

Matthew 21:1–17

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 07 January 2024

Preacher: David Helm

[0 : 00] So please read with me in Matthew 21, verses 1 to 17. Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethpage to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied and a colt with her.

Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say the Lord needs them, and he will send them at once. This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise.

I'm sorry, verse 5. Say to the daughter of Zion, Behold, your king is coming to you, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the fowl of a beast of burden. The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them.

They brought the donkey and the colt and put them on their cloaks, and he sat on them. Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

And the crowds that went before him that followed him were shouting, Hosanna to the son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, Who is this?

[1 : 24] And the crowd said, This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee. And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple.

And he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. And he said to them, It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you make it a den of robbers.

And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, Hosanna to the son of David, they were indignant.

And they said to him, Do you hear what these are saying? And Jesus said to them, Yes. Have you never read out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise?

And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, good morning and happy new year.

[2 : 27] Welcome to 2024. The first Sunday after a holiday break in which we celebrated Christmas. In the church world, they call today Epiphany Sunday.

That would probably only be familiar to those of you who might have grown up in a church or have some kind of Christian background. Epiphany Sunday commemorates traditionally the arrival of the wise men some, you know, 12 days on the backside of the infant king's birth.

And so in the Christian tradition, the new year always begins with that epiphany of those who are arriving, bringing their gifts to the newborn infant king.

But for those of you who didn't grow up as a Christian or aren't familiar with the church, that doesn't mean that you won't have perhaps some recollection of this day too.

It just doesn't come from the magi. It comes from that song you might be familiar with, the 12 days of Christmas. The 12 days on the backside. You're probably aware the first day, my true love gave to me a, come on, a partridge in a pear tree.

[3 : 54] But by the 12th day, the day we commemorate today, it arrives with what? 12 drummers drumming. So whether you're a Christian who's thinking about the beginning of the new year and arriving to bring your gifts to the infant king or you're unchurched and unaware and this might be your first time in any such assembly, at least you know that those drummers are drumming with some anticipated procession behind them.

You know, when I was in high school, our football team would arrive on the field through a drum corps that would lead them literally from the locker room to the field.

And it just, it was all percussion and there were at least 12 of them. Bass drums and snare drums and the team would walk.

And as a fan, I, you just waited in the stands for the moment when the drummers were drumming because it signaled the entrance of someone who was desiring to be victorious on the battlefield. Well, I think then that whether you're a Christian or not, this text is worth opening. It arrives with all the sense of a triumphal entry.

[5 : 25] You can almost hear the drummers already in the distance sounding the noise of the infant king now grown coming into the city.

If you have a text in front of you, it's traditionally called the triumphal entry. And so as we unwrap this gift today and we wonder what's in it, I just want you to see what's in it.

It really moves in simple terms. 1 to 10, just look down there at verse 10.

And he entered into Jerusalem. There's something about this text that speaks of Jesus entering Jerusalem.

But then it moves in verse 12. You can see it at the literary level. And Jesus entered the temple. The text is going to move from his entrance into the city.

[6 : 27] And then the first thing he does is his entrance into church. And then it closes, verse 17. Can you see it? And leaving them, that is leaving them in church, he went out of the city.

This conclusion, the drums now fall silent. The gift before us today has something to begin the new year on Jesus entering into the city.

Entering straightway into the church. And by the time you depart, he will have departed from the field altogether. In regard to what we can take from it, I'm going to put it this way.

The king has come. First half. But will that be good news for you? Second half. The king has come. Verses 1 through 11. It's the story of Jesus now entering into the final week of his life.

[7 : 41] And arriving into Jerusalem on a donkey. Mounted, as it were, on an ass. You know, this notion of kings entering into cities with the significance of their arrival announced has a great history.

There's a long history of triumphal entrances into cities. Especially by warriors as a celebration of their conquering might. In ancient Rome, those of you who study that time period in history, after an unusually great military conquest, a general might be awarded a triumph by the Senate.

They would wait outside the city until the Senate voted whether or not you could have a triumph. Which would have to be considered great, given all the goods that you would be bringing back for people in the empire.

If granted, here's the way the triumph went. Chained captives on foot would come into the city gate first. Following the chained captives would be a showcase of flatbeds upon which were all the treasures and the wares that now belong to Rome and her citizenry.

