

Week of March 26 – April 1

Jesus Enters Jerusalem (Mark 10:32-34; Luke 18:31-34)

The disciples were anxious as they neared Jerusalem, and Jesus took them aside to explain that everything the prophets had written about would be fulfilled. Jesus said, "I will be arrested and handed over to the chief priests and scribes who will condemn me to death and turn me over to the Gentiles to be crucified. I will be insulted, beat, and spit in my face before they execute me. But after three days, I will rise again." The disciples had no idea what he was talking about.

Zebedee's wife and her sons James and John met them along the way, and she asked Jesus, "Will you let my sons sit next to you when you become king? One on your right and the other on your left."

"You don't understand what you just asked," Jesus replied, "Do you think you can drink what I the bitter cup I drink? Or become part of what I am consumed in?" They replied they thought they could, but Jesus said, "Maybe you can drink from my cup and soak up what I am consumed with, but to sit on my right and left hands is not mine to promise. That is reserved for whom my father destines it."

When the others overheard the discussion, they were irritated at the two brothers. Jesus called them over and said, "Princes exercise authority over their subjects, but that's not how it should be with you. The more prominent one should give way to the lesser, and the greatest will be the one who serves everybody else. I didn't come to be served, but to serve, and to give my life for the sake of others."

Positions and rewards in the kingdom of Heaven are not granted in response to personal ambition or private requests, but for faithful service given to Jesus.

Blind Bartimaeus Receives Sight (Mark 10:35-52; Luke 18:35-43)

As they passed through Jericho, a crowd followed them. They encountered a blind beggar named Bartimaeus sitting beside the road with another blind man. When they realized Jesus was passing by, they cried out, "Lord Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us." The more the crowd tried to restrain them, the more passionately they pleaded. Jesus stopped and called the two over to him and asked what they wanted. "Open our eyes, Lord," they replied. So, Jesus touched their eyes and told them their faith had made them whole. Immediately they could see and joined the group as the crowd praised God.

Israel was spiritually blind and didn't recognize their need. So, they saw no reason to turn to Christ for help. He helped those who knew their need and turned to him for help.

The Salvation of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10)

A short man named Zacchaeus, who was wealthy through corrupt business practices wanted to see Jesus as he passed by, so he ran up the road and climbed a sycamore tree for a better view. When Jesus saw him and told him to get down because he wanted to stay at his house for a while, Zacchaeus hurried down and took him home for the day. But the people were offended because Zacchaeus wasn't well regarded. Zacchaeus vowed to Jesus to devote half of his possessions to the poor and make restitution fourfold to anyone of whom he had taken an unfair advantage. "Today, his house has been restored, for he, too, is a child of Abraham," Jesus told the crowd. I have come to find and restore that which was lost."

Zacchaeus was among those whom Jesus came to seek and to save. He was part of “what was lost.” The priests had not come to him to acknowledge their sin or to seek forgiveness. But Zacchaeus had come, and in response to his faith, he was forgiven.

Faithful Handling of the Lord’s Possessions (Luke 19:11-28)

As they passed on toward Jerusalem, Jesus told another story because he knew they expected him to impose his new kingdom immediately when they arrived. “A nobleman went to a distant land to be crowned as King. He called three servants and gave them \$1,000 each to take care of his affairs in his absence. But the people hated him and said they didn’t want him as their king.

When he returned as king, he called his servants to account for their \$1,000. The first said he had increased the amount ten times and returned the \$10,000 to his lord’s treasury. “Well done, good and faithful servant. I will give you ten cities to govern,” the king responded. The next one came and turned over \$5,000. The king was pleased and said, “Well done, good and faithful servant. I will give you five cities to govern.” The third came and returned the \$1,000 he had kept safely folded away in a towel, saying, “I was afraid to fail because you are a hard man to deal with, taking what isn’t yours and confiscating the crops of others. ‘Your own words betray you, you unworthy steward,’” the king responded. ‘If you know so much about me and how tough I am, why didn't you deposit the money in the bank so I could at least get some interest on it?’ He told the others to take his money and give it to the one who had returned \$10,000. ‘But Lord,’ they contended, ‘he already has a lot of money.’

“Everyone who does well with what he had been given will be given more. But the ones who don’t contribute will lose even what they have been given. Now take those enemies of mine who revolted, bring them in, and execute them before me,” the king replied.

Jesus is teaching that he has the right to rule but would be absent from the place over which he was appointed to rule. Those over whom he has a right to rule would rebel against him and reject him. Some would claim to be his disciples and were entrusted to be stewards. For those who proved to be good stewards by their faithfulness, they would be rewarded with positions of authority in his kingdom. The unfaithful would be cut off from the kingdom. Israel was appointed as the king’s stewards but proved to be unfaithful.

Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1-17; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:29-44)

As Jesus neared Jerusalem, he paused at the olive orchard in Bethphage and sent two of his disciples to find a donkey with a young colt that had never been ridden. They were to untie the colt and bring it to him, fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy, “Tell the citizens of Zion their King is coming seated on the back of a mule.” When the disciples saw the animals as Jesus had described, they started to untie the colt. When asked what they were doing, they said that their master needed him, and they let them go without further question.

