

King Jesus

Matthew 21:1-17

At the birth of Jesus, magi from the East saw His star and came to worship the King of the Jews (Matt. 2:2). When they found Him, they presented gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh (Matt. 2:11). Although the baby Jesus didn't know about these events, his parents, and soon Herod, certainly did. He was recognized as a King and therefore considered a threat. Because of this, Jesus did most of His ministry in northern Israel away from Judea where the ruling class dealt with threats like Him. Now He comes deliberately and triumphantly into Jerusalem for the final week of His life, to take His throne and save His people.

The King on a Donkey

Throughout Matthew's Gospel Jesus fulfills prophecy, sometimes without knowing it. Mary was with child by the Holy Spirit so "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: Behold, the virgin shall be with child..." (Matt. 1:22-23; Is. 7:14). But at this point, Jesus knows what He is doing and how He fulfills the prophecies and promises of God. In this short section, no less than six passages are quoted from the Old Testament, all revealing the kingship of Christ. Bethphage is a village on the east side of the Mount of Olives, about two miles northeast of Jerusalem, 250 feet above the hill that the temple is built on. Between the western slope of Olivet and Jerusalem is the Kidron Valley. Jesus sends two disciples to go get a donkey and its colt, and to tell anyone who asks why that "The Lord has need of them" (vv. 2-3). Matthew says this was done to fulfill what the prophet spoke, "Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your King is coming to you, Lowly, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey'" (v. 5; cf. Is. 62:11; Zech. 9:9). Isaiah prophesied that salvation would come to the daughter of Zion, and Zechariah said the new King would come on a colt, the foal of a donkey. Kings go out to battle on horses but after victory they ride on donkeys. In Zechariah's prophecy, the King has triumphed over Tyre, Sidon, Ashkelon, and Gaza (9:4-5): "He shall speak peace to the nations; His dominion shall be 'from sea to sea, And from the River to the ends of the earth'" (v. 10; cf. Ps. 72:8). Matthew leaves out these parts and emphasizes the humility of Christ. This will still be a conquest, but a different kind. The disciples lay their clothes on the donkey, and Jesus rides into the city as multitudes lay down their clothes and branches from trees to make a kind of "red carpet" for Him (vv. 7-8). King Jehu rode into Jerusalem in a similar way as he was anointed king as "each man hastened to take his garment and put it under him on the top of the steps; and they blew trumpets, saying, 'Jehu is king!'" (2 Kgs. 9:13). Jehu came into the city to bring judgment on Joram and the house of Ahab and Jezebel, so you can imagine the expectations of what Jesus would do to rid the city of the house of Herod and Herodias. The crowd cries out, quoting Psalm 118:26, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" (v. 9). Just as the whole city was stirred when the magi came seeking the baby King Jesus (Matt. 2:3), now the city is hailing Him as the King to be enthroned.

Cleaning House

Jesus is *the* meek one, preparing to inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5). But meekness before God is might before men. So because Jesus He is meek, He goes to the temple and drives out all who bought and sold, and overturns the tables of the money changers (v. 12). It's Passover, so many people bring foreign currencies which need to be exchanged in order to buy sacrificial animals. This in itself is not a problem but in fact necessary for sacrificial worship. The problem is that the Lord had said through Isaiah, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Is. 56:7), but the Court of the Gentiles had been turned into "the

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Bazaars of the sons of Annas.” The high priestly family of Caiaphas, Annas and sons (LLC?) regulated, taxed, and skimmed off the sales. The whole thing was complicated and corrupt in different ways. Jesus quotes Jeremiah 7:11, calling it a “den of thieves” (v. 13). Jeremiah warned Israel not to live wickedly, oppressing the fatherless and widow, and then go to worship saying “The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord” (Jer. 7:4). He said Yahweh would make the temple like Shiloh, when the Philistines defeated Israel, slaughtered the priests Hophni and Phineas, and took the ark captive (1 Sam. 4). Israel has not been listening to Jesus, repenting of sin, doing justice, and loving mercy, and therefore their worship is hypocritical and in vain. Out of a motive for profit true worshipers were not able to learn about Yahweh in the Court of the Gentiles. This angered Jesus so much that He had to clean house. This was not even a one-off, but the second time He did it (Jn. 2:15). This righteous anger is not only consistent with the kindness and the humility He exhibited when entering the city, it’s necessary for His compassion: “Then the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them” (v. 15). Consider some of the ungodly and unbelieving objections to Jesus and anyone who acts like Him today: “Is violence ever the answer? Wasn’t there a more constructive or creative way He could have gone about things? Wouldn’t it have more productive to start a dialogue or have a conversation? How is it reverent and honoring to throw down in God’s house? What about the guy who was just there to buy a sacrificial animal for worship, who didn’t know better?” To not be angry at what’s happening in the Court of the Gentiles (or in the halls of power in evangelicalism today), you either have to be ignorant and gullible, or complacent and uncaring. Some people didn’t know, but more didn’t care. Jesus does care so He tosses tables in order to heal the blind and lame. The conservative, Bible-“believing” church today is largely embarrassed and uncomfortable with Jesus, not because we love people, but because we don’t.

Out of the Mouth of Babes

The chief priests and scribes see the wonderful things Jesus does and the children crying out “Hosanna to the son of David!” in the temple, and they’re indignant. They asking Jesus if He is aware of these blasphemies (v. 16). As usual, Jesus sees and raises, quoting Psalm 8: “Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise” (v. 16). He points out that even the children praise Him as Yahweh. *Look* at this situation. The temple is a mess. The ruling class is filled with wickedness. The disciples are confused about what’s going on. But God ordains strength out of weakness (Ps. 8:2) and puts the song of victory into the mouths of children. Psalm 8 is about the greatness and grandeur of creation, the insignificance of mankind, and God’s graciousness to be mindful of us and crown us anyway with glory and honor (vv. 3-5). Christ will first be crowned with thorns and death, and then glory and life. The Father would raise Him and “put all things under His feet” (Ps. 8:6). This is a wonderful season to lay your garments down for Jesus to walk on. Deck the halls and wrap things up. Sing the gospel and say that potent blessing, Merry Christmas! Hear His praise out of the mouths of children and be confident that He came to make His blessings flow as far as the curse is found. And don’t forget to ask Him to toss some tables.