

Week 24: Matthew 21:1–22

Hook



Main Point: Jesus is the true King, but not the kind they expected.

The organ was paired with baseball in 1941 at Wrigley field, playing favorites such as “Take Me Out to the Ball Game,” the “Charge!” song and various other standards for fans between innings. It wasn’t until the early 1970s that organists began to play walk-up songs as players made their way to the plate. These tunes bellowed from the organ, specific to individual players.ⁱ As technology increased, the organ was left behind, but the walk-up song took hold. In 2015, the Cubs were the last team to embrace walk-up songs.ⁱⁱ

Q: What is your favorite player’s walk-up song?

Q: How does a player’s walk-up song add to the excitement of his entrance? Could you recognize the players on your favorite MLB team by their walk-up songs?

Q: If you had a walk-up song, what would it be?

Transition: Today we will explore Jesus’ Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem. It’s a procession marked by meaningful elements but not what the Jewish people would have expected.

Week 24: Matthew 21:1–22

Book

Main Point: Jesus is the true King, but not the kind they expected.

Matthew 21:1–11 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Jesus wasn't the kind of king they expected, but He's the king we need.

Q: Why do you think this man just let the disciples take his donkey?

Q: What kind of king did Jesus proclaim Himself to be by riding in on a donkey?

Jesus was very intentional in the way He chose to enter Jerusalem, proclaiming two different, almost paradoxical things to the people. He was declaring that He was the promised Messiah, the fulfillment of prophecy (Zechariah 9:9). At the same time, He was showing them what kind of Messiah He was. He didn't come barreling in on a war horse; He rode on a humble animal associated with peace and civil, not military, processions.ⁱⁱⁱ Jesus' "triumphal" entry was not like the Roman triumphal processions, which would have looked more like this:



The Roman "triumphs" were the highest honor bestowed upon a victorious general, done only for those who had won a major war-ending battle. The general was draped in a purple and gold tunic, held a laurel branch in his right hand and an ivory scepter in his left, and wore a gold crown on his head. He rode in a horse- or elephant-drawn chariot festooned with laurel, and was followed by magistrates, members of the Senate, musicians, sacrificial animals, incense-bearing priests, the spoils plundered from the enemy lands, and conquered soldiers, who were led through the streets in shame to their public execution. The ceremony began at the

Triumphal Gate through the Via Sacra (“Sacred Way”) to the temple of Jupiter, along streets adorned with garlands and lined with people shouting, “Lo triumphe!”^v Compared to these processions, Jesus’ Triumphal Entry would have been laughable with its small crowd of common people. He rode on a donkey, and He hadn’t actually won any battles, so their cheering was more in anticipation and hope of His *becoming* a military leader rather than a celebration of His victory. But every detail about the Triumphal Entry was planned to harken back to the Old Testament, as Matthew always did for his Jewish audience, to show them how Jesus fulfilled prophecy, that He was the Messiah they had been waiting for. Nothing was haphazard or accidental.^{vi}

The colt: In Rome, royal emissaries could demand the service of an animal from anyone, and the owner had to comply. Jesus could have been asserting His kingship and authority in this way, or He could have just known the donkey owner would give it.^{vii} He had a large number of supporters beyond the Twelve, and everywhere He went, He needed things – lodging, food, a room for Passover – so it wasn’t that unusual to ask for things like this. Mentioning both the colt and its mother doesn’t create a question of which He rode or dissonance with the other Gospel accounts. A colt would have needed to be near its mother, so they brought the mother along, but Jesus only rode the colt. As a colt, it had never been ridden before, reserved for this sacred use.^{viii} Applying this prophecy to Himself redefined Jesus’ kingship – donkeys were used for civil, not military processions. Jesus was making a clear distinction between Himself and the kings of the world.^{ix}

Hosanna: The crowd proclaimed, “Save us now!” Their emphasis would have been on the entrance of a Messiah-King to liberate Israel from Rome, a military salvation. But “Hosanna” has a much deeper meaning in Old Testament ritual. Except for the acclamation, “Son of David!” indicating a hope that He was the Messiah, their cry was taken from Psalm 118:25–26, part of the *Hallel* (Psalms 113–118). The *Hallel* was sung during the three major Israelite festivals. It is a prayer of praise and thanksgiving for God’s redemption, which fits this time of Passover. During *Sukkoth* (“Tabernacles”), the people sang *Hallel* while waving a group of four branches, called the *lulav* (“palm branches”), because the palm is the largest one. Jesus quoted Psalm 118 later in this chapter, regarding Himself as the cornerstone (v. 42). It is also significant that “Hosanna” would have sounded very similar to Jesus’ name, Yeshua – “Yahweh saves.”^x