Rome's victorious soldiers then would follow the flatbeds upon which were all the applause of many warriors all then would come next.

[9 : 22] And finally, the general who had been awarded the triumph would be on a chariot drawn by four horses. He was the pinnacle of the procession.

This victorious, conquering warrior now been granted entrance into the city. And he would roll through the streets to the cheering populace showing all their gratitude upon him.

And just so that it didn't all go to his head, a slave was appointed to stand behind him and continually whisper into his ear, Remember, momento mori, momento mori, momento mori, remember, you too will die.

What a triumph. It wasn't just an ancient Rome. The scriptures talk about triumphal entries into Jerusalem, which would be a place where God would come and rule.

We get it first with David and the water shafts that led his men back in 2 Samuel to a victorious sense of taking Jebus and now calling it Jerusalem.

[10 : 38] We get it later though, don't we, in history when Nebuchadnezzar will arrive in 605 BC or so and lay siege to the city and enter in as the triumphant conqueror of Jerusalem and put all things ablaze and take captives home and rule.

We'll see it again in 165 BC where Antiochus IV will emerge through the city and mount the temple and set all things ablaze and demonstrate his power.

We're actually going to see it on the back side of the New Testament where Titus is going to come in 70 AD. All these things are a matter of historical record, are they not? I'm not telling you, at least some of you, anything that you haven't already read about.

And Titus will come and lay siege. That's, I guess, what makes Jesus' entrance so unusual. This infant, now grown, whom the Magi had said, where is he who is king, comes in the most unique of ways.

What is Matthew trying to communicate in these verses 1 through 11? And I hope you have it in front of you where you can scroll it or eyeball it and see what he's trying to do.

[12:11] I want to put it this way. For Matthew, Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem signals to the reader that for him, the promised Savior King has come.

For Matthew, Jesus is the one who has dominion all over the earth. Over all the earth, he's entered. He's here. In Jesus, the kingdom of God is here.

And the king is to be crowned as already having arrived. How do I get that? How does Matthew get that? He gets that, interestingly, in a couple of ways.

I want you to see him. He makes use of an ancient prophet. And then he makes use of an ancient psalm. First, the prophet who went by the name of Zechariah.

Zechariah was also interested, as was Matthew, in the detail of verse 1. That when Jesus drew near to Jerusalem, he came to the Mount of Olives.

[13:16] Do you see it there in the text? For some reason, he wants you to know that he arrives at the Mount of Olives. Well, Zechariah had quite a bit to say about the Mount of Olives. This was not an insignificant place.

This was a rise. I've never been there. Some of you have. But I look on maps. I imagine the terrain and Jerusalem mounted on its perch.

And the valley descending out from the east side. And then a rise in the slopes and all the cemeteries in the ground. And Mount of Olives on that. And you could actually see from one place to the other.

Zechariah wrote and said, when the kingdom comes, when God comes, when everything's going to change, he's actually going to arrive on the Mount of Olives. That's what Zechariah had foretold.

In fact, in chapter 14, he said, On that day, his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lie before Jerusalem on the east. Then the Lord my God will come, and the Lord will be king over all the earth.

[14:23] Matthew is echoing Zechariah's prophecy by way of fulfillment through the significance even of the Mount of Olives. Jesus now standing there, looking across the kindred valley, eyes upon the eastern gate, upon which he will soon enter.

That's not the only thing from Zechariah, though, right? I mean, look at the text. It's really coming out full in verse 4. All these things took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Zechariah, saying, Say to the daughter of Zion, Behold, your king is coming to you humble and mounted on a donkey, on the colt, on the foal of a beast.

The entire orchestration of the events, according to Matthew, come under the predetermined plan of Jesus to mimic all that took place in Zechariah 9.

That even the manner in which he came, mounted on an ass, all the way from the Mount of Olives, would signal the fulfillment of God is now here in his city.

The king has come. But what an unheralded arrival. He didn't stand over there and wait for the Senate to vote. And he wasn't like Nebuchadnezzar or Antiochus or later like Titus, who just took it unto himself.

[15:56] He seems to be now some half mile off with a preordained plan to be mirroring the fulfillments of prophetic discourse that would indicate God has now put a king in the world.

