

Jesus the shoot and branch

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[0 : 00] Please can we turn to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 21, and we're going to look at that section. Let's pray.

Lord, again, we ask that you will show us yourself as we come to your word.

Let your grace be limited by our sin, our limitedness, but let your grace be divine, powerful, glorious. Show us the Lord Jesus Christ in his glory and set us loving him and following him, we pray. Amen.

Amen. So this introduction is almost specially for Anya.

Yeah. This is Michael Portillo, who does a wonderful set of TV presentations on great railway journeys.

[1 : 11] And Maria and I saw the great railway journey from Kiev to Odessa. And on that journey, I was rather struck by one thing that Michael Portillo said to camera.

He said, history is almost always made by economic forces, social change, new ways of thinking or transformative technologies.

But every now and again, said Michael Portillo, one person makes a decision which by itself shapes the future.

And the one person was this person. Do you know who that is? I'm so pleased because otherwise I would have been quite foolish. How do you say his name? It's Andrew.

It isn't actually. It's either Vladimir or Vladimir. Vladimir. Vladimir. Vladimir. Vladimir. Okay, well, I shall mispronounce it.

[2 : 11] But anyway, that's who Michael Portillo thought was one of these few people in history who single-handedly turned a corner. And he said this Vladimir was such a person.

And his decision determined the development of Ukraine and indeed Russia for more than a thousand years. That's what was said about this particular person who I think was a king or prince. Actually converted to Christianity, you can see from the cross. But the idea of a single person setting a nation, if not more than one nation, on a course for a thousand years is quite something, isn't it?

But I think somebody else has single-handedly done an even greater thing. I think if that was true of that merely human prince, how much more for the man Christ Jesus in the week that we now remember when he single-handedly changes the course of events, not for one thousand years, but two thousand years and counting, and on into eternity itself because of the actions of that one single person.

And even on the most skeptical of approaches to Jesus, I think you have to say he is a remarkable person.

[3 : 40] And as Christians, we would go much further than that, wouldn't we? We say he is someone to be followed, worshipped, believed in.

Let's look at some of the things that he did in this, single-handedly, in this particular week. What is he doing in Matthew's Gospel 21?

It's sort of the same pretty much in all the Gospels. This event is, what's the word, said many times. What is Jesus doing?

Well, he's going boldly into the national capital, Jerusalem. You want the map? There it is. There it is. This capital is a place with many, many connections, many aspirations, many prophetic promises.

So if you've been here the last few Sunday mornings, we've been going through the book of the prophet Isaiah, and you will know the huge, weighty promises attached to Jerusalem, the city that was a place where you look for fruit and you found a mugging, but it will be the city of faithfulness, the holy city, the city of righteousness.

[5 : 10] And you'll know, too, that the mountain on which it sits in Isaiah says, this mountain will be the highest mountain and all the nations will flow to it. And you'll know that the king is going to reign

there.

His name, in the bit of Isaiah that we've got to so far, is the branch, the growth from the stump. And he has another name, Emmanuel, God with us.

And these are just very few of the multiple powerful promises that are attached to this city that Jesus is now going to enter.

There's the city, there's the temple, there's the mountain, there's where the nations are supposed to flow to it, there's the branch. This city is the headquarters for the prophesied king.

This king that the Bible speaks of, unlike all other kings who die, the king is dead, long live the king. All other kings die, but this king is forever.

[6 : 12] The forever king. And this is where this forever king is going to reign. But Jerusalem is the city with the temple.

We're used to going around the English countryside and we see churches in more or less every town and village and we think, well, there are probably, in Jerusalem, there are probably temples in every town and village.

But we'd be wrong. Because the temple is the one place, the one place on earth where God comes down and people can go geographically to meet God because he is localized in the temple.

The one place where, on earth, where heaven comes down. That's where Jesus is headed. And this place that he's going to is the focal point for all the promises, for all the hopes, for all the fears of his people, the people whom God took out of Egypt to be his special people, the Jews.

And Jesus is going there. And as we've already seen, he will enter with the thought and the sound and the acclamation of kingship filling the air.

[7 : 30] And we also know that a few days later, just a few days later, he will be killed. And he will be treated as an intolerable, abominable, criminal blasphemer.

And that's where he's heading. Those are the things that are going to happen in the week that we think of as just starting. So I would like us to look at this account, Matthew 21, and pick out from it four things.

Number one, he enters in a deliberate act. Number two, he enters in fulfillment of kingly prophecy. Number three, he enters at the nerve center of the temple.