Lord: Jesus calls Himself “Lord” in this passage, and yet His actions are anything but lord-like. This encapsulates the great paradox that is Jesus Christ. He is the King of kings, Lord of lords, God of the whole universe. But He gave that up to become a man and die for us (Philippians 2:1–11). When Matthew quotes Zechariah 9:9, he omits one phrase, “righteous and having salvation is he.” In leaving this phrase out, Matthew focused on Jesus’ humility and gentleness rather than His future victory of salvation.^{xi} He is a Lord who could demand anything from His servants, but instead He only took a colt, and only to ride into the city to announce symbolically

that He is a humble, meek king. His kingdom would not be like the Roman government. His Triumphal Entry didn't lead Him from a position of being victor in battle to one of glory and honor. It led Him to a battle, where He would sacrifice Himself. The people's response was appropriate – calling Him king, recognizing that He came in the name of the Lord, calling for peace. But His is a peace that is reached not through war and victory but through death and sacrifice.

Matthew says *the whole city* was “stirred up.” This word was used of God's voice shaking the earth (Hebrews 12:26) and of a great wind shaking a tree so hard the fruit fell out of it (Revelation 6:13). The NRSV says, “The whole city was in a turmoil!” Jesus shook things up. And He still does today. When you are presented with Jesus Christ's declaring Himself as king, you have to respond. You either rejoice with praise and thanksgiving – “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” – or you are unnerved and shaken. There is no middle ground. An awful lot of people think they are neutral about Jesus, but when it comes to Jesus, if you're not for Him, you're against Him (Matthew 12:30). Throughout the Bible, from Eden to the conquest to Jesus, there are always two sides – God's side and the other side, good and evil, life and death. There is no neutral ground. God demands that we choose this day whom we will serve (Joshua 24:15). Most of the people in Scripture who met Jesus face-to-face had polar opposite reactions to Him – they either loved Him and gave up their lives to follow Him, or they hated Him and wanted to kill Him. When you meet Jesus, you won't just be gently stirred, you will be shaken. You will never be the same.

Q: What does Christ showing Himself as humble and gentle tell us about the way we should live? How our religious leaders should behave?

Q: Describe a church leader you know who exemplifies Christ-like humility, love and self-sacrifice. What kind of impact does he have on the community?

Q: If you were to describe Jesus to a friend who wasn't familiar with the Bible, only what they had heard about Him from other people or seen in Christian behavior, what would you say?

Matthew 21:12–17 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Jesus doesn't put up with people using Him for personal gain.

Q: Why did Jesus drive out the moneychangers?

Q: Why would the chief priests and scribes be angry at the wonderful things He was doing?

This story is often pointed to as one of the few times we see Jesus getting angry, to show that anger is perfectly fine if it's righteous anger (Ephesians 4:26). Most of us think of Jesus as meek

and mild and “only that Old Testament God got angry.” But the Old Testament God, the New Testament God, and Jesus are all the same. They express both compassion and anger, depending on the situation. In talking about Jesus’ reaction to Lazarus’s death, theologian B.B. Warfield wrote, “compassion and indignation rise together in His soul.”^{xii}

This isn’t the only story of Jesus’ getting angry. In Mark 3:5, Jesus got angry at the Pharisees for not having compassion on a man who needed healing. The word used is the same one used for the wrath of God. In Matthew 23, Jesus pronounced woe on the Pharisees. In Revelation 3, He told Laodicea He would spit them out of His mouth. In John 11, He got so angry at the death of Lazarus that He snorted. Jesus got angry at hypocrisy (Matthew 7:5), pride (Matthew 23:6–7), greed (John 2:13–22), “religious” deeds done for human praise (Matthew 23:5), and focusing on the rules while missing the more important heart of God’s law – justice, mercy and love (Matthew 23:23). He expressed the most anger for religious leaders who abused His people (Matthew 23:1–4) and oppressed the poor (Mark 12:40). Jesus showed compassion toward sinners and outcasts and anger toward those who “acted religious” on the outside but whose hearts were far from God.