Wouldn't it recognize that though, would we, if we had been there? Didn't look very loud.

I mean, it did have the singing of the people and the palms. But a rather unheralded arrival. No chariot with four horses.

Just a single donkey laden on his way through the eastern gate. It reminded me this week, this surprising entrance of a little dialogue that took place between Frodo and another when he finally recognized that this character named Strider was actually later revealed to be Aragorn, who was the rightful heir to the throne.

Initially, he just appeared ordinary, humble, meek, clothed in the long black coat. One moment, Frodo's out there on his own and he hears this voice behind him.

[17 : 25] Fear not, said a strange voice behind Frodo. Frodo turned and saw Strider and yet not Strider. In the stern of this boat sat Aragorn, son of Arathorn, proud and erect, guiding the boat with skillful strokes.

His hood was cast back, his dark hair was blowing in the wind, a light was in his eyes. And here's what Tolkien says, a king returning from exile to his own land.

That's kind of the way this emerges, these first 11 verses. The surprise of turning back and seeing Jesus, the prophet, the Nazarene, but not Jesus, the one who was king, coming to be crowned. So there is this prophet, according to Matthew, that is trying to indicate the significance for you and me concerning the entrance of Jesus.

But not just a prophet, but a psalm. Notice what's said to Jesus along the way in verse 9. Hosanna to the son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

[18 : 40] Hosanna in the highest. This is a quotation from Psalm 118. This is the last song of the Hallel Psalms. If you were Jewish in the first century and you were arriving at the week of Passover, this was the song you would have sung on your way into the city to start the week, which is where we are with Jesus.

But it's also, as we're going to see, the song that would have been sung on Thursday during the Passover meal itself. There's a psalm that is signaling salvation.

The king has come. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. So, by way of a prophet, Zechariah, and a Psalm 118, Matthew is indicating clearly to readers today that Jesus is the one who stood on the Mount of Olives, that lied before Jerusalem on the east, and who entered into the crown.

He has all that awareness in mind, and yet it's hidden from your view and mine, but without explanation. He's here.

The king has come. But will that be good news for you? Take a look at how the text shifts.

[20 : 09] No longer are we concerned, verse 10, with the manner in which he entered into Jerusalem, but at verse 12, he now enters into the temple. He's not just in the city. First thing he did was go to church.

And in the church, we begin to see whether his arrival would be good news or not for those who were attending on that day.

Let's take a look. Here he is, now in the temple. There are three indicators in verses 12 through 16 that indicate the arrival of Jesus as God's king is going to be good news for some.

Can I show you these? No, I'm going to show you these. Three indicators that his arrival in the world is good news. First of all, what Jesus says, then what he does, and then the song the children sing.

What does Jesus say? I want you to pay special attention to the opening phrase of verse 13. And he said to them, it is written, my house shall be called a house of prayer.

[21 : 27] Full stop. That's a quotation from Isaiah 56. Another prophet who indicated that the temple would be not just a place of prayer, but in Isaiah's context, the place where the outsiders finally got access to God.

That's good news. Isaiah 56 is the outsiders get access to God through this particular place. Jesus is now heralding the good news for those on the outside that they can get in.

Not only by what he says, but by what he does. Notice what it says in verse 14. And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple and he healed them.

He's healing individuals. And if we've seen anything in the book of Matthew this year together, it's that the miracles are validating the message. Back to the paralytic.

He forgives his sins, but in order that people might know the message is true, he tells them, pick up your bed and walk.

[22 : 44] So the miracles are always validating the message. So the fact that he's healing people here of their physical ailments is for us proof that his message is actually accurate.

That salvation comes with him. That he can get it done. So this is good news. Not only by what Jesus says, not only by what Jesus does, but his entrance into the world as God's king is good news by the song the children sing.

Notice how now we're brought back again to the same song from Psalm 118. It's right there in verse 15. And the children are crying out in the church, Hosanna to the son of David.

Salvation. Put it all together. Jesus is saying very simply in this text, I'm now in a house where the outsider can come to know God.

My miracles validate that I can bring you forgiveness. And the children are actually saying, and did not God say in Psalm 118 this very thing, that God would receive such praise.

