

The Story of Redemption Matthew: King and People

Lesson #137.5

Understanding the background behind a passage in the Bible can make its application much easier. For example in Matthew 10 Christ sent His disciples into the world, saying:

Matthew 10:9-10, “Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for you money belts, or a bag for your journey, or even two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for the worker is worthy of his support.”

Traditionally, this text has been interpreted simply to mean that Christ wanted His disciples to be supported by those who received their ministry. However when we look at this passage’s background, we see that this commandment has striking parallels with the ordinances surrounding the dress of those who approached the Temple for worship. According to the laws of the Temple, the worshipper could not approach the Temple...

- “With his staff.”
- “With shoes on his feet”- he could only come with sandals.
- “With dust upon his feet.”
- Or even “with money tied to him in his purse.”

Christ’s commandment would have been understood by the Apostles to mean that NOT ONLY were they to be supported by those to whom they ministered, BUT THAT they were to go in the same spirit and manner as they had countless times gone to the Temple to worship. Their ministry in the kingdom was to be their only thought, undertaking, and care- just as the worshiper who approached the Temple! Without an understanding of the culture of Christ’s day it would be very easy to read past Christ’s words in Matthew 10 and thus miss an incredible truth!

As we look at Matthew 21, we often miss its significance on account of a lack of understanding of the culture of Christ’s day: Matthew 21. Traditionally, this has been called “Jesus’ Triumphal Entry.” It contains the description of Christ’s last public appearance in which He manifested Himself to the world as the Messiah. Now while this passage is frequently dramatized, yet just like in Matthew 10 much is missed without an understanding of the culture and background lying behind this event!

What took place on that first “Palm Sunday?” What was the significance of this event? And how does this text relate to our lives today?

Matthew 21:1a, “And when they had approached Jerusalem and had come to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives...”

Bethphage was a suburb of Jerusalem separated from the city by the Kidron Valley. As Christ came near to this city, He would have been viewed as one of thousands who were hastily journeying to Jerusalem for the Passover. In this regard, it is sobering to think that as a worshipper travelling on the road with Christ, you would have been travelling alongside YOUR Passover Lamb!

Matthew 21:1b-3, "...then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, 'Go into the village opposite you, [this would have been Bethphage] and immediately you will find a donkey tied there and a colt with her; untie them, and bring them to Me. [Matthew is the only Gospel that records that there were 2 donkeys- a mother and an offspring. This is not a problem. Because Christ intended to ride the colt, it makes logical sense that to try to separate the mother from the colt would have required much effort. And so, Christ requested both of which only the colt is mentioned in the other Gospels]. And if anyone says something to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them [in Mark 11:5-6 and Luke 19:33 we read that the two disciples were confronted by the owners who, after hearing that "the Lord needs them" allowed the disciples to carry out their mission]."

Notice that Christ's activity reflects a huge shift in His ministry. Until now, Christ has labored to minister in obscurity. In Matthew 12, we read of Christ withdrawing from the multitudes. Why? Because the Messiah was one who, "...[would] not quarrel, nor cry out; nor [would] anyone hear His voice in the streets" (Matthew 12:19). In John 7, after His brothers chide Him to go to Judea and make Himself known, Christ said, "My time is not yet at hand..." (John 7:6). In Mark 1:44, we read of the healing of the leper and Christ's surprising words, "See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a testimony to them."

Throughout His ministry, Jesus sought to labor in obscurity. And yet here we see a change. Far from His previously designed anonymity, Christ deliberately staged this ride to Jerusalem. This leads us to conclude that a statement is being made, a statement of epic proportions. And what is the "statement?"

- Matthew 21:2-3 reflects a practice in Christ's day known as "angareia" (or requisitioning). It held that a King could requisition the property of another in times of need. And thus, that Jesus exercised this right suggests that He is here proclaiming His identity as King!
- Furthermore, look at Matthew 21: 2 and Christ's choice of animals is a donkey. In the mind of the Jew the donkey was a sign of royalty (cf. 2 Samuel 16:1-2; Judges 5:10; 1 Kings 1:33). And thus, Christ's choice to ride a donkey publically into Jerusalem on that day made a clear statement; Jesus was indeed the long-awaited King!