And number four, he enters in the center of powerful controversy. So those are the three. No, they're not three other. I should count. Those are the four things that I'd like to bring to our attention this morning from this passage.

Okay, with me? Yeah, we can all count to four. Yeah, let's do that. So let's first of all say he enters as a deliberate act. Now, please notice that previously Jesus has been rather deliberate in steering clear of Jerusalem.

[8 : 54] He's been there on occasions, but he hasn't based himself there. He knows it's a dangerous place for him. And he has periodically retreated to the north.

He's gone up north to Galilee and done most of his teaching and ministry in those areas. So to go south to Jerusalem is in itself a step towards danger.

And we can see that there is something very, very deliberate about this. I've just got some references. Chapter 16, verse 21. From that time, Jesus began to explain to his disciples he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law, that he must be killed.

And on the third day, be raised to life. And Peter understood sufficient of that to say, that's a big mistake, Lord. Not supposed to do that. No, Lord. And then Peter himself gets roundly rebuked. Jesus is deliberate. He must go to Jerusalem. 2017. 2017.

[10 : 11] As Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the 12 disciples and said to them, We're going to Jerusalem. The Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law.

They'll condemn him to death. That's where we're going. It's pre-planned. The detail of it is pre-planned. And this bit about the donkey.

Rather a touching little description, isn't it? Chapter 21. As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sends two disciples saying to them, Go to the village ahead of you.

You'll find a donkey with her colt. Untie them. Bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you say, The Lord needs them.

And he will send them right away. Now, I suppose you could say that this was Jesus' foreknowledge. Or you could say it was his forearrangement.

[11:14] That last time he was in Jerusalem, he'd said to somebody, It said to, I don't know, Joseph, You've got a donkey, haven't you? Yes, I have. In a few months, I'm going to need that donkey.

Okay? Keep it ready. I'll send some people. And if you're not quite sure, you ask them. And they just say, The Lord needs it. That's me. That's them. Let it go. No problem.

I think he planned this some time ago. The Lord needs them. And I'm fascinated by the idea of the Lord needing something. Because we usually think of the Lord being entirely self-sufficient.

But in this sentence, it says, You've got something the Lord needs. The Lord needs them. And I... So there's the donkey.

And in a moment... Oh, yeah. The timing is pre-planned. I couldn't see in the passage, and perhaps I've overlooked it, I couldn't see in the passage a reference to the timing of this visit.

[12:13] But it is clear, for example, when we get to chapter 26, verse 2, that it is a special time of year.

It is the Passover. And Jesus has arranged his timetable to get to Jerusalem in time for the Passover. And in the Passover, thousands of pilgrims are there.

I didn't look up, but I seem to remember in the book of the Jewish historian, Josephus, he's got a huge number of people that are going to be there. And it's an electric occasion.

I know the Swiss have a Swiss National Day. I don't think we've got any Swiss here today, have we? English are not very good at having a National Day. Other nationalities have a National Day. Anybody got a nationality that have a very special National Day? Do you have a Brazilian National Day? Independence Day. Independence Day. Absolutely. So everybody goes around saying we're independent.

[13:16] Yeah. Dancing in the streets, whatever. Maybe not. Marching in the streets. Okay. Well, this is this, multiplied by a factor of 10, I think, because this is the day in which they remember their independence from Egypt.

All those years ago. They remember when God led them out by a mighty hand, slaughtering the firstborn, and they were ejected from Egypt, and the nation had its Independence Day, if you like. And they're thinking about all this. And I think, as they go past the sentries on the street corner, who are Roman, the Roman soldiers, they think, independence, bring it on.

We, our kids, went to Cypriot Greek school to learn Greek, and once a year they had a concert where all the children displayed the Greek that they'd learnt, which wasn't always a lot.

But they sang a song, and is Maria here to correct me? Yes. It's Eleftheria, which means freedom.

[14:36] So it's all Greek Cypriots, and they're all going, freedom! Do you get the thought that this, this is the sort of electric atmosphere of Jerusalem, independence, freedom.

freedom. They will, during the course of this week, celebrate the freedom from Egypt with the killing of Passover lambs.

So there's a lot of planning, timetabling, leading up to this. The result of Jesus' planning is rather definite, and I say this because Matthew alone tells us that there are two donkeys.

There's the mother and the child donkeys. I'll put two donkeys there. Do you notice that? Going to the village ahead of you, you will find a donkey tied there with her, colt by her, untie them, and bring them to me.

The other accounts only tell us about the one donkey. Matthew tells us about the two. Matthew does this habitually. The other gospel writers say there was one blind man.

