

# Easter Sunday 2022

*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: 17 April 2022

Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[ 0 : 00 ] this morning from Matthew chapter 21. Now, we're going to be looking at the entire chapter, but I'll be reading, if I can, the first 17 verses, and then what I'll do is I'll just take you through the chapter before we get into the body of the message.

So Matthew 21, beginning at verse 1, now hear God's word. 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, and tie 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, say to the daughter of Zion, behold, your king is coming to you, humble and mounted on a donkey, and 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 on them 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 and that followed him were shouting, Hosanna to the son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

[ 1 : 38 ] Hosanna in the highest. And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, Who is this? 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.

He said to them, It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made 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 mouths of infants and nursing babies, you have prepared praise.

[ 2 : 39 ] And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there. It then goes on to say that Jesus curses the fig tree, and this is connected to the temple.

Then the authority of Jesus is challenged for obvious reasons, because of what he has just done in the temple. And then Jesus tells two parables back to back. The parable of the two sons, which illustrate why kingdom entrance, entry into the kingdom of God is possible.

And then, of course, the parable of the tenants, which is speaking about the crucifixion, or at least leads to that. Well, let's pray, and we'll come back to God's word.

Let's also remember those, as we pray this morning, who we heard on Wednesday evening are suffering with COVID. So let's remember them also.

Father God, we would ask that as we are blessed by your word this morning, that you would speak to us and that we would hear that our hearts and minds would be inclined to you fully, and that we would receive your blessing upon us.

[ 3 : 47 ] We do pray, Father God, for those who are unwell with COVID at this moment. We recognize, Father God, that it is still there, but it is something which we would seem would have to get used to.

But we do ask, Father God, for your care to be upon those who are suffering in any type of way, whether it be with COVID or any other type of illness, mental, physical, or spiritual.

We recognize, Father God, that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation, and your grace and mercy is able to shape our lives and remove illnesses and make us better and make us strong in

the moments that you would have us become that.

Father God, as we read now of Palm Sunday, as it was back then, it is now that we, Father God, would recognize that we are the outcome of Christ's accomplishment.

And that, Father God, that whatever has gone on in our past, whatever pain and sorrow we've had, only Christ can take it away. And so may we see that also in the accomplishment of Christ, that, Father God, he takes care of all things, and all things are taken care of by him, by him in our lives.

[ 4 : 59 ] So, Father, we present ourselves this morning before you as holy offerings, and we do so with our ears and hearts as we listen to your word in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Amen. ...that was made, and then, of course, you lose track of time.

But when Christ comes, eventually he will come like a thief in the night as a total surprise, but not as a surprise that you didn't know he was coming, simply the timing of his coming is the surprise.

Well, Palm Sunday is a gentle approach to Jerusalem in many ways. Jesus rides in on a donkey.

But many people simply stop there with Hosanna to the Son of David.

They don't actually understand what Jesus is actually doing and saying on the day in which he rode into Jerusalem. The most interesting thing that we find, especially if you understand the promises of God, that every Jew would have understood living under Roman occupation, that if the Messiah was to come, that the Son of David, the new king, that he would deal with the Romans.

[ 6 : 17 ] And so it must have been a terrible surprise when Jesus comes in. Instead of going into the Roman garrison, he turns right and goes into the temple and deals with his own people.

That's a surprise. Now, it's not a surprise if you understand the condition of God's people and you understand what Jesus Christ has actually come to do.

But it is a surprise if you have actually forgotten your own condition before God. And so it's a reminder to us this morning not to forget our condition before God.

That those who belong to Christ Jesus are in a position and a condition of grace and mercy. And we have the blessings that we do, not because we have worked for them, not because we have lived a life that so has brought about or earned these blessings upon us.

It is because that God has given them to us according to his loving nature. We are blessed by God because he chose to bless us.

[ 7 : 24 ] And he has blessed us in Christ Jesus. And we call that doctrine, if you remember, union with Christ. That we are no longer in union with fallen man who took us into sin.

But we are now in union with Christ. And since we are in union with Christ, we have the blessings that come with Christ. And so you can imagine then, if you're a first century Jew here listening to Jesus coming in, expecting the Messiah to come, and then your mind is set on him overthrowing the government and bringing in a reign of peace and overturning those who are against God.

And then he does no such thing. That he starts with his own people. As if you, as the people of God, can actually forget your condition before God.

And that God has come to deal with each and every one of us. And so whatever the expectations were, they quickly disappear. The moment Jesus overturns the tables in the temple and throws out those and calls them, calls that place a den of robbers.