They spread coats over the mule, and Jesus mounted her back. Proceeding along the way, the crowd laid their garments or cut branches off palm trees, making a path into the city. Approaching the city gate, masses of people followed along shouting, “Honor the approaching heir of David, who comes with the authority of the Lord. Show him the utmost respect.”

The entire city was astir as word spread quickly that Jesus from Nazareth was on his way to the Temple. Those who had seen Lazarus raised confirmed it was him. Jesus looked at the crowd and wept over the city, saying, “If you only knew what this day means and what lies in store for

you, but you can't imagine. Your enemies will surround you and slay you and destroy your community because you didn't realize the significance of what is happening."

Jesus entered Jerusalem on the appointed day to bring peace to the nation. It was his official presentation of Himself as Messiah to Israel. He had been identified as Messiah at his baptism by John the Baptist, authenticated as Messiah at his temptation in the wilderness, his glory revealed at his transfiguration before Peter, James, and John, but it was at his triumphal entry that Jesus made an official presentation of Himself as Messiah to the nation. That's why Jesus wept over the city because the people wouldn't receive the blessings he had come to provide for them. Judgment would come instead when Jerusalem would be attacked and destroyed along with its people "because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

Cursing the Fig Tree with Leaves but no Figs (Matthew 21:18-19; Mark 11:12-14)

He got hungry on his way to the city the next morning, so he approached a seemingly healthy fig tree along the way only to see it had no fruit. He said, "No one will ever eat your fruit again," he said to the tree as his disciples looked on. And he went on his way.

Second Cleansing of the Temple (Matthew 21:12-14; Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45-46)

When they got to the Temple, Jesus started running off those who were buying and selling as he had done before. He overturned the moneychangers' tables and knocked down the booths where doves were being sold, saying, "My father's house is supposed to be a house of prayer, but you have turned it into a den of thieves." He prevented anyone from carrying merchandise into or out of the Temple. The leaders feared him, and the chief priests and scribes resolved to kill him since the masses rallied behind him. They couldn't get to him because he was always surrounded by supporters who were clinging to his every word. Jesus returned to Bethany, where he spent that night.

Lesson on Faith about the Withered Fig Tree (Matthew 21:19-22; Mark 11:20-26)

The next morning, they saw the dried-up fig tree and marveled it could wither so quickly. When Peter mentioned it, Jesus said, "If you have faith and don't doubt, you can do things like this and more. You can even say to this Mount of Olives, 'Move over into the ocean,' and it will. You can get anything you ask for in prayer if you believe. And if you do pray, first, you must forgive everyone who has wronged you so your father in Heaven might forgive you. If you don't forgive, your father won't release you from your sins."

The sudden withering of the fig tree revealed that the judgment pronounced on that generation would come quickly and suddenly. Israel would be brought under judgment because of their lack of faith.

Questioning Jesus' Authority by the Leaders (Matthew 21:23-27; Mark 11:27-33; Luke 20:1-8)

When Jesus returned to the Temple, the chief priests and elders asked him by what authority he presumed to do what he was doing and who gave him such authority. "Give me a straight answer to one question, and I will gladly answer your question," Jesus responded. "On what authority did John baptize? Did God inspire him, or was he just a common man doing what he believed in?"

The Jews felt trapped. If they said God inspired John, he would ask why they didn't support him. If they said he was not, they feared the crowd would turn on them and stone them since almost

everyone thought John was a prophet. So, they couldn't give him an answer. "Well then," Jesus said, "neither can I give you an answer."

Jesus' Response in Parables (Matthew 21:28-22:14; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19)

Jesus then shared a story about a man who had two sons. The man asked his first son to work in the vineyard, but after initially refusing, he relented and did what his father wanted. The second son eagerly agreed, but never showed up. "Which of the two did the will of his father?" Jesus asked. They agreed the first son had done his father's will. Jesus added, "Surely evil men and prostitutes will get into Heaven before you. John told you to repent and turn to God, and you wouldn't, while very evil men and prostitutes did. And, even while you saw this happening, you refused to repent, and so you couldn't believe."

The Pharisees claimed they were sons of the kingdom because of their father, Abraham. But Christ taught that sonship must be tested by obedience, and only the obedient are sons.

"There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, fenced it, built a winepress, and put a storage tank in it. Then he hired laborers to tend to it when he went away. At harvest time, he sent his servants to collect the fruit it produced, but the laborers beat one up and sent him away empty-handed. They killed another and stoned yet another. He sent other servants, and they all got the same treatment. Finally, he said, 'I will send my son. Surely they will show him respect.' But when the son arrived, they said, 'This is the only heir. Let's kill him and take his inheritance.' So, they murdered him. What do you suppose the landowner intends to do when he confronts those laborers?"

"Surely, he will slaughter those evil men and hire more reliable men to take their place," they responded. Jesus said, "Haven't you read the scriptures, 'The stone the builders rejected is to be used as the cornerstone?' This was always God's plan, and we marvel at it. Therefore, oversight of God's kingdom will be taken from you and given to those who provide its fruits to God. Whoever objects will be broken, and whoever resists will be ground to powder." They all knew Jesus was talking to the chief priests and Pharisees. So, they left him alone and went on their way.

The chief priests and Pharisees clearly understood that Jesus was pronouncing judgment on them. So, to avoid the impending judgment, they looked for a way to arrest him. But they were afraid to proceed openly because the people believed that Jesus was "a prophet" from God.