

It is so good to be back with you all! Welcome to everyone who is new. I want to kick things off by updating you on some of the progress that has been made around the church, celebrating the good things that have been done, and sharing next steps for the next few months.

Over the last year, to help with safety and security, especially with taking good care of our kids, we have installed automatic locking doors and seventy security cameras throughout our building. We've put a new roof on most of our building, updated the children's ministry space, creating more room for additional kids, and we've completed renovations to the Connecting Place to help people take their next step at the church. So much progress has been made. Because of God's goodness and your generosity, everything we've done has been paid for in cash, for which we are so thankful. Our next two projects are updating space and technology for our pre-teen and student ministries and renovating this worship center, moving to individual theater seating, which will allow hundreds more people each service to join us on Sundays. We are working with architects and designers as we speak to finalize those plans, and our present plan is to move forward with those projects as funds come in. We will keep you posted and up to date on the timing with all those things. We are still actively exploring what a family play center could look like. We are touring other facilities and dreaming about how we could have a facility that not only advances the ministry of our church but also could be used to engage our community in dynamic and impactful ways. If you've been around here for a while, none of this information is new. We just want to do regular updates so we are all up to speed and aware of where we are at and what's going on! Let's pray and give thanks and prepare our hearts.

We are now in our last three weeks of our study of the gospel of Matthew. Today we are covering the events in the last several days of Jesus' life. This section is all about Jesus taking his place as the rightful king of Israel. These events function somewhat like his coronation. As soon as Jesus is welcomed in as the rightful king, he begins to put his house in order, he controls and condemns those who have been mismanaging the present affairs, and then he wraps up by promising one day to return to the world, and instead of only putting Israel in order, he will set the entire world right once and for all. After diving into this passage, we'll look at the modern situation and talk about what this means for our lives today.

### **The King Is Welcomed In**

A little helpful context: This is the beginning of the last week of Jesus' life. He is planning to make his way into Jerusalem, the nation's capital. He decides to capitalize on this moment, to maximize its impact based upon a precedent and a prophecy.

First, **the precedent**: Jesus knew Israel's history perfectly. He knew that nearly 1,000 years before him, David, Israel's greatest king, had two sons who both wanted the throne at the end of David's life. Once he had chosen Solomon to be the nation's next leader, he had to find a way to declare publicly that Solomon was the new king. What did he do? He had Solomon, his chosen son, ride into Jerusalem on a donkey to be recognized as Israel's rightful king (1 Kings 1:34-40). It was a way to say to all the people, "Here is your king."

Not only is there a historic precedent, but there is also **a prophecy**. One of the Old Testament prophets said that when the Messiah comes, he will ride into Jerusalem on a donkey. "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" (Zechariah 9:9).

With those two things in mind, as Jesus is approaching Jerusalem during the last week of his ministry on earth, he tells his disciples to go and fetch a donkey. It's his way of saying, "It's time!" That's where our passage picks up.

They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. 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!" (Matthew 21:7-9)

The people see Jesus and say, "This is the true and ultimate son of David; this is the fulfillment of the prophecies. He is our king!" They welcome him and embrace him! This is like people rushing to the capital in the middle of January for inauguration day, celebrating our new leader. They shout, "Hosanna," which means "God, save us. Save us now."

To fully appreciate the meaning of this event, which is called the triumphal entry, you have to understand what Jesus did, riding into Jerusalem on a donkey as the people embrace him and ask him to save them. But it's not just what he did—it's when he did it. It's Palm Sunday, which means it's the 10th of Nisan, exactly five days before Passover. According to the Old Testament, what is supposed to happen on the 10th of Nisan? Exodus 12 requires that on that day, the Jewish people select a Passover lamb and inspect it to ensure it is spotless, ready to be offered for the forgiveness of their sins and their liberation from their enemies. Jewish historians say that every Passover, 250,000 lambs were brought into Jerusalem to be sacrificed in the temple. At a time when there are literally a quarter of a million lambs being led into Jerusalem for sacrifice, bleating all along the way, unaware of their fate, on the exact same day, at the exact same time, Jesus enters the Jerusalem. The people are saying, "Save us." Jesus nods, knowing that he will indeed save them by becoming the ultimate Passover lamb, God's chosen sacrifice to take away the sins of the world.

### **The King Puts His House in Order**

Jesus is being welcomed as the king. The next thing we see is that Jesus, as the king, begins putting his house in order. When we get a new president, what do they do on day one? They sign executive orders. They say, "We can't wait months or years for congress to move on these matters; work must start immediately." The Jews expected that the moment the king comes, he will put his house in order right away, and that's exactly what Jesus does. When Biden took office and signed executive orders, it made people on the right upset. When Trump signed executive orders, it made people on the left upset. If you are opposed to the incoming ruler and he starts putting his agenda into place, it's not going to be comfortable for you.