Or rather, he calls it a den of robbers in accordance with what they have made it. Well, here's the summary then of the whole chapter. Because unless you understand the whole chapter, you probably can appreciate why, at the very beginning of Holy Week, as we might call it, Jesus is telling them what will happen to him by the end of the week.

[ 9 : 00 ] So Matthew chapter 21 begins with Jesus riding into Jerusalem, and it finishes with the crucifixion. Now, it doesn't mention the crucifixion, but it's quite clear with the parables that Jesus tells that he predicts his own crucifixion and why.

So here's a few parallels as you make your way through the text. Now, if you read Matthew 21 carefully, perhaps ahead of Easter, you know, whatever you are in your reading program, you've read ahead, and therefore you know what Matthew 21 is about.

You'll notice that the king in verse 9 is the same as the son in verse 38. So the king, Hosanna to the son of David, the king who rides in is Jesus Christ.

And the son that is being referred to in the parable of the tenants, verse 38, is also Jesus Christ. So in verse 9, Jesus is welcomed as the king, Hosanna to the son of David.

And then in verse 39, they plan to kill the son. It's the same person. They plan to kill the son. In other words, what they're doing is they're planning to kill the king.

[10:14] So if Jesus is the king in verse 9, and he is the son, he is the son in verse 38 and 39, and they kill the son in verse 38 and 39, then you can understand that their plan is to kill the king.

That their plan is to kill the one that they say, Hosanna to the son of David. So this is where we're going. And we know, because we live on this side of the crucifixion, that that is exactly how the week unfolds.

Jesus rides in, and by the end of the week, they're crying no longer, Hosanna to the son of David, but crucify him. Then, as we make our way down, verse 13 and verse 38, we have those in the temple, verse 13, who are robbing God.

It may look as if they're robbing people by the exchanging money. That is one form of robbery, but that's not what Jesus is referring to here. To say that the robbery that is actually taking place is between people and people is to miss the point entirely.

The real robbery is that they are taking from God what actually belongs to God. God is not receiving what actually belongs to him. My house shall be called a house of prayer, and you have made it a den of robbers.

[11:29] They're robbing God. They may be robbing people with the temple taxes, but they're actually robbing God. We'll come back to that in a minute. And then in verse 38, we have those who plan to kill the son and then keep the inheritance.

In other words, they do not want to give the master what belongs to the master. We've got the same thing happening all over again. So we want to kill the son because we do not want to give to the master the fruit of the vineyard.

They may not have any fruit to give him. It would seem that they don't, especially with what God says next in the text. And so what we have in verse 13 and 38 is that you have two points within the text where you have the master, God, being robbed.

And then we have Jesus, verse 19, looking for fruit on a fig tree and finding none. And then we have the master, verse 43, looking for fruit from the vineyard and receiving none.

So you've got these beautiful parallels that Jesus is setting up for us so that we would understand that what is happening in the temple is then illustrated throughout Israel's history.

[12:48] Then we have the crowds, verse 26, who stop any action being taken against Jesus. You know, the people want to kill him, but they can't because of the crowds.

And then in verse 46, they want to arrest Jesus, but they can't because of the crowds. So Matthew 21 belongs together. It's one complete section.

It's almost a complete thought about what Palm Sunday actually means for Jesus. What Jesus is actually riding into is his death.

Now, he is laying his life down. His life is not being taken from him. But you need to understand that Jesus is under no illusion from the very beginning that the week is going to turn out in any other way than his crucifixion.

The crucifixion does not take Jesus by surprise. Jesus here is setting it out very clearly that as he enters and then tells the parable at the end of Matthew 21, that he knows exactly what's going to happen to him.

[13:55] That those who are currently in charge, as it were, of the vineyard are actually going to receive the son when they see him coming and kill him because they do not want to give to God what belongs to God.

So when Jesus enters Jerusalem, notice what he does. He enters Jerusalem. Then he enters the temple. Then he curses the fig tree, which is an illustration of what will happen in the temple.

Then his authority is questioned. Then he speaks a parable of two sons, which addresses the difference between appearance and reality. Those who appear to be gods and those who actually are gods.

Those who appear to belong to God and those who actually belong to God. And then we have the parable of the tenants who will not be receiving the kingdom of God.

They will actually have the kingdom of God taken away from them. And then all of that leads to the eventual killing of the son, what we would call the crucifixion of Christ.

