

April 5th, 2009
“The Last Year of the Life of Christ, Part 41”
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Matthew 21:28-32

28 “But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go, work today in my vineyard.’
29 He answered and said, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he regretted it and went.
30 Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, ‘I go, sir,’ but he did not go.
31 Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said to [Jesus], “The first.”
31 Jesus said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you.
32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him.

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

This is the Sunday on the Christian calendar on which we commemorate the Triumphal Entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem at the beginning of the last week of His human life on earth. As Jesus entered Jerusalem in preparation for the Passover on the Sunday before His Crucifixion, the crowd that accompanied Jesus to Jerusalem hailed Jesus as a King because of the many miracles that He performed, including the miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead. The people treated Jesus as the reincarnation of King David, as they reenacted the scene that occurred when a conquering King returned home, decorating the path upon which King Jesus entered Jerusalem with palm branches, which is why we have palm branches strewn around the church today.

While the Jewish people were hailing Jesus for His demonstration of God’s power, the Jewish religious leaders were plotting to kill Jesus because they were jealous of His demonstrations of power. This hero’s reception for Jesus obviously did not sit well with them. Let us look at this episode, which is recorded in the harmony of the Gospels that we have been using, Jesus Christ, The Greatest Life, by combining passages of Scripture from **Matthew 21:1-11, Mark 11:1-11, Luke 19:29 and John 12:12-19:**

When [Jesus and His disciples] approached Jerusalem the next day and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent out two of His disciples, saying: “Go into the village ahead of you. As soon as you enter it, you will find a donkey tied up. Tied with her will be a

colt which no one has ever ridden. Untie them and bring them to Me. If anyone says anything or asks, ‘What are you doing?’ say to him, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he’ll immediately send them here.”

Those who were sent left and did what Jesus told them. They found a young donkey tied outside the door in the street just as He had described, and they untied it.

The owners were standing there and said, “What are you doing? Why are you untying the colt?”

“The Lord needs them,” they said, repeating what Jesus had told them to say.

Then the owners let them go. So they brought the donkey and the colt to Jesus, threw their clothing on them, and sat Jesus on the colt.

As [Jesus] rode [toward Jerusalem], they began to spread their articles of clothing on the road. When [Jesus] came to the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, a large crowd of disciples began to shout for joy and to praise God loudly for all the miracles they had seen. “Blessed is the King who is coming in the name of the Lord!” they shouted. “Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest!”

A huge crowd had come to the feast [of the Passover]. When they heard that Jesus was entering Jerusalem, they cut down palm branches, went out to meet Him, and spread the branches on the road.

The crowds who followed [Jesus] as well as those who went ahead of Him kept shouting, “Hosanna! Hosanna to the Son of David!” “Blessed is He who is coming in the name of the Lord, the King of Israel!” “Blessed is the kingdom of our father David!” “Hosanna in the highest!”

All this happened to fulfill what the prophet said: Tell the daughter of Zion, “Don’t be afraid! Look, your King is coming to you, humble, and riding a donkey, even a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

The disciples didn’t understand these things at first. But after Jesus was glorified, they remembered these predictions about Him and that they had done these things to Him. The people who were with [Jesus] when He raised Lazarus from the dead and called him from the tomb were telling others all about it. That is why the people went out to meet [Jesus]; they heard that He had performed this great miracle.

Some Pharisees in the crowd said to [Jesus], “Teacher, restrain Your disciples.”

But [Jesus] answered them, **“I’m telling you, if they were to keep quiet, the very stones would cry out!”**

Although it was a day of great accolades and appreciation for Jesus, it was also a day of great sadness. As Jesus entered Jerusalem, He realized that He was coming to the end of both His earthly journey and of the Jewish dispensation. The episode continues:

When [Jesus] came near and saw the city, He wept over it. **“If only you, [Jerusalem]—yes, you—had known on this special day the things that would bring you peace! But now they are hidden from you. The days are coming when your enemies will build a siege ramp around you and encircle you and hem you in on all sides. They will level**

you to the ground—with your children inside you—and will not leave one stone upon another. This will happen because you didn't recognize the time of God's coming to you."

The whole city was aroused when [Jesus] entered Jerusalem. "Who is this?" they asked.

The crowds answered, "This is Jesus the Prophet, from Nazareth in Galilee."

