

The Gospel of Matthew
Week Twenty-Four
Matthew 21:1-32

Day One

1 As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away." 4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: 5 "Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"

vs. 1&2 – Jesus and His disciples were approaching Jerusalem, heading for His fateful showdown with destiny and the Jewish leaders. Not far from the city, Jesus dispatched two of His disciples to go and obtain a donkey for Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. In Matthew's version, the donkey has a colt and they both were to be brought to Jesus. Jesus was specific in His instructions, providing an accurate picture of where the donkey would be, which made the disciples' job much easier. He didn't just say, "Go get me a donkey," but rather told them *exactly* what they would encounter and what to do if they met any opposition.

This is an indication of how specific the Lord can be when He sends you on a job assignment. The disciples left Jesus' presence in faith that the instructions He gave them were accurate, confident that they were not being sent on a "wild goose chase." They did not doubt by asking "How will we be sure we will find the right donkey?" They went forth, trusting it would be just as Jesus told them. And it was. It always is.

Do you trust Jesus that it will be just as He told you? Do you ask endless questions and delay doing what is in your heart because you are not certain or guaranteed of success? What aren't you doing that you have reasonable confirmation that God wants you to do? What steps can you take today to obey His directive?

v. 3 – The Lord told the disciples what to do in case anyone asked why they were taking the donkeys. After all, these men were untying and "borrowing" donkeys that did not belong to them and it could appear that they were stealing them! Yet Jesus told them just to say, "The Lord needs them" and that would ensure their success. There are many people who possess things that you need to accomplish God's will and purpose in your life, but you may be afraid to ask for them. **Can you think of something? Why don't you ask for what you need today? Just tell them that the Lord has need of what they have!**

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not

ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures (James 4:1-3).

vs. 4&5 – Matthew put this in biblical context by pointing out that this scenario fulfilled the words found in Zechariah 9:9. Their king would not come riding a white stallion but on a donkey, the beast of the poor. This would not be the image of a general charging full speed ahead in battle, but a humble king going forth on a journey. Jesus never met the expectations of those who wanted a mighty King in human terms but He exceeded the expectations of those who needed a humble Servant Savior.

Day Two

6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. 7 They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. 8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest!"

vs. 6&7 – The disciples obeyed and it happened just as the Lord had told them it would! That is how obedience always turns out – just the way the Lord told us it would. **Has God instructed you to do something and you are hesitant because you may look foolish if it doesn't work out?** God is faithful and stands behind His word for those who obey Him! I urge you to obey God right now and see Him do what He promised.

I doubt if Jesus sat on both animals, but He did not want to separate the colt from its mother. Notice that the disciples put their cloaks on the donkey so Jesus could have a saddle of sorts. **I wonder how their cloaks smelled when they got them back?** I am not sure why this scenario played out, except that Jesus wanted to symbolize His humility and also to indicate that He was not anything like the Roman or other rulers, entering large cities with pomp. As Jesus would say later, His kingdom was not of this world and His “rules of engagement” were nothing like people were expecting.

What is your leadership philosophy? Do you have one? What symbolic things can you do to communicate that philosophy? If you are a humble leader and you are promoted to a corner office, for example, could you reject that office for a smaller, less prominent version? If you are on church staff, can you refuse an assigned parking space that comes with your position? You can only do those things if they are consistent with who you are and what you are trying to communicate to others.

So I suppose I am asking what kind of leader you are or wish to be? Will you ride into position on a white or black stallion, or a donkey? The choice is yours and it is an important choice.

v. 8 – The people spread their cloaks on the ground, under the donkeys' feet. That meant that their cloaks could get dirty from road dust, the donkeys' feet or what donkeys do

when they have to relieve themselves. Some simply put palm branches on the road. Both acts symbolized honor, and in some ways was the equivalent of rolling out a red carpet of welcome. The people were showing honor to Jesus. Notice that this whole parade was spontaneous and unplanned. There were no advance men to promote or gather a crowd. The roads were lined with pilgrims coming to Jerusalem for the Passover feast and this short journey down the hill from the Mt. of Olives to Jerusalem was probably only witnessed by hundreds of people, not thousands.

v. 9 – The crowds shouted “Hosanna!” which means “save us.” **The people were shouting Hosanna, but was it spiritual salvation that they sought?** Probably not! They were hoping for a political salvation from Rome and literal re-founding of David’s throne. The people were undoubtedly not yet focused on both the spiritual aspects of Jesus’ work and their own needs, which is why they could turn so quickly on Jesus in just a few days when it became clear that His objective wasn’t an earthly kingdom like David’s of old.