[15:04] So when Jesus then enters into Jerusalem, notice how he does it. He rides on a donkey and with a colt beside of him. Now this is not only a sign of humility, as it says in the text, but it is also the sign, Zechariah 9.9, that the king has come.

This is how you will know that the Davidic king, the Messiah, the appointed and anointed one of God has entered into your presence. This is how he will turn up.

So Jesus enters in this way, declaring to everyone that he is the rightful king, the rightful ruler of the world and of course God's people.

And they cry Hosanna to the son of David. Now many people struggle to understand, well which one was he riding, the donkey or the colt? Why does it mention two? Well, there's a fairly good example of this.

If farmers know if you have a bull and you have a bull that wants to kick off with other bulls, what you do is you tie a donkey to it.

[16:08] And then the bull won't kick off because if the bull kicks off, the donkey will and the donkey, and no one wants to get kicked by a donkey, so the bull behaves. So if you've got Jesus riding in on a donkey in the midst of crowds, what do you think the donkey is going to do?

Kick off. But if you tie a colt to the donkey, do you think the donkey is going to risk kicking the colt? No. So the colt keeps the donkey calm as they ride into Jerusalem.

That's the reason for the two being mentioned there. But that's only a side point. The real point is that as Jesus rides in on a donkey, we shouldn't be confused that this is not a ruler entering into his kingdom, so to speak.

Right? This isn't a war horse riding in. This isn't a chariot riding in. This is Jesus, the ruler of all, riding in on a donkey, declaring to everyone that he is the rightful king.

And so the people, even though they do not know who it is, because they say at the end of the passage, who is this? And then someone says, oh, it's Jesus of Nazareth. So why are they saying Hosanna to the son of David?

[17:21] Well, it's not because they know who it is, because they then go on to say, who is it? It's because of what is actually happening, that this man is riding in on a donkey.

And people know what that means. And they start singing Hosanna to the son of David. And then the city was whole, the whole city was stirred. And they say, who is this?

And the answer, and the answer is Jesus of the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee. So now he is being identified.

Now, it doesn't take long for their curiosity to turn to confusion, because remember the expectation.

They would have expected the Messiah to come in and throw out the Romans.

And instead, he enters Jerusalem and throws out his own people. Why his own people? Why is he overturning the tables rather than overturning the Romans?

[18:22] Why is he throwing out his own people rather than throwing out the Roman occupation? Because the heart of the problem is the people's heart, that they are actually robbing God.

And so the temple, which Jesus declares should have been a place of prayer, has become a den of robbers. And Jesus is quoting here, Jeremiah 7, 11.

In other words, the people are not giving to God what belongs to God. They're coming to church, as it were. They're coming to the temple. But they're not actually giving to God what belongs to God.

And this is where you begin to see the distinction between appearance and reality. In the same way you do with the parable of the two sons. Those who appear to be doing the right thing.

And those who are actually doing the right thing. And then avoiding not being seen for it. And so as Jesus comes into the temple and he throws over the money lenders and everything.

[19:27] It looks to us that he's upset with the money exchange. Well, it's clear that the temple taxes were the difference between makers and takers.

And the church has never seemed to escape this issue. That there are those in the Christian kingdom, as it were. The kingdom of God in this world who are makers.

And then there are those who are takers. They don't build anything. But they borrow everything that everyone else has. And I've said this often. One of the failings of the Christian church, especially in Europe, is that we no longer build anything.

We borrow everything from the world which is atheistic. We borrow their education. We borrow their healthcare. We borrow all of this. Right? Why aren't we building any of it?

The reason we don't build any of it is because we've just lost all sense of Christians being makers. And we've just become takers. We expect things to turn up on the plate.

[20:30] Right? And when you actually look at where the care of God's people actually stands in terms of healthcare and education, that doesn't fall to the state in Scripture.

That falls on the church. That falls in the home. You never see it being applied. You never see, you know, godly parents in Ephesians 5 and 6, for instance, send in their children to the Roman academy.

Because they understood that that is you don't take, you don't borrow, you make. If it doesn't exist, then you're obligated to build it yourself. Now, back in the day, you had Christians that started hospitals.

You had Christians that started schools. You had Christians that started orphanages. You had all of these things. And now we just don't do it. Whether it's because we're lazy or we just got so used to the government giving us handouts.

Who knows what it is. So there is that element where there are makers and takers. Those in the north of Israel were all the makers. And those in the south of the temple walls were the takers. [ 21 : 34 ] They just basically had 100% markup on the temple taxes. And that was just the way that it is. And one of the reasons why the church is almost in the position where it is, incapable of supporting itself, is because we are so dependent on external sources rather than the church building them for ourselves.