Then the Pharisees said to each other, "See, we are accomplishing nothing. Look at how the whole world has gone after Him!"

Jesus entered the temple, and when He had looked around at everything, He left for Bethany with the twelve since it was already quite late.

Jesus, who unmistakably and publicly exercised the power of God, entered Jerusalem to the accolade of everyone that objectively evaluated His record. With the city so overwhelmingly positive towards Jesus, how could the religious leaders justify being so negative?

As we review the narrative of the events of the next day, the reason for the negativity of the Jewish leaders surfaces quickly. **Matthew 21:14-19, Mark 11:12-19 and Luke 19:45-46** record:

Then [Jesus and His disciples] came to Jerusalem, and Jesus went into the temple of God and began to drive out everyone who was selling and buying things there. He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the chairs of those selling doves and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple. [Jesus] began to teach them, **"Doesn't Scripture say, 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers!"**

The chief Priests and the teachers of the law heard what had happened, and continued to seek a way to kill [Jesus]. They were afraid of Him because all the people marveled at His teaching. The blind and the lame came to [Jesus] in the temple, and He healed them all. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things [Jesus] was doing and heard the children shouting in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they became furious.

They said to [Jesus], "Do You hear what they're saying?"

"Yes!" Jesus replied. "Have you never read, 'from the mouths of babes and infants You have ordained praise?' "

Then He left them, and when evening came, [Jesus] left the city and spent the night in Bethany.

Jesus used a defibrillator to restore Lazarus' heartbeat, performing lasik surgery on the blind Jericho beggar and Bartimaeus, then came to the Temple in Jerusalem, performing lasik surgery on the blind and knee replacements on the lame, and healed them all.

No, He didn't. Jesus didn't perform any surgery, He didn't use any medical implements, He didn't prescribe any drugs, and He didn't tell anyone that office hours were over and that they should come back tomorrow. Jesus spoke to and touched blind and lame people and they were healed. Now, maybe some of them were faking, were actually able to see, and just pretended to be healed in a conspiracy to build up Jesus' reputation, but the Scripture does not say that Jesus chose certain the people to heal and rejected others; the Scripture says that Jesus healed all of the blind and the lame that showed up. Jesus' healing ministry was comprehensive so as to make it extremely unlikely that anyone could accuse Him of faking. Lazarus, the blind Jericho beggar,

blind Bartimaeus, the blind and lame in the Temple were all raised from the dead or healed in public, in plain view of everyone. Jesus didn't take them into the magic tent or sequester them in any way; Jesus simply spoke a word in public and their physical conditions changed.

But, the Scripture tells us, in **Matthew 21:15**:

But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things [Jesus] was doing and heard the children shouting in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they became furious.

Furious. What a curious reaction to the miracles of Jesus. Why would the healing of the blind and the lame and praise for the person performing the healing make the chief priests and teachers of the law "furious"? Isn't that an inappropriate reaction to a miraculous event?

The beginning of the explanation for the inappropriate reaction of the chief priests and teachers of the law is in the combination of **Matthew 21:23**, **Mark 11:27-28** and **Luke 20:1-2**, which says:

So [Jesus and His disciples] returned to Jerusalem. As Jesus was walking in the temple, teaching the people and announcing the good news, the chief priests, teachers of the law, and elders of the people approached [Jesus] and said, "Tell us by what authority You are doing these things. Who gave You such authority?"

The issue for the chief priests and teachers of the law is one of authority. The ceremonial leaders of the Jewish religion, as appointed by Moses, Aaron and the Temple hierarchy that developed over centuries of Judaism, were the chief priests, teachers of the law, and elders of the people. They considered themselves in charge of religion among the Jews, and felt about Jesus the same way that any pastor would feel if he prepared his lesson for Sunday, only to come to the pulpit to find out that his people had voted that someone else would give the lesson. 'Wait a minute', he might say, 'I'm the pastor. Who are you to tell anyone else that they can stand in my pulpit and preach unless I give them permission? I'm the pastor, this is my church, and I'm the only one who can approve preachers here.'

As a matter of fact, that's just exactly the way I feel. If the most scholarly preacher in the world were to come to the church this morning, he would have to listen to me, because I spent time preparing this message.