Day Three

10 When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"
11 The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee." 12 Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. 13 "It is written," he said to them, " 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'"

v. 10 – While the crowd may not have been very large for the procession into Jerusalem, much of the city-at-large was abuzz when Jesus arrived (and the city population was swollen due to the Passover feast). The crowds asked a good question: Who is this? Everyone will have to ask and answer that question. It had been a while since Jesus had come to Jerusalem due to the danger. Now He was back and God was bringing things to a head that would lead to Jesus’ execution.

v. 11 – The people answered their own question and attributed prophet status to Jesus. The same is true today. Today many are willing to acknowledge that Jesus is a prophet, a moral teacher of unmatched quality, and a man who is worthy of our attention and emulation. They would just stop short of worshipping Him. One author said that Jesus is a model for faith and not an object of faith for modern man. The same was true for those Jews asking this question. Jesus was a good man to them, even a godly man; they just weren’t ready to say that He was God and worship Him as such.

It is interesting that the crowds identified Jesus in terms of His hometown of Nazareth. The Jews were very conscious of everyone’ tribal identity and their area of birth. This was another obstacle that they had in accurately identifying Jesus as the Son of God. **Do you think Matthew’s original Jewish readers had the same problem?** Of course! That is why he wrote to them so that they could get over their Jewish bias against Jesus and accept Him for who He was.

v. 12 – **What was Jesus’ first act in Jerusalem?** He went into the Temple and cleaned house, symbolically of course. He turned tables over and chased merchants away, but you know that they came back right away. I wonder how much this act had to do with Jesus’ execution? Jesus was bad for business in the Temple and when people’s economic interests are challenged, they usually react badly. That fact was also evident in Paul’s ministry:

About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way. A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in no little business for the craftsmen. He called them together, along with the workmen in related trades, and said: "Men, you know we receive a good income from this business. And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all. There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty" (Acts 19:23-27).

v. 13 – Notice that Jesus quoted a verse giving the impression that the Temple was “His.” He came into the place like He owned it, which of course we know He did. **Does this mean that the Temple was only to be a place of prayer?** I don’t think so, for God had also established the sacrificial system. I believe that Jesus chose prayer as a representative activity that set the Temple apart as a place where spiritual and not commercial things were to be occurring.

Did you notice that Jesus referred to the Jewish Scriptures when He did His house cleaning, specifically Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11? Jesus was more than a prophet and used Scripture to justify what He did. His authority should have indicated (and did to some) that He was different than any prophet Israel had ever had.

Day Four

14 The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. 15 But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant. 16 "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him. "Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read, " 'From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise'[g]?" 17 And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.

v. 14 – After Jesus cleansed the Temple of special business interest groups, He had a healing service. This tells me that the lame and blind were already in the Temple area for worship, but it was “one-sided” up to that point. They were there to give to God but God was not giving anything in return, mostly because the leaders were blocking God’s way. As I stated earlier, Jesus said the Temple was to be a house of prayer and prayer was a

representative activity. What Jesus said was not meant to indicate that prayer was the most important activity in the Temple. He confirmed this by not praying after He said what He said, but by healing. The Temple was to be a place of spiritual activity, not business transactions, and prayer wasn't the highest priority.