[15:49] Matthew, I think I'm correct in saying, says there were two blind men. He often doubles and tells us when there are two things, and he tells us when there are two because in the thinking of their culture, if you want to make something certain, you have two or three witnesses.

And he is telling us there are actually two donkeys. And I think he's pressing the button of definiteness and certainty on this. Get this fact.

This is definitely what Jesus did. There are even two donkeys. And the result is dramatic. Jesus rides on the donkey, presumably with the other donkey behind, and verse 6, the disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them.

They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them. Jesus sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on

the road.

And the crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed were shouting. And Jesus entered Jerusalem and the whole city was stirred. It's a scene of great excitement.

[17:14] If you'd been there, you would come home and that would be the first thing you'd say when you got home. Do you know what I saw today in Jerusalem? There's these shouts of Hosanna and the whole city is stirred.

It's a big, exciting moment. For those people there, they had a sense that something of vast importance was going on.

In the other accounts, it says that if you shut people up, the stones will cry out. It's something of vast importance. And I want to say for us, it wasn't just of vast importance within that framework, within that day, within that week.

It's of vast importance for the cosmos. It's of vast importance for us. And I want to try and persuade us of that as we go on to the next thing. First, it was a deliberate act.

Second, it was in fulfillment of kingly prophecy. So let's look a little bit more carefully. The donkey. The cloaks.

[18:20] The branches. The shouting. Oh, I've got some branches going there. And what does Matthew tell us what's going on?

In people's heads to a degree, but what was going on in terms of Scripture? And Matthew tells us, verse 4, this took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet.

Say to the daughter of Zion, that means the citizen of Jerusalem, that's what daughter of a city means, see, your king comes to you gentle, riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

It's a prophecy of the coming king. It's from Zechariah 9, verse 9. And the Zechariah prophecy goes on to say, your king comes, he will proclaim peace to the nations.

His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth. It's a huge statement about the king coming. He comes on a donkey, and Jesus deliberately gets himself a donkey and deliberately rides in on the donkey saying, this is me.

[19:49] In case you can, you're not sure of what I'm claiming to be, I'm going to ride on a donkey. You know the prophecy, I know the prophecy, I'm deliberately putting myself in the place of that prophecy.

It's a huge, unmistakable, and provocative claim. And if Jesus had previously managed to steer clear of a lot of controversy, in this case, he's just heading straight for it.

Nobody is going to mistake what he's saying now he's done this. The donkey is kingly fulfillment. The shouting is kingly acclaim.

When they shout out Hosanna to the son of David. When they shout out blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

When they shout out Hosanna in the highest. These are all statements actually from Psalm 118 that we started with. They are the Hosanna.

[21:01] Save us now. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna to the son of David. That's a big thing to say.

We sing it in the song and it just sort of trips off our lips. But in those days it would have been a hugely controversial thing to say.

Hosanna to the king who's going to come and liberate us. thinking of military liberation political liberation every sort of liberation and do it now.

The crowds are in no doubt that the king is making his public claim to power. Jesus is coming and saying I'm king.

this is my city. And it's not just that this is my city. My reign stretches from the east to the west from sea to sea and shore to shore.

[22:09] If I'm the king of this city I'm also the king of everything. That includes us. As he rides into Jerusalem he claims not just kingship for that city but kingship over every man and woman and boy and girl that has ever lived and that does live and that shall ever live.

I'm king of all of that. What are you going to do with that claim? Are you going to say yes or are you going to say yes but or no or what?

But that's the claim that he's making. It's a kingly entry into Jerusalem. Third thing he enters in the nerve centre of the temple.

So if you follow it down to verse 12 there's several repetitions of temple slightly obscured by using the word area. So verse 12 Jesus entered the temple.

The word area is added in for clarification. He drove out all who were buying and selling in the temple is what it says. He said to them my house will be a house of prayer.

[23 : 26] Verse 14 the blind and the lame came to him at the temple. Verse 15 the children were shouting in the temple.

So the place that he heads to is the nerve centre of the spiritual life of Jerusalem. He goes to the temple. temple. So let's think about three things about what he does in the temple.

He goes to the temple. He goes to the place where heaven and earth meet where the Lord dwells and he assesses the temple.

He enters the temple area and he assesses it and finds it unsatisfactory. So he drives out those who are buying and selling.

