotted against Jesus, He continued daily to pour into his disciples his teachings, preparing them for all that was to come. When they traveled again past the fig tree that Jesus had cursed, the disciples were amazed at how quickly it had withered completely. Jesus used this as a teachable moment, knowing the disciples would need to have faith sustain them when he would be separated from them in death. “'Have faith in God,' Jesus answered. 'Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea', and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.’” [Mark 11:22-25]

Jesus is here looking into the future struggles, the mountains, his

believing disciples would have to face, without his physical presence. Knowing this, he presented to them that even though they would face humanly impossible obstacles to their service for him, they must trust in the God of the impossible. Having faith in the almighty God would cover any wavering of their own strength or reason.

In their future they would also face the rejection and mountains of resistance thrown in their way by these same religious leaders who would kill Jesus himself. But, through the Holy Spirit, they would bravely remove these mountains by prayer and speak boldly in the Name of Jesus. The disciples would be hunted and arrested, but God would release and hide many who trusted in His Name. Many would face torture and death, but God would spread his Word in the face of such danger and expand his church throughout the world.

The disciples would also be tempted to be angry and hold grudges against these leaders who would kill their Lord. To these emotions, the Lord added: “And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

Jesus desired that his disciples would also have faith that God's plan for judgment would be completed in His time, not according to their emotions at the end of the age. But until that time, it is his purpose that his disciples share the good news with all, so that all may come to repentance. Therefore, this prayer was not to be used for vengeance but

for the furtherance of the gospel.

However this promise was as much for us today as it was for the disciples. We all face mountains in our lifetime. I absolutely bring illness, financial stress and struggles in our family and work before the Lord in prayer all the time. I know God desires for us to bring our burdens to him. But, any circumstance that blocks our standing up for Christ before others, is a mountain as well. Any fear that tempts us to turn away from telling others about him due to possible reprisal is a mountain. Even our burdens might break our strength to give the Lord the praise due to him while we are under them.

But God is faithful. We may waver in our faith when we face these mountains, but Jesus was referring to faith in his power, not our own. Jesus wants us to rely on His faithfulness because we have chosen to stand on the side of the Lord God, the keeper of our souls. The Lord's faithfulness is enough.

God is sovereign in this world.

God is faithful to move mountains