But, wait a minute. Let me think about that. You know, if I really have your best interests at heart, I should let this scholarly preacher preach, because it would certainly benefit you, and maybe even I can learn something that I need to know.

But although the Jewish religious leaders were afraid of Jesus, Jesus did not come to Jerusalem with the idea of taking over the responsibilities of the chief priests, teachers of the law, and elders of the people. There were many rabbis in many synagogues throughout Israel, and all of them were in Jerusalem for the Passover. As a matter of fact, the Passover was much like the National Baptist Convention, in which the President preaches the keynote sermon, the Dean of the Congress preaches at the Dean's convocation, but there are many preachers, from all around the country, preaching in various places at various times. Many churches in the city in which the convention is being held run revivals during the week of the Convention, because great preachers that are not on the agenda to speak in the convention are in town, and people want to hear them. During the week of the convention, you can hear preaching almost whenever you want to hear it somewhere in the convention city, and the Passover of the Jews was a similar situation.

So, once again, why did Jesus' preaching cause so much fury? **Mark 1:22** explains:
22 And they were astonished at [Jesus'] teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Jesus was a different type of teacher than your average intellectual educator. Jesus taught with the authority of God. For instance, Jesus taught, in **Mark 11:22-26**:

22 So Jesus answered and said to them, "Have faith in God.

23 For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.

24 Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.

25 "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.

26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

Jesus was not teaching the ceremonial law of Moses as were the scribes, but Jesus was teaching his disciples to wield the power of God. As **Mark 1:22** says, Jesus taught as one having authority. What does that mean? As **Matthew 21:14** records:

The blind and the lame came to [Jesus] in the temple, and He healed them all.

When Jesus did so, **Luke 4:36** records:

36 Then they were all amazed and spoke among themselves, saying, "What a word this is! For with authority and power [Jesus] commands the unclean spirits, and they come out."

When they challenged Jesus in **Matthew 21**, the chief priests, teachers of the law, and elders of the people asked the right question. Where did Jesus get this authority? Jesus came to town to teach, and He decided to teach them. But sometimes, the best way to teach is not by lecturing, but by asking questions, and Jesus decided to do so, in **Matthew 21:24-25**, which says:

"Let Me ask you a question first," Jesus said. "Answer Me, and I'll tell you by what authority I'm doing these things. The baptism of John—did it come from heaven or from men? Answer Me!"

This question is relevant because John the Baptist was the forerunner of Jesus Christ. Listen to John's sermon, as recorded in **Luke 3:7-14**

7 Then [John the Baptist] said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

8 Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

9 And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

10 So the people asked him, saying, "What shall we do then?"

11 He answered and said to them, "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise."

12 Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?"

13 And he said to them, “Collect no more than what is appointed for you.”

14 Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, “And what shall we do?” So he said to them, “Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages.”

John preached repentance. He told the Jews that relying on their heritage of being the seed of Abraham was an error, as the criterion for avoiding the wrath of God was not just being part of the tree of the lineage of Abraham, but was actually bearing fruit as did Abraham. John promoted sharing with neighbors and not being greedy for money as a sign of Godliness and as did Jesus, so he was not the favorite of the chief priests, teachers of the law, and elders of the people, but John's message was one with which it was difficult for a godly teacher to find fault. The Jewish religious leaders disliked John's preaching because he spotlighted their sin, but could not challenge John's message.

For the Jewish leaders, the problem with John the Baptist and Jesus Christ was their message. The Jewish religious leaders taught that to follow the ceremonial minutiae of the Mosaic Law was the greatest good, especially the part about paying tithes to support the descendents of Levi, which would benefit them. Jesus and John preached that displaying practical love for your neighbor by helping him, and not being greedy would lead to the power of God being displayed in the land, which Jesus actually displayed. Jesus and John challenged the Jewish leaders to actually do something to help the people, rather than just to collect their tithes and lead their ceremonies.

It is instructive that the Jewish leaders questioned the origin of Jesus' authority, because the Jewish leaders were all about authority. Their authority was a function of their ancestry, of their lineage. It offended them to hear someone preach or see someone wield the power of God that actually had moral authority, because moral authority spotlights the deficiencies in simply having ceremonial authority. Jesus had moral authority and Godly power, and the people paid Him homage by laying down their coats in the road when He came to town. Nobody cared about the Jewish leaders except on the ceremonially Holy Days in which they presided in the temple.