Jesus got angry and yet He did not sin, exactly what Paul commands us to do (Ephesians 4:26). While some may think of anger as a “negative emotion,” clearly, the anger itself is not a sinful thing. Anger can be a good thing, a holy thing. When we get angry at the things that made Jesus angry – injustice, greed, oppression, hypocrisy – this is righteous anger. We should call out sin in the Church. Paul said he had no interest in judging outsiders (that is God’s job), but he was passionate about calling out sin in the Church, to confront evil and call for repentance and keep the Church pure (1 Corinthians 5:12–13). We should “turn over tables” in our churches when we see evil in them. We should get rid of it; drive it out. That is getting angry but not sinning. This is why Jesus gave us the method of church discipline we learned about in Matthew 18. Getting angry *and sinning* would be seeing sin in our churches and gossiping about it instead of confronting it. Or leaving the church instead of trying to fix the situation. Or just letting it continue out of fear of confrontation.

Jesus quoted two verses as He drove out the moneychangers, Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11. Isaiah 56 is about God’s future eschatological temple, which will be for all nations, all people. Jeremiah 7 is a warning against those who had used His temple as a kind of magic charm to keep them from any wrath or judgment while they oppressed the poor, shed innocent blood, and committed idolatry there with other gods. Jesus’ actions were not only a cleansing of the temple, they were a prophetic sign of God’s impending judgment on Israel and its temple. Just a few years later (A.D. 70), the temple was destroyed and remains so today.^{xiii} Jesus taught of no need for a physical temple, but instead a spiritual temple, founded on Himself as the cornerstone living in the lives of His followers as temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:10–16).^{xiv}

After Jesus drove out the moneychangers, He healed the blind and the lame in the temple (v. 14). Typically those with physical disabilities were not allowed in the temple, but Jesus welcomed them, pointing to that same truth from Isaiah, that God’s future eschatological

temple and His kingdom are open to all.^{xv} This angered the chief priests and scribes, yet again Jesus quoted Scripture to them, challenging their knowledge by saying, “Have you never read ...” (v. 16). With all these actions – the Triumphal Entry, cleansing the temple, and challenging the religious leaders – Jesus really pushed against the establishment. Bible commentator Craig Keener wrote that He didn’t just predict His own death and Resurrection, “He virtually provoked it.”^{xvi} Though it may seem surprising that Jesus would be crucified just a few days after He came into the city amid cheers of “Hosanna,” it’s not so surprising when we realize just how much He challenged the powers that be.

Q: How have you seen the Church being used for personal gain by people in history or today? Is there anything we can personally do about it?

Q: How do you think Jesus feels about evil being done in His name? How can we stand up and fight against that?

Q: What things make you angry about the state of the world or the Church today? What kinds of things should make us angry with righteous anger as Christians?

Matthew 21:18–22 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Faith can do the impossible.

Q: Why did Jesus curse the fig tree?

Q: Why does it take faith to ask God for the impossible in prayer?

Matthew’s readers would have known instinctively what Mark’s version of this story states explicitly – it was not yet the season for figs (Mark 11:13). At this time of year, fig trees held only green, early figs which ripen around June, but often fall before then, leaving just green leaves on the tree.^{xvii} In the Old Testament, Israel was depicted as a vine that God had taken from Egypt and planted and cared for in His vineyard. Even though God did everything He could for the vine, it only produced bad fruit (Isaiah 5:1–5). The righteous who trust in God are described as trees planted by the water who bear good fruit, while those who trust in man are like a bush in the desert or chaff that blows away in the wind (Psalm 1; Jeremiah 17:5–8). This judgment of the fig tree is a symbolic one, connected to the judgment of Israel and the temple – those who did not have faith in Him.^{xviii}

But the disciples didn’t ask *why* Jesus cursed the fig tree, they asked *how* He did it (v. 20). It’s strange that they seemed amazed by this when they had already seen so many miracles in Jesus’ ministry. Jesus answered that they could do even more impossible things by faith. The image of “moving mountains” was a common Jewish metaphor for something that was impossible.^{xix} Jesus specifically said “this” mountain, referring to Mount Olivet, which was visible from where they stood. They could also see the Dead Sea from there.^{xx} In this, Jesus

referred again to Zechariah, when the word of the Lord said to Zerubbabel, referring to his obstacles in rebuilding the temple, “Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain. And he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of ‘Grace, grace to it!’” (Zechariah 4:7). This time the “impossible task” before Jesus was not rebuilding the physical temple but building the new temple of the Church, with Himself as the cornerstone (v. 42).^{xxi}