Now, if there was any doubt as to the statement that Christ was making notice the next verses:

Matthew 21:4-5, "Now this took place that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, 'Say to the daughter of Zion [this refers to the "people of Jerusalem"], behold your King is coming to you, gentle, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'"

The primary reference here is Zechariah 9:9 written 500 years earlier which predicted that the people of Jerusalem would hail the Messiah as their King. This clearly asserts the point of Christ's Triumphant Entry; Jesus is the long-awaited King, The Messiah!

Now this raises a some very important questions: Why the pronouncement now? Why not earlier, at

the very beginning? Why did Christ hide His identity for three years, and then, in a matter of hours, forcefully proclaim it?

The answer to these questions is best seen when we understand the background of the nation of Israel and their understanding of the coming Messiah. In Genesis 12, God promised to make Abraham a great nation. To the Jew this promise was understood to have come to its fullness in 1 Samuel with the beginning of the Monarchy in the 11th century BC. And yet this “promise of a great nation” was short-lived. For in 722 BC the Assyrians conquered the Northern kingdom of Israel. And then again in 586 BC the Babylonians conquered the Southern kingdom of Judah.

From 586 BC onward, the people of God looked for the “Messiah” the Promised One who would

1. Be of the Royal line of David, and thus be a king,
2. Victoriously restore the ancient glory of the people of God, and thus
3. Reinststate the promise made to Abraham.

With each country that held Israel captive (and there were many: Babylon, the Persians, Seleucids, the Ptolemies, and the Romans), the people of God anticipated a Coming One who would conquer their oppressors. Now, this anticipation was brought to a fervent heat with the domination of the Greeks and the Romans- who proved to be quite ruthless in their rule of Palestine. And thus, by the time of Jesus, the Jewish anticipation of a coming Messiah, a military victor, had grown to dangerous proportions.

Now you take this “MISUNDERSTANDING” of what the Messiah was going to be and it becomes clear as to why Christ kept His true identity hidden for so long: to have revealed it earlier was to risk misleading the crowds! After Christ fed the 5,000, we read this:

John 6:15, “Jesus therefore perceiving that they were intending to come and take him by force, to make him king, with-drew again to the mountain by himself.”

On account of their misunderstanding of Scripture, the people here were ready to set Christ as king and march on Rome! This helps explain John the Baptist’s doubts about the Messiah. John was the forerunner of the “Messiah”, and yet he found himself in prison, that wasn’t supposed to be the result of the Messiah!

Matthew 11:2-3, “Now when John in prison heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples, and said to Him, `Are you the expected one, or shall we look for someone else?’”

And that is why, as Christ approached the besieged city of Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday, He wept saying this:

Luke 19:42, “If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes.”

The “City of Peace”— Jerusalem — equated their peace with the warfare of a military leader! And thus, as Christ entered Jerusalem on the donkey, He was heralded as the “Deliverer!” Now all of this

explains why Christ withheld His true identity, yet it doesn't explain why He revealed it here.

Matthew 16:21, "From that time Jesus Christ began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day."

Almost a year before His death Christ's focus shifted to Jerusalem and His work there. And thus, as Christ stood on the Mount of Olives on the day of His triumphal entry, He knew that in less than one week, He would be crucified. In other words, the time had FINALLY come to reveal Himself as the TRUE Messiah. His life was almost over! Now toward this end notice Matthew 21:5.

Matthew 21:5, "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold your King is coming to you, gentle, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'"

The word "gentle" receives the emphasis of the quote. Through His ride on the donkey (quite in contrast to the Roman pomp and splendor of a stallion, an animal which served as a symbol of war in that day), Christ was revealing Himself as the coming Messiah, yet NOT the military leader expected and anticipated by the people. Christ came as the Prince of Peace — the Gentle One — whose triumphal procession would lead to suffering, humiliation, and ultimately death! In view of this, what do you suppose will be the character of the "abundant life" that we receive in Christ in this present age?

And so, the time was at hand for Christ to manifest Himself to the world as the true Messiah, as the "Promised One" whom God had sent to save His people from their sin! And thus we read this:

Matthew 21:6-7, "And the disciples went and did just as Jesus had directed them, and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid on them their garments, on which He sat."

The Triumphal Entry is the Manifestation of Christ's True Identity to the people in His day. He is INDEED the King of the Jews, the Messiah! And this leads us the details of Christ's coronation.

The Coronation

Matthew 21: 8a, "And most of the multitude..."