So we are inherently weak. And that is, that's a problem today, just like it was in the days of Jesus. And so we cry when we see all our young people deserting the church and denying God when they get a secular education at university and that.

And then we go, well, why have they gone in the wrong direction? And the answer is because they've been sent in the wrong direction. You can't complain against the direction that you're sending them in if they end up following that way.

So in the temple here, you've got takers. And Jesus, the thing that Jesus is really concerned with is the fact that they are robbing God.

The house should be called a house of prayer. But Jesus says, you have made it a den of robbers. Who is actually being robbed here? God's being robbed. Because the very place in which God should be receiving the prayers of his people, he isn't.

[ 23 : 01 ] What is happening instead is that you have this money exchange and God is just out the window. No one's thinking about God. So instead of the place being a house of prayer for all nations, it has become a den of robbers.

They are robbing God because God is not receiving the praise and prayers that he deserves or is due or that he built that place for.

And so we have the fig tree. So when Jesus curses the fig tree, what is he looking for? Well, he's looking for fruit and he is expecting to find fruit, but he finds none.

And this is an illustration of what Jesus finds in the temple. He goes into the temple expecting to find real spiritual fruit. And instead of finding real spiritual fruit, he finds people actually robbing God. And so the fig tree is an illustration of the temple. A place where you would expect to find fruit and then you find none.

[ 24 : 10 ] And so what does Jesus do next? He curses the fig tree that no fruit may ever come from it again. What is that an illustration of? It is an illustration of what will happen to the temple.

And that is exactly what happens to the temple. The temple is destroyed because it is not producing any spiritual fruit. It is taken from them.

And so what Jesus is showing us with the illustration of the fig tree is that there is a difference between appearance and reality. The temple may have the appearance of spiritual fruit, but the reality is that they are robbing God.

The fig tree may have the appearance of fruit, but when you get close to it, it has none. And so Jesus curses the fig tree so as to illustrate to us what he will eventually do with the temple.

In the same way, the fig tree will be brought to an end. The temple will be brought to an end. In the same way, the tenants in the vineyard have nothing to give the master.

[ 25 : 13 ] They want to kill the son. And Jesus then says, well, it will be taken from them. The kingdom of God will be taken from them and given to a people producing fruit.

And the vineyard here is, of course, the kingdom of God. So throughout Matthew 21, there is this expectation and reality, this appearance and reality.

And what Jesus is addressing is the difference between the two. And the reason he is overturning his own people is because they have the appearance of spiritual fruitfulness, but they have nothing at all.

What they have instead is that they are robbing God. And so in the same way he will remove the kingdom of God from them, the vineyard, he removes the temple from them.

And this is illustrated by the cursing of the fig tree. So Jesus' authority is then challenged, which we would expect to find. They are now upset with Jesus.

[ 26 : 17 ] And why wouldn't you be upset with Jesus, especially when he has come along to you and pointed out your errors? And we would like to say, well, no one has ever taught me anything differently.

And Jesus would then turn around and say to you, do you not have God's word for yourself? Do you not have it? Do you not read it for yourself? Do you not read it for yourself? So we may want to play ignorant to the expectations of God or play the interpretation card and say, well, I don't see it that way.

But as I've often found growing up in my home, that I could often say to my mom, well, I see it differently than you, and then soon find out that the way that my mom sees it is the way that it ought to be done.

That sort of line of discipline is not something that can be crossed. But nonetheless, God's people frequently try to cross it and so challenge the authority of Jesus.

In other words, what right does Jesus have to say the things to me that he is saying? What right does he have? Well, remember, in the context of fruit, Jesus has already given us a beautiful parable of this, hasn't he?

[ 27 : 34 ] That the seed and its fruit go together. That the seeds you sow will produce a certain type of fruit. So the outcome further down the line of how things turn out in your life and how things turn out in your family and how things turn out in your work and everything is normally an indication of what kind of seed you have planted beforehand.

And while it may look like you're getting away with it in the years that it's growing, when the fruit eventually turns, you should never be surprised to think, where did this come from?

Because you planted it. And Psalm 1, verse 3, which again I keep bringing us back to, is a reminder that the man who is personally devoted to the Lord in thought, word, and deed and whispers the word of God to himself day and night is the one who produces spiritual fruit in his life and who is like a tree that produces fruit in its season.

