

## Lesson 18: Chapter 21 "fruit, not just leaves"

### Servant's preparation:

[http://www.suscopts.org/pdf/presentations/biblestudy/NT/Matthew/Matthew\\_21.pdf](http://www.suscopts.org/pdf/presentations/biblestudy/NT/Matthew/Matthew_21.pdf)

### Brief introduction:

At the beginning of each lesson in the bible study of St. Matthew, please mention this book overview.

- ✓ Who is St. Matthew? He was one of the twelve disciples; he was a tax-collector before Jesus called him to follow Him.
- ✓ Who did he write his gospel to? The Jews, it is designed to prove that Jesus is the Messianic king of Old Testament (OT) prophecy.
- ✓ What is its theme? Jesus is the King of the Heavenly kingdom, Israel's long-awaited Messiah.

### Remember:

Last lesson in chapter 19, Jesus challenges the rich young man to give up his wealth for eternal life. Then He speaks about the difficulty of salvation for those who rely on their riches and the promise of eternal reward for those who follow Him. While chapter 20 highlights that true greatness in God's kingdom is found through serving others and not through worldly power or position.

### Memory Verse:

*21: 22 "And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."*

### Lesson Opener:

What is more important to God, saying we are going to do something, or actually doing it?

We can say we have all the faith in the world, but if it does not compel us to act, what type of faith is it really?

Ben Franklin famously said, "Well done is better than well said."

Jesus wants us to be active followers, to tell the truth, and to be people that others can trust and count on.

### Lesson Goal:

Jesus is looking for fruit, not just leaves, on the fig tree. This represents the need for Christians to not only have the outward appearance of faith (leaves) but also to produce good works and demonstrate their faith through actions (fruit).

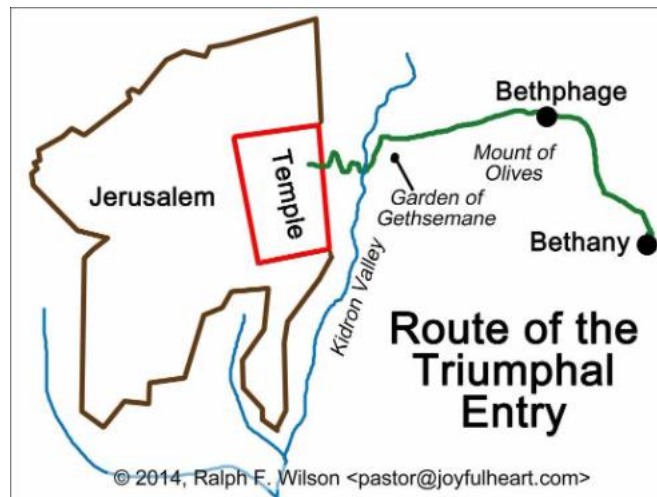


## Lesson Body:

### The Triumphal Entry (21:1-11)

Jerusalem was overcrowded by millions at that time. They had come to buy sheep to offer as a Passover. But the Lord Jesus—the Lamb of God—came forward Himself towards Jerusalem to offer Himself willingly a Passover for mankind.

He sent His two disciples to get the donkey and the colt that were tied, and He asked them to loosen them and bring them to Him, so He would use them in entering Jerusalem. Jesus demonstrates His omniscience – Jesus wasn't just good at guessing. This is a very specific and very clear prophecy with many details. All of them came true just like He said.



Christ rode upon both the donkey and the colt. The very common opinion is that He first sat upon the donkey for a short time and then rode on the colt or was alternating between them.

While Jesus entered as a king, He was not entering as a normal king. What do you think a typical king would ride? a powerful war horse. Jesus instead chose to ride on a donkey. A donkey portrays meekness and humility. Jesus wasn't coming to conquer but to offer peace.

The donkey and the colt symbolize the Jews and the Gentiles. All humanity needs the Lord.

What was happening was previously prophesied by Zechariah the prophet 9:9 *“All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, ‘Tell the daughter of Zion ‘behold, your king is coming to you, lowly, and sitting on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey!’”* in (Matt 21:4)

St. John Chrysostom says, “The prophet Zechariah was known to the Jews, the Jews’ envy and their rejection of Christ was clear when He went into the temple; He therefore warned them ahead and gave them this sign so they may know Him.”