A few days ago, we were getting ready to prepare a dinner of salmon, potatoes, and green beans. At our house, Keren usually takes care of the inside food, while I take care of the outside food, so I was grilling the salmon. It was one of those really windy days where it's hard even to get the fire started. Eventually, everything was up and running and it was time to season the salmon. I decided to go blackened style this time, so among the other spices I had paprika and cayenne pepper. Everything was going fine until I sprinkled the cayenne pepper at the exact same time a huge gust of wind came along, and all that pepper went right into my eyes. I hadn't felt a sting like that in a while. As we look at this passage, we are going to see the sting the religious leaders of the day felt when Jesus started setting his house in order.

It all begins with Jesus going to the temple, the epicenter of the Jewish religion and the official offices of the religious leaders.

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 robbers.’” (Matthew 21:12-13)

We’ve talked about this before, but these people, who were part of the religious establishment, were setting up shop in the temple to profit off the exploitation of faithful worshippers. Those with institutional power said, “You can’t use Roman money in the temple; it’s too defiled. You have to use temple currency.” They had their own “pure” money. It would have been no big deal, except that when they traded out the money, they charged a crazy exchange rate, price gouging impoverished pilgrims. Jesus looked at that and hated it! He turned over their tables. He cleared the place out! He said, “This is my father’s house but you’ve defiled it with your greed. This is a place of prayer. I’ve come to cleanse and restore it.” One would see Jesus acting that way and naturally ask, “What gives him the right? How does he think he has the authority to do something like that?” Look at what happens next: “Early in the morning, as Jesus was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, ‘May you never bear fruit again!’ Immediately the tree withered” (Matthew 21:18-19). Some people, especially tree lovers, read this passage and say, “Hey, what did that tree ever do to you? Why are you cursing the tree?” But if you dig a few inches beneath the surface you realize that the tree is a metaphor, a representation of the temple.

**tree—no fruit—cursed by Jesus—withered and dead**

**temple—no fruit—cursed by Jesus—withered and dead**

The tree is a living metaphor, a powerful picture that just like the tree withered and died, the same thing will happen to the temple. It would become defunct and obsolete. It never provided the kind of fruit God was looking for, and now Jesus would become the new temple, the perfect high priest, and the ultimate sacrifice, to take away the sins of the world.

After cursing the tree, a parable of his cursing the temple and the entire religious establishment in charge of it, Jesus goes into the temple. If you read through chapter 22, you see that all the religious leaders line up. The chief priests, elders, Pharisees, Herodians, Sadducees, teachers of the law—the entire establishment takes turns trying to put Jesus in his place, to humiliate and shame Jesus publicly so they can regain honor in the eyes of the people. But Jesus, like an expert jiu jitsu fighter, reverses each of these intellectual attacks and winds up exposing the incompetence of the leaders! After answering all their questions and leaving them speechless in chapter 22, Jesus goes on the offensive in chapter 23. He shows that the so-called emperor has no clothes. Listen to some of his words:

- “But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them” (Matthew 23:3-4).
- “Everything they do is done for people to see” (Matthew 23:5).
- “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites... You have neglected justice, mercy and faithfulness” (Matthew 23:23).
- “They are full of greed and self-indulgence” (Matthew 23:25).
- “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... you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness” (Matthew 23:27-28).
- “You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?” (Matthew 23:33).

It's almost impossible to imagine Jesus condemning these leaders in a more severe way. And it's not only his description of the leaders—he says the entire temple and the entire city and the whole system of oppression and injustice that was set up is going to be destroyed. “Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down” (Matthew 24:2). He said, “Because of your wickedness, your evil, your selfishness, your rejection of God and his truth and his ways, within one generation, not one stone will be left on top of another.” A “generation” is about forty years. Jesus said that around 33 AD, and in 70 AD the Romans came and decimated the city. They crucified so many Jews that historians say there were no olive trees left in the entire country with which to make crosses. The entire landscape was left desolate, littered with death, and the temple was destroyed. The Romans literally threw stones that weighed tens of thousands of pounds seventy feet down.

### **The King Promises to Put the World in Order Soon**

Jesus comes as the king and he puts his house in order. But he doesn't end there: he promises to put the world in order soon! In Jesus' first coming, he came to the Jewish people and because they rejected him, there were severe consequences. Then he said one day he will return (his second coming), and instead of coming only to the Jews, he will return to the entire world, and everyone will stand before him and give an account for their life. He tells three parables.