Can you imagine that? Can you imagine that? It's a bit like if somebody went to a revered institution like the Houses of Parliament went into the Houses of Parliament imagine yourself doing this get a day return up to London I'm going to go into the Houses of Parliament I'm not satisfied with this lot you go in there and say get out Jeremy Corbyn move over Theresa May get out the way these benches change it all not satisfactory you'd be arrested wouldn't you before you could even you know you'd just wave one arm and you'd be arrested Jesus goes into the temple and takes it upon himself to say this isn't good enough this isn't right get out get out get out it's not just being in a bad mood he is very deliberately in a very measured way in a very meaningful that's not the right word he knows what he's doing he drives out those who are buying and selling he overturns the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves and he does it on the basis of what is written the quote for what is written is from

[25 : 25] Isaiah actually my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations you've made it a den of thieves compare what it's supposed to be the aspirations for Jerusalem and what you've made it completely different and Jesus overturns the tables now whenever we get to this point I always have to say what is he actually doing what is he actually saying is he saying money changes if you just be honest with your calculators that will be fine if he says with the people selling doves if you could just tone it down a little bit fair prices quite happy with that I think his critique is much deeper than that I think he's saying this whole system it's just not functioning as it was meant to function it's days over this earthly temple with all you know even the best it can manage and they're not managing very well it's it's had its day it's had however many hundreds and hundreds of years to get its act together it still can't do it get out get out get out and I think it's actually a profound critique of the whole

Jewish Old Testament way of doing things with all its limitations and I think Jesus is saying this won't do what this bricks and mortar temple with animal sacrifices and curtains and earthly priests it just doesn't do what it's meant to do it doesn't bring people to God it doesn't draw in the nations it's time is gone we need another temple we need another place where earth and heaven meet we need another sacrifice we need one that really does deal with sin we need something that when this is done when this is lifted up all men will be drawn that's what we need and I think that's what Jesus is doing at the nerve center of the temple and what he's doing I think is he is saying the temple is replaced and all of that don't look to that building anymore look to me look to me he's all that the temple was supposed to be but never quite managed to be he's all of that so if you want to meet God don't book yourself a ticket to the

Middle East and a train ticket to Jerusalem don't do that pray to Jesus he's the one where God is his is the sacrifice that brings sinners near and you don't have to move an inch to do that second thing at the nerve center of the temple did you notice this little tiny sentence verse 14 the blind and the lame came to him at the temple and he healed them blind and lame if you think back to Isaiah you might not remember all of this but in the later chapters of Isaiah it becomes very clear that Israel is blind and deaf and hard hearted and unable to travel where the

Lord wants her to go and I think Matthew is just very quietly picking up that thought as he tells us that the blind and the lame come to him in the temple there's blind and lame coming because Israel's problem is she's deaf she's blind she's lame she's incapable of hearing incapable of seeing incapable of walking with the Lord and the son of David has the power to remove deafness to remove blindness to remove lameness and I know he has the power to do that physically but if I dare say it it's more important that he does it spiritually that's the real problem you can have 20-20

vision full mobility and full hearing and still go to hell what you need is eyes to see Jesus and ears to hear him and to be able to follow him that's what you really need Israel's problem was deeper than merely physical Jesus healed those physical ailments pointing us to his ability to deal with the deeper sickness of the soul this is what Jesus can do he can heal our deafness blindness lameness that's what he needs to do isn't it to open our eyes to open our ears to hear him and to set our feet so that we're walking with the Lord we don't want to be able to see him as he disappears off into the distance and we're just left behind we want to walk along with him don't we of the nerve center of the temple let's just move on to the children verse 15 when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did just notice that the amazing things he did it's a word for to wonder wow the teachers of the law saw those things and they saw the children shouting in the temple you you get this thought don't you

[31 : 53] I mean we've got this here the children running around shouting and the temple said sit down and stay sitting down somewhere until it's time to go home and you can imagine the scribes and the Pharisees and these children are running around they've caught up on the Hosanna thing Hosanna in the highest and they're shouting Hosanna to the son of David there they are we've got some children popping up running around and the guardians of the kingdom that's who they are the chief priests and the teachers of the law they're indignant shut those kids up this is the temple we don't want children running around saying Hosanna to the son of David it's bad enough grown ups doing it at least you can reason with them but the children just in their innocence sort of what would be the word what do children do giggling cackling pardon exuberating yeah Hosanna to the son of David shut those kids up these are the temple guardians saying shut those kids up and Jesus says he quotes psalm 8 he says have you never read from the lips of children and infants you have ordained or framed praise the whole psalm or the context of the psalm says let me just find it and quote it to you you you have set your glory above the heavens from the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies to silence the foe and the avenger it's a wonderful thought isn't it of God's glory above the heavens so you think God is really interested in the members of parliament people who've been to Eton or something like that and then the next line it says actually the children and infants are the people who get it and they are praising the Lord I think in the context he's probably meaning the despised members of society or the lowly members of society but the words he uses for children infants you have ordained praise and this praise silences the foe and the avenger what's God's secret weapon in this great cosmic conflict it's the praises of the lowly humble marginalised people and of course it's literally children that are singing and shouting in the temple there God's secret weapon is not the power and wisdom of great men but the appreciation of the lowly and humble believer the children took it at what am I trying to say they took the words and just said yeah that's it Hosanna to the son of David they didn't have very sophisticated analysis of it that's what it says about Jesus that's good enough for us we'll believe it and we'll shout it out to everybody else the humble lowly believer is God's secret weapon says in