Is your church a place of spiritual activity or business? Is your own life comprised mostly of spiritual or business duties? Your own "temple" is to be a "house" where needs are met and God's business is done through you to meet others' needs.

v. 15 – What a terrible reaction from the leaders! What a bad and evil attitude they had. When they saw the "wonderful" things Jesus did, they were indignant. They saw the people crying out for salvation, saw Jesus healing the sick and restoring sight to the blind and the leaders were offended. Religious people and leaders are always offended when their agenda isn't followed and God's agenda is. Jesus showed that God was going to circumvent the leaders and go directly to the people to meet their needs. I have heard it said that God respects authority and always works through the established authorities. I wholeheartedly disagree, for what was happening here was a fulfillment of Scripture:

"Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!" declares the Lord. Therefore this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: "Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done," declares the Lord. "I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number (Jeremiah 23:1-3).

v. 16 – The leaders wanted Jesus to stop the worship of the "little" and "simple" ones in favor of the rigid worship rules established by the leaders. Jesus refused to do so then and won't do it now. God is the ultimate Shepherd of His people and, if His "under-shepherds" won't do their jobs, then God will intervene and care for His people Himself! He will then raise up new leaders, as Jesus did by raising His apostles above the authorities of the day. Beware if you are a leader who takes care of yourself and not the people. God is against you and may remove you from your office.

v. 17 – Jesus left Jerusalem. He was attracting too much attention and animosity, so He withdrew. Jesus did not run from controversy but that is not His main mission. He came to do the will of the Father and it was not quite His time to surrender His life, so He withdrew. I love Jesus. He was so focused on the Father's will and refused to be diverted from that. **How focused are you on the Father's will? How able are you to walk away from controversy or fame? How willing are you to confront wrongs yet not be consumed by your crusade?**

Day Five

18 Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. 19 Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said

to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" Immediately the tree withered. 20 When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?" they asked. 21 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. 22 If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer."

v. 18 – Jesus had come for the Feast of Passover, so it was customary for pilgrims to spend their time in the city, which is where Jesus was headed. On the way, He was hungry (proof of His humanity). I am not sure why Jesus did not eat at His host's home, but perhaps He left early, before the household was awake. Keep in mind that Jesus created a teaching opportunity from almost every situation He was in. This trip to Jerusalem was no exception. **How skilled are you at doing the same?** If you aren't, then perhaps you can ask Jesus to help you, for He seemed to have no problem doing so.

v. 19 – Jesus went up to a fig tree looking for fruit but there was none, mostly because it wasn't fig season! (We know that from Mark 11:13). **Why would Jesus expect figs from a tree that wasn't in season?** We must look at this in the context of what Jesus was confronting through His presence and teaching. He was speaking to a nation that had little spiritual fruit, although they had the appearance of having some. Israel was leafy and green, but when God inspected their branches, they were barren!

So Jesus cursed the tree, symbolic that God was about to do the same to Israel. Israel did wither at the roots in 70 AD when Rome sacked Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple.

v. 20 – Mark indicated that the tree was withered when they came by again the next day. Matthew indicated that the tree withered right then and there. The difference is irrelevant; the important thing is that we see the power in Jesus' word to bless or curse. At first glance, it appears that the main message here is faith and the power of a faith-word. While there is some truth to that, this passage is disjointed unless studied in its context of Jesus' painful confrontation with the leaders of Israel.

v. 21 – The disciples wanted to know how the tree could have withered so quickly. They could not grasp the deeper meaning here, but that was not the only lesson that Jesus had for them. He was teaching the disciples about the power of faith and also the power of doubt. Faith is such that it can wither fig trees or move mountains, when applied in purity. The power of doubt is that it can thwart faith and keep a fig tree and mountain as is. It would be preposterous to think that Jesus was teaching the disciples to move mountains or curse trees frivolously, just because that is what they felt like doing on any particular day.

I think they understood the lesson, for eventually they too spoke to illnesses and spiritual powers of wickedness and saw dramatic results to their faith prayers and utterances. **What power is there in what you say and do? What difference do your faith prayers and commands have in the betterment of your family, church, or**

community? If they have none, then you using the power of doubt and not the power of faith.

v. 22 – **What are you asking for in faith prayers? What results are you seeing? If none, why not?** If you are, then what more can you ask or do to use your faith-power to benefit others? Don't excuse lack of prayer results by saying, "It must not be the will of God!" Also don't waste your faith-power on selfish, small requests..

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures (James 4:1-3).