The multitudes declared the joy of the church, in its triumph of the Lord. The palm branches were mixed with the olive ones; it was as if the spirit of triumph was blended with the Spirit of peace. Their praise was concentrated on proclaiming the salvation, saying ‘Hosanna’ or ‘Hoshanna’. Which is a Hebrew word that means ‘Save us’.

‘Hosanna to the Son of David....Hosanna in the highest’. St. Jerome says, “This means that salvation is in the highest, pointing clearly that the coming of Christ means the salvation that does not touch mankind alone, but the entire universe as well.

It seems clear that the people believe Jesus is the Messiah and expect that He is coming to Jerusalem to establish His kingdom. This is what they had been waiting centuries for! Now the moment had finally arrived! You can almost feel the excitement ripples in the air! How could these crowds who were so wildly supportive turn against Jesus and join in the refrains to “Crucify Him!” This question is not so easy to answer, but it does demonstrate how fickle people’s hearts are. Following Christ is so much more than been carried away with emotion during an exciting moment.

It requires deep roots. It takes commitment. Today all of us are here studying the bible. How about tomorrow? How about next year? How do we ensure that we don’t wilt in our enthusiasm for serving Christ? How can we keep this passion fresh?

### **Jesus Cleanses the Temple (21:12-17)**

According to St. Mark, on this day, Sunday, after the triumphal entry, Jesus entered the temple, looked around, perhaps to note the abuses, and then in the evening went out to Bethany (Mk 11:11). The next day, He returned to enter temple to clean it as it is recorded here.

St. Jerome thinks the Jewish priests used to make the most from the Passover feast, in which the Jews from all over the world used to come to offer sacrifices. They therefore changed the temple to a commercial center. They set the tables of the money changes, to offer loans to the people to buy the sacrifices. They offered the loans without interest, for collecting interest was forbidden by the law, but they would ask for actual gifts, which in reality were another form of interest.

This is a painful picture in which the Lord’s temple has diverted from its goal. The priests have lost their spiritual work and have changed their mission to collecting money.

My house shall be called the house of prayer - This is taken from Isaiah 56:7 and speaks of Gentiles coming to the House of God.

We are God’s temple, and the Spirit of God dwells in us. Let our hearts be free of any trading, or a market for buyers and sellers, and free of any desire to receive gifts. Otherwise, the Lord will enter in fury and will cleanse His temple without any lenience.

It certainly appears that Jesus was angry in this passage. But this was not an out-of-control raging anger. Anger is not always a sin. See Ephesians 4:26. Sometimes righteous anger is called for. Righteous anger in the Bible is anger directed at injustice and sin, not at a person, anger that seeks resolution and aligns with God's values.

If we never have righteous anger, it is probably because we lack empathy, and we just don't care about people around us. Jesus did care. He wept for Jerusalem. He cared that many sheep were being misled by these money centered practices. So, He took calculated, intentional, and dramatic action to deal with the sin.

Jesus heals the blind and lame in verse 14. Here we can see quite a contrast. Jesus goes from a forceful disciplinarian driving out hordes of merchants and animals one moment to a kind and compassionate healer the next moment.

The children have declared the joyful kingdom of God, whereas the chief priests revealed their wrath about the evil kingdom that has no peace whatsoever.

### **The Fig Tree Withered (21:18-22)**

**Why did Jesus curse the tree when it was “out of season” for fruit?** In Palestine, the fruit usually appears before the leaves. When they saw the tree from a distance, the natural assumption would be that since it had leaves it also had fruit.

The fig tree had attractive leaves, to which the hungry person comes thinking he would find some fruit to eat, but he returns still hungry.

In this same way the Jews had their green leaves, such as their knowledge of God, the law and keeping record of the prophecies. But despite this, they had no inner life that produced any fruits. They were tied to appearances that seemed outwardly bright, but with no depths. They paid attention to literal things, but not to the spirit. Therefore, what the Lord did was to destroy literal observance to establish the spirit.

It is noteworthy that at a specific moment, Jesus passed by the tree and judged it to wither. This concept can be applied to our lives as well; our lives culminates at a certain time when God evaluates us for fruitfulness. If no fruit is found, no further opportunities are provided. Jesus is teaching the disciples to have faith in God's power. Notice that in the text Jesus gives a qualifier. He says “If you believe, you will receive...” This belief denotes a complete confidence that what we are asking is God's will. With faith we are blessed by everything in Christ Jesus, so long as we obtain Him in us.