[24 : 07] This idea of the son of David in the song of the children indicate that Jesus is the rightful heir to the throne.

This actually will be the song that Jesus himself will sing after the Passover meal before he goes to his own death.

This song signals the replacement of an entire sacrificial system, which is good news for anyone who wants to actually come to know God.

But it's not good news for all. In fact, when you and I read the text initially, we see that it's not good news for all. It's good news for some, but not for all.

Will it be good for you? I mean, look at how the text moves. There's the overthrowing of money changers, a clear indication not only that he's replacing something, but he's displacing someone.

[25 : 11] In fact, I want to highlight the very closing line of verse 13 again. Because when he quotes, my house shall be called a house of prayer from Isaiah, which is good news, he attaches it to a quotation from Jeremiah 7, which is bad news.

But you have made it into a den of robbers. In other words, put the whole quote together. Jesus is saying, you on the outside, you want to know God and don't know how? My arrival is good.

I'm the one. But if you're on the inside and you're making it hard for the outsider to get to know God, well, it's not going to be good for you. You've turned this thing into a den of robbers.

Judgment is coming, let me put it this way, for any who make a mockery of God's free gift of forgiveness in order to make money off the backs of those seeking mercy.

Let me say that again. Those who make a mockery of God's free gift of forgiveness by making money off the backs of those simply seeking mercy, for them, Jesus will not be good news.

[26 : 25] So let me just sit on it. Those today who would take your earnings to enrich themselves and their own enterprise, in the name of Christ, for them, his rule will not be good.

And our world is filled with it. Pulpits are replete with it. The money changers sat out there in the outer court and made a buck on those who were simply trying to offer a sacrifice in which God would make them right again.

There's a New Testament scholar. He put the whole scene this way. The temple in Jerusalem consisted of an inner sanctuary surrounded by a series of courtyards.

In descending order, they were the court of the priests, Israelites, women, and Gentiles. It was this outer court of the Gentiles that the temple authorities arranged booths to provide animals approved for sacrifice and to exchange foreign currency for that which would be acceptable if they were going to pay the temple tax.

They only took the best. They weren't going to take your copper coins, your foreign currency.

Everything had to be paid in what they thought was premium value. You watch TV today or you go to any church today and you find pastors and preachers who you can read it pretty quickly are simply trying to make money in order to further their lifestyle.

[28 : 12] For them, his rule is not going to be good. Judgment and salvation.

The arrival of Jesus is good news for some but it will not be so for all which then brings me to you. The King has come proven through the prophetic discourse and a psalm.

But will it be good? Well, that depends on whether you receive his message which will heal your life.

And if you want real proof, infants and nursing babies prove that God is capable of doing this in a world that neglects it all.

I'm just going to say it, Rebecca, and Rowan because people don't know your story. Raina arrives today four months old born six weeks early weighing three pounds and six ounces in your hand.

[29 : 38] In your hand, after an extended pregnancy in which Rebecca's life was truly in the balance, God brought them through.

But God brought them through. God God can forgive your sins, make you whole, give you life faith. Because that's what God does. Now, let's shut this down. The Magi arrived on a day like this to give their gifts to God.

The infant. the infant. But in the text, it's the infants who are in the presence to declare the glories of the gift that God has given.

So as we move to the Lord's Supper, and it is open for all who profess their faith in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins.

[31 : 13] It's not the gift today that you're going to give him. This is his gift to strengthen your ongoing faith.

And if you are not yet convinced of the prophetic record, the psalms record, or the vantage point from which Matthew is writing, then by all means refrain from the table.

Why make a mockery of assumed identification with one that you're not ready yet to embrace?

So this is a free moment in this church service. These are the gifts of God for the people of God to strengthen you so that just as Jesus left the church and left the city, when you leave this room and you go out through those front doors, you will be ready.

I pray to live for him. Our Heavenly Father, we start a new year and as Pastor Nee let us know at the beginning, our prayer is that you would make all things new.

[32 : 38] And we also started this series that will take us through Easter, Lord, about crowning Jesus as King. And I pray that there would be many today who come by faith to crown you as King.

Many who would arrive like the Magi of old, but in this sense to partake of your gift, their salvation through the forgiveness of their sins by the blood that you purchased.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. I'm going to ask you