Day Six

23 Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?" 24 Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. 25 John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?" They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' 26 But if we say, 'From men'—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet." 27 So they answered Jesus, "We don't know." Then he said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

v. 23 – Jesus did not need a reason or place to teach. He went to the Temple and began teaching, just like He owned the place. It would be like someone showing up at your church, walking into the pulpit, and preaching. The pastor and elders would be indignant, and rightfully so. This was another indication that Jesus operated in the knowledge that He was the rightful owner of the Temple because He was God. The elders wanted to know what gave Him the right to just show up and start preaching. They had not authorized Jesus to do these things, so they wanted to know who did. Of course, we know it was God the Father! **By the way, who gives you the authority to do what you do?** If you are waiting for a human authority, you may be limiting what you can do for God.

v. 24 – Jesus evaded a direct answer but certainly seized the "high ground," so to speak, by asking the so-called experts a question that they could not answer without showing their unbelief in or disobedience to God. One can never out-debate, out-think or out-wit God. The authorities had met their match in Jesus, although they did not realize or accept it.

vs. 25&26 – Jesus asked them about John's baptism and the source of its authority. John was also not part of the religious establishment, just like Jesus, yet John had an authority from God that almost all the people recognized. Jesus was operating in that same

dynamic, and confronted the religious experts with that reality. The leaders debated amongst themselves but could not come up with an answer that would not make them look bad.

Please note that the people knew John was a prophet – the people had more spiritual insight than the leaders. Leadership is no guarantee of spiritual wisdom or knowledge. In fact, it can be a hindrance to seeing or doing new things, as these encounters with Jesus clearly indicate. Please don't put more stock in leadership than God would want. If you are a leader, please don't think you are more spiritual or intelligent than the people. If you are more spiritual or intelligent, it isn't necessarily because you are in a position of leadership.

v. 27 – The leaders abstained, refusing to answer Jesus. Since they refused to answer Him, He refused to answer them. I love Jesus and the style with which He worked. You don't always have to answer your critics either. Sometimes you just have to respond like Nehemiah and continue your work:

But they were scheming to harm me; so I sent messengers to them with this reply: "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?" Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer (Nehemiah 6:2-4).

Day Seven

28 "What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' 29 " 'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. 30 "Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. 31 "Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered. Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. 32 For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

v. 28 – At first, the Pharisees were on the attack, approaching Jesus to ask Him by what authority He did what He did. Once they could not answer Jesus question, Jesus became the aggressor, telling a parable that had a question at the end. It is obvious here that the two sons represented the Pharisees and the “sinners” of the day. The one group (the sinners) had rejected righteousness but then repented and turned to God. The other group (the Pharisees) had indicated they would accept God's righteousness but then refused.

The Pharisees answered rightly that the son who said “no” but who relented and obeyed did the will of the Father. In case they missed the implication, Jesus told them point blank that they had rejected John's baptism only to have the “sinners” be baptized. Since the Pharisees saw no need to repent and be baptized, they had rejected God's will for their lives.

Jesus was indirectly talking about how the Pharisees had rejected Him, since John had announced that Jesus was the One from God. In some sense, Jesus was answering the question that the Pharisees had asked about the authority by which He taught and healed. He gave an *indirect* statement about the authority by which He did what He did – He derived His authority from the same place that John got his, from God Himself. Jesus also endorsed the actions of the “sinners,” telling the Pharisees that what the sinners had done was acceptable to Him and thus to God Himself.

There is always a tendency on the part of people who know and who have said “yes” to God, to begin to trust in their own righteousness. They feel like their history with God is enough to gain them His favor on an ongoing basis. To some extent, it is true that we must in some sense unlearn every day what we think we know so we can approach God in humility and as a child, learning and humble.

When we think we know God or the way to God, we are in danger of taking matters into our own hands where God is concerned. We can think, “I know this. There is nothing new for me here. I am an expert. I am experienced.” **Is that your attitude? You may be correct in your assessment but that doesn’t mean there is nothing for you to learn where God is concerned?** Remember the way to exaltation in the Kingdom of God:

[Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up \(James 4:10\).](#)