When we read the book of Acts, we see that His disciples did the impossible through the power of the Holy Spirit, too. They drove out demons, healed the sick, even raised the dead. Whatever they asked for in prayer, they received – no matter how impossible – when they asked in faith. As long as they were following Jesus in faith and were not out for their own gain like the religious leaders Jesus cursed and the moneychangers He drove out of the temple, they could do impossible things for the kingdom. We have that same power in us today – the Holy Spirit. We learned in Matthew 17 about mustard-seed faith. God can do the same impossible miracles in our lives today when we follow Him in faith. Just as we have the same mission the disciples did (Matthew 28:18–20), we have the same power they had (Acts 4:27–31). We can’t be afraid to ask God to do the impossible if it is in His will. We can’t be afraid to be bold in our prayers. He is still in the miracle business. He wants to give good gifts to His children if only we will ask, seek, and knock (Matthew 7:7–11).

Q: Why are we often afraid to ask “big things” of God? Why do we struggle to believe God can still do miracles?

Q: How can we know if something we are praying for is God’s will? Why do you think God sometimes says “no,” even to a prayer asked in faith?

Q: What miraculous things have you seen God do in your life?

Week 24: *Matthew 21:1–22*

Took

Main Point: Jesus is the true King, but not the kind they expected.

Walk-up songs used to be chosen for the players, but now players get to choose. It used to be the only time players got to choose music was during practice! Now it is something they spend time thinking about and planning for.^{xxii} The song choice becomes something that they are recognized by and known for; something that sets the tone and builds the excitement for what is about to happen. Jesus' riding into Jerusalem on a donkey with the crowds shouting "Hosanna!" set the tone and built the excitement for what was to come.

Q: When you as a believer walk in, are you recognized as a believer by the things that you say and do?

Q: A life verse, like a walk-up song, can get us excited/motivated to push through tough times. Do you have a life verse? If you do, what is it?

Q: How can you live in such a way that people stop, take notice, and praise the Father for what He is doing in and through you?

CHALLENGES

THINK: In what ways have you misunderstood who Jesus really is, and how we are supposed to build His kingdom? In what ways has the Church missed the mark in following Jesus, the humble King riding on a donkey, the self-sacrificing servant leader who gave up all worldly power to serve, suffer, and die? How can we reflect His character and His mission in our lives?

PRAY: Who in your life needs a miracle? Pray for God's will and don't be afraid to ask Him for the impossible. Ask Him to show you how you can help and serve.

ACT: Take action against injustice. What injustices do you see in the world around you that would make Jesus angry? How can you help fight those injustices? Do you need to stand up and say something, speak for those who can't speak for themselves? Do you need to confront a friend or bring up a concern to our church leaders? Do you need to take action against someone who is hurting others? What is God calling you to do today to fight injustice in our world?

Hook, Took & Editing by Shelley Reeves

- ⁱ <https://www.mlb.com/cut4/the-complete-history-of-the-walk-up-song>
- ⁱⁱ <https://www.mlb.com/cut4/the-complete-history-of-the-walk-up-song>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Craig Keener, *Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1994).
- ^{iv} Labrousse, *L'Antique Rome*, The Bridgeman Art Library (1796).
- ^v "Triumph: Ancient Roman Honor" *Encyclopedia Britannica* - <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/606065/triumph>
- ^{vi} William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke, New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978).
- ^{vii} Craig Keener, *Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1994).
- ^{viii} Albrecht Frenz, "Matt 21:5-7," *Novum Testamentum* 13/4 (1971), 260.
- ^{ix} Craig Keener, *Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1994).
- ^x Paul W. Meyer, "Matthew 21:1-11," *Interpretation* 40/2 (Apr 1986).
- ^{xi} Paul W. Meyer, "Matthew 21:1-11," *Interpretation* 40/2 (Apr 1986), 184.
- ^{xii} B. B. Warfield, *Person and Work of Christ* (Philadelphia, PA: The Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co, 1970).
- ^{xiii} E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985).
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- ^{xv} David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew, New Century Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972).
- ^{xvi} Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans, 1999).
- ^{xvii} F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980).
- ^{xviii} J. C. Fenton, *Saint Matthew* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1977).
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- ^{xx} Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982).
- ^{xxi} Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans, 1999).
- ^{xxii} <https://www.mlb.com/cut4/the-complete-history-of-the-walk-up-song>