The difference between moral authority and ceremonial authority was clear to the Jewish leaders, as they showed in their deliberations about their answer to Jesus' question, in **Matthew 21:25-26**:

The [Jewish leaders] discussed it with each other and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He’ll say to us, ‘Then why didn’t you believe Him?’ But if we say, ‘From men,’ we are afraid of this crowd. The people will stone us because they’re convinced John was truly a prophet.”

This is the problem with the Jewish leaders, who had ceremonial authority but lacked moral authority. Without moral authority, the Jewish leaders did not stand on principle, but by determining the most expedient thing for themselves, whether their actions were principled or not. The Jewish leaders found themselves in conundrums, trying to choose between that which is morally correct and that which is most expedient for themselves, as in this case.

But, the characteristic of a person that is “filled with the Holy Spirit” is that moral principles are an absolute for them. People filled with the Holy Spirit do the moral thing regardless of the cost; they do the moral thing even if it causes them to lose their lives, which is why 1.8 million people took the moral high road and died for their testimony of the Christ in the

first three hundred years of the church's existence. People filled with the Holy Spirit can always determine the morally correct thing to do; they know that unsolvable debates between moral and immoral do not exist. They know that the reason that people decline to do the moral things is not because they can't figure the moral thing out; people decline to do the moral things because they do not want to suffer the consequences of taking the moral high road.

So the Jewish leaders give the answer that they most often give when faced with a moral dilemma that might actually cost them something to solve. **Matthew 21:27** records:

So they replied to Jesus, "We don't know."

Jesus answered them, "Then neither will I tell you by what authority I'm doing these things."

"I don't know" is a cop-out. Of course you know; you're the religious leader. You just don't want to answer because you know that to do so will make you look bad. Truth is not the issue for you, but the issue is how you look. So Jesus follows up on that thought in our text for today, **Matthew 21:28-32**:

28 "But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go, work today in my vineyard.'

29 He answered and said, 'I will not,' but afterward he regretted it and went.

30 Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I go, sir,' but he did not go.

31 Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said to [Jesus], "The first." Jesus said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you.

32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him.

Folk come to church and profess to be Christian. The real question is not whether or not you tell God that you are going to follow Him, but is whether or not you actually follow Him. Jesus says that the sinner that spends his time in the den of iniquity but helps his neighbor is closer to God than the person that spends all of his time in church but is too self-righteously focused on God and too removed from the problems of humanity that God sent us to address to actually help anybody. Being in the church will not save you unless you do that which God commands. We had already read that which John said, in **Luke 3:8-9**:

8 Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

9 And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

John preached that who your parents are is not the determinative factor. Who are parents doesn't matter, what church you go to doesn't matter, nor does any other intrinsic property of your life matter. What matters is how you live. What matters is how you display your love for the Lord by loving those whom He loves. That is why people that hang out in the bars may end up in heaven while the people that hang out in church may miss it. It's not where you hang out, but the kind of person that you are as you hang out there. Jesus Christ's preaching converted the

greedy tax collectors who took things for people by false accusation, and the disrespected harlots, who were sexually immoral, because these rank sinners repented of their sins of greed and sexual immorality. Jesus condemned the religious leaders because they refused to repent of their sins of greed and self-aggrandizement. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire, regardless of their ceremonial position.

The question is not; when your Heavenly Father asked you to go into the vineyard, did you tell Him that you would? The question is: when your Heavenly Father asked you to go into the vineyard, did you go?

John 3:16-17 tells us:

16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

It's not what Jesus Christ said; it what He did. He gave Himself, dying on the Old Rugged Cross to pay the penalty that we owe for the sins that we have committed, and, in so doing, giving us the gift of access to heaven. All of the preaching in the world would not have saved us if Jesus Christ had not acted on our behalf.

So as we contemplate the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the Cross of Calvary during this Holy Week, let us remember why Jesus Christ died. Jesus gave Himself on the Cross; He died to teach us that talk is not sufficient for Christians; we have to actually give something for the Kingdom. We have to start where we are, use what we have and give what we can. Jesus Christ lived a life of service, and, although we may not be able to heal the blind and the lame, we have the responsibility to do what we can. Convince people of the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, not by going to Church, but by living a Godly life.

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