

The Gospel of Matthew

Lesson 13

Matthew 21:1 – Matthew 22:14

A Donkey and a Colt – April 2nd, AD 30

Matthew 21: ¹ When they had approached Jerusalem and had come to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied there and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to Me. ³ "If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them." ⁴ This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: ⁵ "SAY TO THE DAUGHTER OF ZION, 'BEHOLD YOUR KING IS COMING TO YOU, GENTLE, AND MOUNTED ON A DONKEY, EVEN ON A COLT, THE FOAL OF A BEAST OF BURDEN.'" ⁹⁰ ⁶ The disciples went and did just as Jesus had instructed them, ⁷ and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid their coats on them; and He sat on the coats.

Heading south out of Jericho, Bethphage sits on the eastern edge of the Mount of Olives just north of Bethany.⁹¹ The mount is covered with ancient olive trees. It is Sunday morning as the Lord approaches it on April 2nd, AD 30.

It has long been assumed that Jesus sent the two disciples into Jerusalem to retrieve the donkey and her colt; however, the Gospels do not give enough information to determine whether the animals are from Jerusalem or some other village. It has also been assumed that only one donkey is used in the triumphal entry, but in this passage, the Lord instructs the two apostles to bring both the mother donkey and her foal. Notice that when they are brought to the Lord, they lay their coats on both of the animals. Mark says that the colt has never been sat upon; therefore, the Lord mounts an animal that has never been ridden to make His triumphal entry. Jesus rides the young foal, but the mother also makes the trip into Jerusalem, draped in the coats of the disciples.

Once again, Matthew proves the purpose of the Lord's actions by drawing from the prophecy of the Old Testament. The first part of the passage is from Isaiah and the last part is from Zechariah. Jesus does not say these words at this point in the story; they are added by Matthew.

Crowd's Blessing

Matthew 21: ⁸ Most of the crowd spread their coats in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in the road. ⁹ The crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David; BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE Lord;⁹² Hosanna in the highest!" ¹⁰ When He had entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?" ¹¹ And the crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee."

On Sunday afternoon the apostles place their garments on the animals. The rest of the crowd places their garments and branches on the road. Once the Lord passes over the items, the crowd collects the garments and branches and places them in front of Him again. This process continues all the way into town. As the crowd shouts the words of Psalm 118 the entire city is stirred in wonderment, including the religious leaders.

⁹⁰ Isaiah 62:11, Zechariah 9:9

⁹¹ Bethphage means "house of unripe young figs."

⁹² Psalms 118:25-26

Second Temple Clearing

Matthew 21: ¹² And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. ¹³ And He said to them, "It is written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER'; but you are making it a ROBBERS' DEN." ⁹³

The parade ends at the temple. Once inside, the Lord drives all those doing business out of the building while quoting from Isaiah and Jeremiah. It is the second clearing of the temple. The first was performed just days after His baptism and this second clearing occurs just days before His death.

The Blind and Lame

Matthew 21: ¹⁴ And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. ¹⁵ But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became indignant ¹⁶ and said to Him, "Do You hear what these children 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 FOR YOURSELF?'" ⁹⁴

With the commerce area cleared, the room quickly fills with people needing a touch from the Lord. Within the temple the religious leaders become indignant at the words of the people towards Jesus. The words resemble those in the "Hallel" of Psalm 148:1. "Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens; Praise Him in the heights!" The angels sang a similar song when Jesus was born in Luke 2:14. "Glory to God in the highest, (heaven) and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased." This time the children within the temple are shouting these words. Matthew uses the masculine word for children so it probably refers to the boys serving in the temple service. They are thrilled at the clearing of the evil degradation out of the temple and the subsequent wonders that Jesus performed. Jesus' rebuke is harsh and another fulfillment of a prophecy from the Old Testament.

Back to Bethany

Matthew 21: ¹⁷ And He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.

Back in Bethany, the house of Mary, Martha and Lazarus awaits to give the Lord a time of rest and comfort.

Cursed Fig Tree – Monday, April 3rd, AD 30

Matthew 21: ¹⁸ Now in the morning, when He was returning to the city, He became hungry. ¹⁹ Seeing a lone fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it except leaves only; and He said to it, "No longer shall there ever be any fruit from you." And at once the fig tree withered. ²⁰ Seeing this, the disciples were amazed and asked, "How did the fig tree wither all at once?" ²¹ And Jesus answered and said to them, "Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it will happen. ²² "And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."

Monday morning dawns and the Lord is hungry as He begins the short walk from Bethany to Jerusalem. A fig tree can be seen in the distance and the Lord approaches it to retrieve

⁹³ Isaiah 56:7; Jeremiah 7:11

⁹⁴ Psalms 8:2

its fruit, but none exists. The main fig crop ripens in the autumn but figs sprout in the spring before the leaves appear. The early figs should have been on the tree because it is covered with leaves. Surely Jesus knows that the tree is fruitless, but He uses it as a teaching opportunity for the apostles. Because the tree is bare of figs, the Lord curses it and it withers.

In answering the apostle's questions, Jesus emphasizes the importance of believing without a hint of doubt. This kind of believing is crucial because doubt signifies a divided mind wavering between thoughts from trust to disbelief and from confidence to fear.