Corinthians I will destroy the wisdom of the wise has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world but God chose the weak things of this world to shame the strong he chose the lowly things of the world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are so that no one may boast before him let him who boasts boast in the Lord it's quite comforting for us isn't it he chose not the big strong people but he chose the weak the lowly the non entities as his secret weapon to bring to nothing the powers that set themselves against God have you not read from the lips of children and infants he has ordained praise oh there's more children they keep on popping up fourth point Jesus entered Jerusalem in the centre of powerful controversy all the city was stirred in every tea table that evening do you know what happened did you see this did you read it on Facebook did you see this on Twitter it was on the local news it was on the national news were you there did you see it what was it it was Jesus coming in the whole city was stirred the crowd was excited and shouting the children were carried along with it all those palm branches and everything but you ask were they stirred rightly when when they when they said who is when they asked who is this verse 11 the crowds answered this is Jesus the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee now I would suggest that's not a particularly full answer what are you shouting about who are you shouting to what's all this going on who is at the centre of this how is Jesus he's from up north he's a prophet I don't think that goes far enough have they really understood is a sufficient understanding have they got anything to actually say specifically about his kingship

[37 : 45] I know they've been shouting kingly slogans but when asked they don't actually say that and do they actually know about his sacrifice Jesus has told his disciples this repeatedly I'm going to Jerusalem I'll be handed over I will be suffer and be killed Jesus has repeated that to his disciples but I don't think the crowd have got that at all they've got they're taken up with the you know freedom independence all that bit but they haven't really got and some people were indignant some people were totally against this this is just dangerous the Pharisees teachers of the law this is completely over the top this is wrong this is dangerous this is subversive this is intolerable so as I conclude with this thought it was controversial

I ask which side of the controversy would we be on would we actually when we get to know really who Jesus is or perhaps even before we get to know really who Jesus is we're put off and we're angry and we're offended and we begin to say don't tell me about a Jesus like this this smacks of fanaticism or or you know this is taking things too far a Jesus who demands my life my soul my all is too much some people were angry and offended and put off and I would say if that's you why why are you angry and offended and put off what is it about Jesus you don't like are you right to be offended if somebody who has no right to your life and soul and all tries to manipulate that out of you definitely push them away but the thing is

Jesus does have the right to claim my life my soul my all he does have the right to do that are you excited but ignorant so you think there's many positive things about this Jesus stuff he's a positive person he's the people that follow him are nice people it's good to meet nice people in a week at some point during the week not out to get a lot of money out of me or put me down I mean I'm all in favour of that but have you quite actually realised that there's more to it than that have you worked out about his sacrifice that he died he gave everything for our salvation and because he gave everything he can demand everything his lordship when he enters the city as king he's not just saying

I'm king over part of this city or I'm king over the ideas of this city I'm king over the whole thing and when he says he's the king over the whole of this city he's actually saying I'm the king over everything because that's the son of David is lord of all the true son of David the government will be upon his shoulders that's what his claim is upon my life and upon your life and you haven't come to terms with that until you have prayed lord take everything take my life take all my family take my sins take my potential take my gifts take my money take my future take my creative life take my sexual life take everything because you're lord of it all until you've said that you haven't really understood his lordship and there were some people in this story who are responsive in faith and I think that's probably not putting it

I'm perhaps pushing this point but the blind and the lame they're the people who come to him and be healed and I think that is an encouragement for us to say lord I want to see you I want to see you and lord having seen you I want to follow you the blind and the lame came to him and were healed Jesus answers such a prayer that's the prayer you need to pray and he's the one who answers it I'll follow the song this evening we're going to close by singing ride on in majesty in lowly pomp ride on to die!

[43 : 30] to to to to to