### **Jesus' Authority Questioned (21:23-27)**

The religious leaders wanted to know on what authority Jesus kicked the sellers out of the temple. The religious leaders clearly did not try to ascertain God's will on doing business in the temple.

Jesus did not engage with them. He knew that if He said His authority came from God it would create a bigger argument. If He said He was the Son of God and the Messiah, they would not listen and

would perhaps arrest Him immediately before His time had come. Answering their question here would accomplish nothing. Nothing He could say would convince them or change their heart. He challenges their right to interrogate Him on the ground of precedent. Seeing that the work of Jesus reforming the temple has a connection with John the Baptist, both would stand and fall together.

If they acknowledge John as His forerunner, they must, of necessity, receive Jesus as the Christ. They refused to answer. They didn't want to reject the claims of Christ nor damage their reputation in front of the people.

### **The Parable of the Two Sons (21:28-32)**

The first one represents the Gentiles who began their life by rejecting to work. But they repented later and went to work in the vineyard. The second one refers to the Jews, who said, (Matt 21:30) "I go sir," but they did not go.

Truly the Jews accepted the work in the kingdom, but it was a wordy acceptance with no work at all. They therefore cast themselves out from the vineyard, to leave their place for the Gentiles who did not listen to God at the beginning, but then they obeyed Him.

As the old saying goes, *we must not just talk to the talk, but we must walk the walk.*

### **The Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers (21:33-46)**

Jesus uses the parable as a metaphor predicting His death at the hands of the Jewish religious authority and their eventual destruction and loss of authority as God's representatives to His people.

The landowner represents God while the vineyard represents His people, Israel. The vinedressers were the priests and teachers of the law.

Here the Lord reveals to them that throughout history they were not only idle, but they have also persecuted God's men most cruelly. Even the son of God Himself, when He came as the only heir, they cast Him out of Jerusalem to kill Him.

The Lord showed them the result of their deeds, which is destroy the old building [wrong teachings], so the kingdom of God would be established on a new foundation.

### **What is this rejected cornerstone?**

It is said that when Solomon's temple was being built, the builders found a very huge stone, and they thought it is of no use, and so disregarded it. But when they needed a rock for the cornerstone, they found nothing better than this rejected rock. This was a symbol of the Lord Jesus who was rejected by the Jewish religious people. They did not know that He connects the two walls in the new temple, binds the Jews and the Gentiles in Him, so all would become members in the new kingdom. This is mentioned in Psalm 118:22-23.

From this parable, we learn that God is amazingly patient. He waited, and still waits, a long time to punish those who act so rebellious and scornful toward His good plans for them.

The kingdom was taken from the Jews and given to the chosen nation; not any particular nation, but those chosen out of the nations to be a distinctive people.

44 And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.” Their falling upon the Stone (Christ) caused their nation to be ruined.

When the Stone fell upon them, [fulfilling Jesus’s prediction because they rejected Him], they faced severe consequences in the destruction that took place approximately thirty-seven years later when Jerusalem was burned.

### Takeaways and Lesson Delivery Ideas:

#### **Do you have fruits or leaves?**

Sometimes we go to church out of habit. It is a ritual many of us have done our entire lives. Are you really drawing near to God? Are you really going to pray? Or are we just going because that is what we do on Fridays and Sundays? **What kind of reasons make people go to church?**

1. Social life: People go to church because that is where their friends are. Hey, churches have lots of nice people and it is easy to make friends there. There are lots of activities around the week to enjoy during one’s free time. This includes trips, parties, meals, games, etc. This is not to say that any of these things are wrong. However, it is all too easy to begin going for the fun, food, or friends. Church is not meant to be a club to meet your friends! Are you going to church to worship God and grow or to be with your friends?
2. Safe feeling: Many others go to church for the feeling of safety that it provides. It makes them feel they are doing well spiritually and won’t feel guilty.
3. Warm feeling: Many people feel comfortable and peaceful when they go to church without ever really knowing the gospel.
4. Pressure: Another category go to church because their parents or friends put pressure on them to go.
5. Pharisaic – Another very common reason for going to church is that it has become an ingrained ritual. We go because “we have always gone”.

We need to have the right attitude and motivation. If you have been going for the wrong reasons, confess and ask God to give you right motivations. When you go to church, focus on worshipping. Focus on listening to the sermon and growing spiritually. Choose one or two points and practice them during the week. Most importantly, remember to go to church for the right reason and don’t think about what you can get out of it.



fruitless



fruitful