Jesus also compares the fig tree to the mountain on which they are standing. Removing a mountain is a greater endeavor than sending a curse on a fig tree. Is Christ thinking of the fig tree as a symbol of the Jewish people? Is His comment about the mountain related to His parable about a mountain found in Matthew 17:20? Have the Jews shown no fruit in years and therefore need to be cursed by the Lord? Can their mountain of sin be removed by their trust in the Lord? Yes is the answer to all these questions. But all of these situations can be remedied through trust and prayer.

Question of Authority

Matthew 21: ²³ When He entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him while He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?"

The priests are ready and waiting for Jesus' arrival on Monday morning. Overnight they have devised their scheme for the day. They decide to focus on the topic of authority. They ask Jesus to tell them who gave Him the authority to do the things He is doing in the temple.

Question of John's Baptism

Matthew 21: ²⁴ Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. ²⁵ "The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?" And they began reasoning among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Then why did you not believe him?' ²⁶ "But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the people; for they all regard John as a prophet." ²⁷ And answering Jesus, they said, "We do not know." He also said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

Not wanting to be trapped, Jesus replies with the question about the one name that strikes fear in their hearts, John. Their conversation recorded by Matthew proves that Jesus has entrapped the hypocrites in their own game. Since they will not play the game and reveal their honest answers, neither will He.

Parable of the Two Sons

Matthew 21: ²⁸ "But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go work today in the vineyard.' ²⁹ "And he answered, 'I will not'; but afterward he regretted it and went. ³⁰ "The man came to the second and said the same thing; and he answered, 'I will, sir'; but he did not go. ³¹ "Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you. ³² "For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him.

In this parable, the first son readily agrees to go to the field but bluntly refuses to keep his word. The second son also refuses to go but after reconsidering the request he then goes to the field. The second son repents and turns from his rebellion, but the first doesn't. The first son represents the religious leaders who readily say the right things but outright refuse to dirty their hands with the true requirements of the Lord. The second son represents the sickest of sinners who would never intend to serve the Lord in any way but repent from their wickedness and serve Him by performing whatever task He requests.

Parable of the Evil Renters

Matthew 21: ³³ "Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT AND DUG A WINE PRESS IN IT, AND BUILT A TOWER, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey.⁹⁵ ³⁴ "When the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce. ³⁵ "The vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third. ³⁶ "Again he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them. ³⁷ "But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' ³⁸ "But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' ³⁹ "They took him, and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. ⁴⁰ "Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers?" ⁴¹ They said to Him, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons." ⁴² Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures, 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone; THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE Lord, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES'? ⁹⁶ ⁴³ "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it. ⁴⁴ "And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust."

By now the priests know Jesus is speaking about them; their hearts are burning as they listen and they do not rebut one word. Jesus pours His condemnation out on the religious leaders with the story about the evil renters of the vineyard. The priests cannot miss the direct correlation between the story and their proven track records. They are the ones who have beaten and killed the men sent by the Lord. They are the ones who have mistreated the spokesmen of God. They are the ones who will kill the Father's only Son. They are not the leaders of the kingdom of God as they profess to be and they will be crushed when the Chief Corner stone falls on them.

Priests and Pharisees Angry

Matthew 21: ⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them. ⁴⁶ When they sought to seize Him, they feared the people, because they considered Him to be a prophet.

Even the dumbest of the dumb priests understand that Jesus in speaking of their wicked lives. The only thing standing in the way of their anger is the Lord's favor among the people. He is still the miracle working Messiah in the eyes of the crowd, and the priests' murderous hearts can't turn the people against Him.

Heaven Compared to a Wedding Feast

Matthew 22: ¹ Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying, ² "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. ³ "And he

⁹⁵ Isaiah 5:2

⁹⁶ Psalm 118:22-23

sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come. ⁴ "Again he sent out other slaves saying, 'Tell those who have been invited, "Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are all butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast.'" ⁵ "But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business, ⁶ and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them. ⁷ "But the king was enraged, and he sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire. ⁸ "Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. ⁹ 'Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast.' ¹⁰ "Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered together all they found, both evil and good; and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests. ¹¹ "But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, ¹² and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?' And the man was speechless. ¹³ "Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹⁴ "For many are called, but few are chosen."

It is still Monday and the Lord relates the third parable which will anger the priests even more. In a different way He makes certain that they understand that they are the invited guests to the kingdom of heaven, but they have killed the servants of the Lord sent to give them greeting from the throne above and offer them a place at the table of the marriage feast. Because of their evil ways, they are not worthy to attend the feast and they, the Jewish leaders who are rejecting Him as the Messiah, will be destroyed. Jesus will invite others from the highways and byways of the Jewish world, but not all of them will be welcome at the feast. Proper attire, wedding clothes pure and white, must be worn. The man not dressed in the proper clothing will be cast far from the feast into the darkness of the place of eternal doom. The story ends with the Lord saying "Many are called but few are chosen." "Called" and "chosen" have the same root word but "chosen" has an additional prefix that establishes a distinction in their meanings. In modern English it might be better to say, many are called but few are called out from the called. Just as the Lord called many to join Him as disciples, Jesus called only 12 to be the apostles. Notice that Jesus made the choice. This passage is different because the destiny of the called being called out is based solely on their belief in the Messiah. It is still the Lord's purpose to offer His coming to the Jews first. The Gospel of Matthew is written to the Jews and therefore this passage is intended for no other ethnic group and it is not found in the other Gospels.