And as I've said over and over again, trees do not eat their own fruit. Trees do not eat their own fruit. What they produce is for others. And therefore, in a fellowship where you are being challenged, challenged, the purpose is give it one more year or cut it down.

It is to produce that fruit which brings glory to God. And so the challenge of Jesus is one that Jesus easily overcomes, verse 25.

[ 29 : 03 ] And he asked this question, the baptism of John, where did it come from, from heaven or from man? Now they're stumped. Because if they say from man, they deny John's authority.

And they don't want to do that because of the crowds. And they don't want to do that because they believe that he is sent from God. But if they say from heaven, then they affirm Jesus' authority because John points to Jesus.

Jesus is the one whose sandals John is not fit to tie. So if they deny John's, they deny Jesus' but they don't want to deny John's because they've already affirmed it.

But if they do deny John's, if they do affirm John's, they end up affirming Jesus' because John points to Jesus. And so Jesus is trapped then with their own question.

And this is important for us to understand. So the authority of Jesus is challenged, but it goes nowhere. They can't take it any further because of the crowds, because the crowds will turn against them if they deny the authority of John as his baptism being from heaven.

[ 30 : 17 ] And Jesus' authority in this context is linked by the question that is asked. So Jesus tells two parables, and this is where he brings it to a conclusion.

The first parable is the parable of two sons, and the point is simple, that there is a difference between appearance and reality. And this is reflected in the parable of the tenants as well.

Those who look as if they have entered into the kingdom of God will not, and those who look as though they haven't will. Why? Because the difference is seen not in what they say, but in what they do.

So those who say, I believe, yes, yes, yes, yes, but do not, do not enter into the presence of God. But those who say in the beginning, no, but then repent, change their mind, repent and believe,

then they actually enter into the kingdom of God.

Jesus again, like with the temple and with the fig tree, and now with the parable of the two sons, is illustrating the difference between appearance and reality. That you may say one thing, but what really matters is what you do.

[ 31 : 33 ] You may say no, but if you turn and repent and do what the Lord commands, that is what is paid attention to. It's the reality of what you do.

And so the parable of the tenants is a very simple one, in that the master has sent his servants to find the fruit that is rightfully his, from the vineyard, but they have beaten the previous servants, which is an illustration, you'll remember, of what Israel did to all the Old Testament prophets.

God sent prophets to Israel, and those prophets were beaten. They were turned away. So God decides, in the plan of God and purposes of God, to send his son, Palm Sunday.

God is sending his son to his own people. And what do they decide to do to the son? Well, they decide to kill the son, to keep the inheritance for themselves.

They do not want to give to God what belongs to God. And so at the end of Matthew 21, Jesus is showing us what is going to happen to him at the end of the week. The son that God sent into the vineyard will be killed.

[ 32 : 49 ] That is the crucifixion of Christ. That is exactly what happens. But that stone that the builders have rejected becomes the cornerstone, the foundation of the church.

The kingdom of God is given to people who will produce its fruit. And then the Pharisees and the priests understand that Jesus is speaking about them. But they did nothing because they feared the crowd.

Well, here's the exhortation as we close. When we recognize Palm Sunday, we are not to recognize it in a limited view, that this is just about Jesus riding in and the people singing Hosanna to the son of David, or rather shouting Hosanna to the son of David.

What Jesus is actually doing on Palm Sunday is making us see the difference between appearance and reality and showing us the outcome of the temple and the outcome of his own life.

The temple will be brought to an end, which does happen, and his life will be killed, taken from him. Well, it is not taken from him. He lays it down himself, though the people believe that they are taking his life from him.

[ 34 : 04 ] And those who actually enter the kingdom of God, those who actually receive the kingdom of God and produce its fruit, are those who are not the ones who speak all good things, but those who do.

What Jesus is doing here is separating appearance from reality, the difference between what people say and what people do. And what Jesus does is what he always does, is he gives the kingdom to those who produce fruit, fruit that is in keeping with the kingdom of God.

And so Palm Sunday is really a story the entire story of what Jesus has actually come to do. Bring an end to the old ways, the ways where people have been given opportunity after opportunity to be faithful to God and have failed over and over again to the point where they are robbing God and then brings about a new foundation, built upon himself, the cornerstone, the church.

Amen. Well, as we come to the table this morning, we'll stand and sing, you are the king of glory, as we prepare for the table.

Praise be to God for his blessings, and may his grace be upon you, both now and forevermore, as you go your way. Amen. Amen.