This literally reads, "The very great crowd." Matthew is stressing the fact that this was an impressive event. It didn't occur with a few onlookers. Rather, it was heralded by thousands, most likely hundreds of thousands! In fact, in a census taken about 10 years after this time, the number of lambs slaughtered at the Passover was determined to be about 260,000. And because one lamb was allowed to be offered for up to 10 people, the worshipers in Jerusalem that week could have numbered over 2,000,000! Now it is very unlikely that this figure is much larger than the numbers during the days of Christ!

Matthew 21:8b, "...spread their garments in the road..."

This reflects an ancient custom in Christ's day (2 Kings 9:13) in which citizens threw their garments in the road for their monarch to ride over, a symbolic gesture which conveyed the idea of respect and submission. It was as if the people were saying to Christ, "Because you are our King, we place ourselves at your feet, even to walk over if necessary." It is akin to the response of the people of God in Samuel's day upon asking for a king. After giving a dour warning of the many abuses that the king would perpetrate against the people of God, these very same people said this:

1 Samuel 8:19-20, "Nevertheless, the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel, and they said, 'No, but there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.'"

In essence, their response was to "spread their garments in the road"!

Matthew 21:8c, "...and others were cutting branches from the trees, and spreading them in the road."

From John 12:13, we learn that the branches were from palm trees, which were symbolic of salvation and joy. It is obvious from Matthew 21:8 that to the crowds, Christ indeed was the DELIVERER, the long awaited Messiah! Now notice a very important truth: Christ's pronouncement is that He is the coming King, the Messiah, was received by the multitudes.

Matthew 21:9a, "And the multitude going before Him, and those who followed after were crying out, saying, 'Hosanna...'"

"Hosanna" is the Greek form of the Hebrew words translated, "Save us!"

Matthew 21:9b, "...to the Son of David..."

According to Jeremiah 23:5-6, this appellation was a Messianic title, a statement of Christ's "royal dignity." In effect, the multitudes were pleading here for the Messiah's deliverance "Save us Now! Be our King! Manifest your reign and rule today!"

Matthew 21:9c, "...blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!"

This phrase was taken from Psalm 118, which was one of the Psalms of the Hallel. Now it is important to note that in a couple of days the crowds would have chanted this Psalm during Passover in anticipation of God's coming deliverance! And yet, on this day the crowds were chanting the Hallel in response to Christ's arrival in Jerusalem! This once again reveals the crowd's valuation of Jesus; He was their coming deliver/King!

The Confusion

Matthew 21:10, "And when He had entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, 'Who is this?'"

When the Magi came looking for the King of the Jews, Matthew tells us that all of Jerusalem was “troubled” (Matthew 2:3). And now that the KING has arrived, the city once again has become “stirred!”

The word “stirred” comes from a word that literally means to shake. It refers to literal earthquakes, and here it references the incredible commotion that Christ’s entrance produced in Jerusalem. The question, “Who is this?” is not asked because Christ was unknown. Rather, the force of the question is, “Who *really* is this?” In other words, the crowds, who had just been heralding Jesus as the Messiah, have somehow gotten confused as to Christ’s true identity.

Matthew 21:11, “And the multitudes were saying, ‘This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee.’”

See something took place between the time of the crowds acclamation of Jesus as the Messiah on the road to Jerusalem and Christ’s presence in the city. For by the time Christ finished His “coronation ride,” He was little more than a “prophet from Galilee.” Why? While the text doesn’t indicate it, it is obvious that Christ’s activity once He got in Jerusalem turned the crowds off. The crowds were about to celebrate the Passover, which commemorated the Lord’s miraculous deliverance of Israel from Egypt! What better occasion could there be for the Lord’s Anointed, the Messiah, to make the ultimate and final deliverance of His people from tyranny? In fact, had Christ been the military victor the crowds were expecting, He no doubt would have gotten off of the donkey, marched to the temple mount with the crowds following Him, entered the Praetorium, a Roman guard house built on the temple mount and driven the Romans from Jerusalem! In short He would have acted like a “King!”

And yet, we read nothing of the sort. Rather, Christ entered the city on a lowly donkey, dismounted, marched to the temple mount with the crowds following Him, and attacked the corrupt worship practices of the Jews, (Matthew 21:12-17)! Now in view of the crowd’s expectation of what the Messiah would be, Jesus’ actions in Jerusalem would have been deflating. Consequently, just as soon as the crowd’s praises had begun, they ceased for Jesus was little more than a “prophet from Galilee.” And in four days, He would be nothing less than a criminal worthy of crucifixion!