- **The parable of the ten bridesmaids** Jesus says when he returns, it will be like people preparing for a wedding. In our world, people send out a “save the date” eight months in advance, then they send an official invitation about three months out. Everyone knows exactly when the wedding will be. But back then, you didn't know when the groom was going to show up, so you had to stand always ready. Of the ten bridesmaids, five were watching, waiting, and expectant, and five weren't. Those who were watching and waiting got to partake in the celebration; those who were asleep were excluded from the party.
- **The parable of the talents.** Jesus says when he returns, it will be like a wealthy man who went on a long trip. He asked three of his servants to invest his money while he was gone. He entrusted them with different amounts of money based on their skills and abilities. When he returned, he asked them to report on how their investments turned out. Two of the servants doubled the money; they were commended and richly rewarded. One just hid the money in the ground and did nothing with it. Jesus called him wicked and lazy, took the deposit from him, and ordered him to be left out in the darkness.
- **The parable of the sheep and the goats.** Jesus concludes by saying that when he returns, it will be like a shepherd who separates the herd, with sheep here and goats there. Jesus says there is coming a day when all humanity will stand before him and he will separate us into two groups. One group will be given the gift of eternal life. The other group will experience eternal punishment. Each group asks why—why are we receiving this reward, why are we receiving this punishment—and Jesus says, “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” And everyone is confused: “When did we see you thirsty or hungry or naked or a stranger?” And Jesus says, “Whatever you have done for the least of these, you have done for me.” How we treat the people Jesus loves is an extension of how we treat him.

All three of these parables are teaching us about Jesus' eventual return, and how each of us can be prepared for it.

These are the primary things Jesus did and said the last few days of his life. What are we to make of them? We should welcome Jesus as our king. We should ask Jesus to put our lives in order, and we should live prepared for his return. Let's talk about what each of those might look like.

**We should welcome Jesus as our king.** When Jesus came into Jerusalem, thousands of people lined the streets to celebrate his arrival and his reign. He was not going to come and rule by force, riding on a horse ready for war; rather, he came gentle, riding on a donkey, a sign of mercy. He was not coming to slaughter his enemies, he was coming as the Passover lamb, allowing himself to become the sacrifice so we could be forgiven and have lasting peace with God. Jesus is the most loving, gracious, compassionate, merciful, just leader the world has ever known. We should welcome him in as the leader of our lives.

**We should invite Jesus to put our house in order.** If we welcome Jesus in as king, that means he's in charge, he's in control, he gets what he wants. Just like he went to the Jewish leaders and told them they needed to make a change, we need to humble ourselves before Jesus and say, "Look at my life, examine every aspect of me—my relationships, my time, my family, my work, everything—and put things exactly as you want them to be. But here's the clincher—we actually have to let Jesus do what he wants to do. It's not the suggestion box; it's a directive.

Recently I was meeting with a group of younger men in a Bible study, and I challenged all the men that if they want to grow in humility, if they want a broken, submissive spirit before God, one of the steps they could take is to stop speeding. Quit justifying breaking rules because you think you are the exception, that you are smarter than everyone else. If you gladly and joyfully practice following the laws of the land, you will become the sort of person who more naturally and joyfully follows the laws of God. I gave that encouragement, and the next day, the guys are in a text thread, and one of them said, "I've been really convicted about following the laws of the land. How about the rest of you? I thought about it while driving, but then put the pedal to the floor and didn't think about it again." Another guy said, "Those signs are just suggestions." Direction was given, and the direction was kind of mocked and rejected. That's okay to do to me. I was just offering them a proactive step they could take to intentionally grow in humility and submissiveness. We don't have that luxury with Jesus. When he comes and reorders our lives, we need to say, "You are in charge—you get whatever you want."

Last, **we should prepare for Jesus' return.** We do that by responding specifically to each of the parables Jesus told. **Like the bridesmaids, we need to be always ready for his return.** This hit me the other day. I had just come in from eight hours of hard work. I showered, sat down on the couch and turned on golf. I was no more than thirty seconds in when I heard Keren yell at the top of her lungs, "Jesus!!!!!!" I looked to the eastern sky, assuming Keren had seen Jesus and he was on his way. After nothing happened, I realized Hudson had cut himself and needed stitches. They sewed him up. He'll be fine. But one day, when we are just going about our routine, not thinking anything of it, Jesus is going to return. How do we live always ready for his return? **Like the money managers, we need to faithfully steward all Jesus has given us.** (View the online sermon to hear a story about this point.) **Like those welcomed to Jesus' side, we need to extend love and compassion to the most vulnerable.** (View the online sermon to hear a story about this point.)

How do we live prepared for his return?

- Be ready
- Be faithful
- Be compassionate

Jesus is going to come back and he is going to ask me if I cared for people in need. I'd be a fool not to!