Do you see the point? So often we look at Palm Sunday with misty eyes, for that was the day Christ came as King! Yet in reality, Palm Sunday was a day of Rejection! Christ did not die, as many suppose, as an outcast, a criminal, or a victim of cruel circumstances. Rather, Jesus died as the REJECTED Messiah! When it was clear that Jesus wasn’t going to give them what they wanted, the people cast Him aside!

The Theme of the Passage

The theme of this passage is *The King Reveals His True Identity and the People Reject Him*. This is such an important passage for us as it reveals an error that still exists in the Church today; as the Messiah, Christ did come to make war yet NOT against Rome or any other nation, BUT against sin and death! Christ came NOT to offer a political peace to the world, BUT to secure the infinitely greater blessing of an eternal peace with God! And yet, so many in the Church miss this. Most think of Jesus

as a Messiah who came to deliver His people from these things:

- Illness.
- Bad circumstances.
- War.
- Societal injustice.
- Pain.
- Misery.
- Temporal difficulties.

Attend any prayer meeting and listen to the requests and you will see the understanding of most when it comes to the nature of Christ's work as Messiah! And yet, while it is true that Christ's advent ultimately will have an effect on these things, specifically His Second Advent, we must recognize that in His first advent, Christ came to

- DELIVER US FROM THE PENALTY AND POWER OF SIN AND SATAN!
- SECURE AN ETERNAL PEACE WITH GOD!

Dr. John MacArthur put it this way:

Many people today are open to a Jesus who they think will give them wealth, health, success, happiness, and the other worldly things they want. Like the multitude at the triumphal entry, they will loudly acclaim Jesus as long as they believe He will satisfy their selfish desires. But like the same multitude a few days later, they will reject and denounce Him when He does not deliver as expected. (Dr. John F. MacArthur, 1988, p. 262)

And thus, the Message of Palm Sunday endures even today. Christ's Triumphal entry into Jerusalem stands as a warning to all God's children of the fickleness of the human heart. As Peter vowed that he would never deny Christ and yet did so a couple of hours later (Matthew 26:69-75), as Christ was not entrusting Himself to man for, "...for He knew all men" (John 2:25), so also we must beware: We are no different! Truly as we proclaim throughout our lives our "Hosannas"- our "Save Us Lord"- let us ever be mindful as to what we are asking the Lord to "Save us from." It is NOT

- Temporal difficulties...

2 Timothy 3:12, "And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

- Harsh Circumstances...

1 Corinthians 4:11, "To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless."

- Ultimately Suffering...

2 Corinthians 12:7, "And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to

keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me...”

BUT sin, specifically its ultimate effect in our life, slavery, and its ultimate consequences, death! And yet, we cannot end this passage on a bad note for though the crowds who heralded Jesus as the Christ would soon turn against Him, and even abandon Him to death, would you notice that Christ nevertheless ACCEPTED THEIR PRAISE! Though many times we worship Christ in weakness, misunderstanding, and hypocrisy, nevertheless if you are in Christ, God

- Accepts you as His own!
- Approves of you as His dear child!
- Loves you with an everlasting love!
- Promises you the ultimate participation in Christ’s final coronation as the King of Kings, Philippians 3:20-21!

Notice another rather incredible truth. According to Exodus 12:2-6, each Jewish household (or groupings of ten) was required to obtain their “Passover Lamb” on the tenth day of Nisan. This was a big event in which the Passover lamb would live with the family four days, and then be sacrificed. Remember that Christ’s Triumphal Entry most likely occurred on the tenth day of Nisan, the day that the sacrificial lamb for Passover was chosen! Palm Sunday is the day that the people of God received the Lamb of God into their hearts much as a family received their sacrificial lamb into their home! And, just as with the Passover lamb, Jesus Christ would be sacrificed just four days later on the fourteenth of Nisan.

John 1:29b, “Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the World!”

Works Cited

Dr. John F. MacArthur, J. (1988). *Matthew 16-23: The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers.

B. The Theme of the Passage: *The King Reveals His True Identity and the People Reject Him.*

III. Homework

A. Memory Verse: Jn. 6:15

B. Hymn #402, "Abide With Me"

C. Preview Mt. 21:18-46