

Logan Smith  
Bread of Life Baptist Church  
August 6th, 2021

### **Matthew 21:1 - 27**

#### **Who Jesus Is and What That Means for Us**

You're hard at work doing something, when someone walks in the room and tells you to immediately stop what you're doing, that you're doing it all wrong, and you need to do it their way instead. Now, I'd wager that none of us would feel particularly happen about someone speaking that way to us, would we? But the *identity* of that person makes all the difference in how you will respond, doesn't it? The way we would respond depends completely upon *who it is* and why they think they have the authority to speak to us that way.

So let's say it's your employee who rudely accused you of doing your job wrong and that they know better - we all know that for them to do so would be highly inappropriate; they have no right or authority to do such a thing. But now imagine you're the employee, hard at work on a project, when your boss, the owner of the company walks in and tells you to stop what you're doing and change it completely. How do you respond to him? YOU can't dismiss or rebuke him like you would an out-of-line employee. If you value your job, you'll listen to him. Why? *Because he has authority in your workplace, and over the work you do on the job, since he's your boss and he's paying you.* So you'll probably listen and do what he says.

The way we respond to someone greatly depends on who that person is and what authority they have. So what if the person you're responding to is the President of the United States? Better yet, what if he is your King with unilateral power and authority over you, so that your life literally lies in his hand? Better yet still: what if the person speaking to you with authority is God Himself, so that your very *soul* literally lies in His hand? How will you respond then?

This is no merely hypothetical question for you this morning. This is a real-life, pressing question hanging over your head, right now, right this instant: *Jesus Christ demands to have complete authority over your life, every part of it.* He demands that you stop living for yourself. He demands that you stop living for sin. He demands that you stop following after the desires and idols of your flesh, the culture, and the world around you. He demands that you give up being the King or Queen of your life. He demands that you bow the knee and let Jesus Christ, the God-King, reign on the throne of your heart. So how will you respond?

That's the question before every person in this world. And that's the very question on full display here in our text, *Matthew 21:1-27*. As Jesus arrives in Jerusalem, He overtly displays his identity and authority. We see, very clearly presented here, that Jesus is the Messiah, God's promised King, the Son of David. We also see the Jesus is truly God, greater than the Temple of Jerusalem or the authority of the priests because His Word is the infallible, fully authoritative Word of God Himself! Yet, the religious leaders do not believe and they challenge His authority. And so, Jesus, the God-King, gives an ultimatum: we can either reject His authority and face the curse of GOD's wrath and judgment, or we can recognize who He is and respond in faith. Leaving each one of us with the question: how will you respond to Jesus?

So those are the main points of this passage: Matthew shows us *who Jesus is* and *why that matters for us* - in other words, how we should respond in light of the identity and authority of Jesus. So that's what I want us to see in this sermon today: the first two points draw out what the text tells us about who Jesus is, the last one about how we should respond to Him.

### **I. Who is Jesus? The Son of David, God's Promised King (21:1-11)**

All throughout the book of Matthew, we have seen Jesus talking about the Kingdom of God. His mission has been directed towards bringing about God's Kingdom, and now Jesus has *finally arrived* in Jerusalem, the City of David, the city of the King. And while Jesus has spoken somewhat cryptically, using parables and only telling certain people that He is the Messiah, even forbidding those he heals at times from sharing broadly who He is - now the time for subtlety has ended, and the time to publicly reveal His identity has arrived! In verses 1-11, Jesus is making it painstakingly clear: He is announcing to Jerusalem (and Matthew is announcing to us) that Jesus is the Son of David - the promised Davidic King - coming into the City of David, Jerusalem.

As Jesus approaches Jerusalem, he has two disciples go and fetch two donkeys, and namely, a colt, never ridden before, for him to ride on as he approaches and enters Jerusalem. *Verses 4-5* tell us why Jesus does this by quoting Old Testament scripture: "This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, 'Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'" Matthew is quoting **Zechariah 9:9**, an explicitly messianic prophecy in which GOD promised to bring salvation to His people through the promised king. The Old Testament builds a prominent theme of a coming Messiah, GOD's promised King who would come from the line of David and

reign as a righteous King over God's people forever, bringing about salvation and deliverance for them, bringing judgment to the enemies of God's people in victory, and establishing His kingdom over the whole earth. We see GOD make this covenantal promise to David in **2 Sam. 7**. We see this brought up over and over again in the prophets, in such places as Zech. 9.

And here we see Jesus *deliberately fulfilling* this direct prophecy. Why does he do so? *Because He is officially and publicly proclaiming: "I am the Messiah. I am the promised Son of David, God's promised Savior and King."* This is a big moment! So big, so explicit, that His disciples and the crowds of pilgrims around him don't miss it. In verses 7-11, we see the crowds all getting the picture: they recognize that Jesus is boldly declaring and revealing Himself as GOD's promised messianic King who has finally come to usher in His kingdom. As he sits on the donkey, reminiscent of King David entering the city of Jerusalem in victory centuries before (cf. *2 Sam. 19-20*), the crowds catch on; they form a royal processional before him, laying down their cloak and palm branches on the road. They start crying out, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" They are shouting as praises to Jesus, as the King, and praises to God!

The time of subtlety and vague allusion to His messianic identity is over; Jesus is loudly proclaiming is self-identification as the Messianic King, the true Son of David! Make no mistake: *Jesus boldly claimed to be God's promised, Messianic King. He is the true King of Israel, the Messiah and Davidic King they longed for.* In fact, He is the true King and Savior over all the earth! God's promises never fail: King Jesus has come, to usher in His Kingdom, bringing salvation to His people!

After Jesus enters the city, we see another further display of who He is and just how great His authority is. This brings us to point number 2.

## **II. Who is Jesus? The Authoritative God of All (21:12-17, 23-27)**

Next, we see Jesus's authority on display - not only as the messianic, Davidic King, but also the *Messianic divine Son of GOD* - the Lord GOD Himself, in the flesh!

In verses 12-17, right after Jesus comes into the city, he enters the temple. If we were not so familiar with this story of what follows, it would probably be shocking to us: Jesus walks in to the temple drives people out, overturning tables and whipping up animals and people alike into a frenzy!

The scene deserves some context and unpacking: the temple was the center of God's covenantal people and the Old Covenant sacrificial system; it represented God's presence among His people, His promises to be their God and redeem them, and their ability to commune with God, know Him, worship, obey, and pray to Him. It was meant to be a *clean and pure* place, symbolizing and representing God's holiness; it was meant to be a reverent house of the Lord. And this outer court in particular was meant to be a place that all people - Jews and Gentiles alike - could come and gather to *pray to the Lord* and worship Him, as they sought to obey Him, follow His Law, and seek redemption through the blood of sacrifices. As Jesus says in verse 13, quoting Isa. 56:7, "My house shall be called a house of prayer." And yet, that is not what Jesus found the temple to be: instead, he called it a "den of robbers."

This outer court had become not a house of prayer, but a *marketplace* full of loud haggling, animals, and money-changers - most likely even greedy exploitation and corruption. Now, the trade going on there was not in itself necessarily a bad thing; it was established so that pilgrims coming to the temple from afar could buy animals to use for their sacrifices to God, under the Old Covenant. If you're a pilgrim traveling for several days from Northern Israel to make a sacrifice at the temple, you might not have the appropriate animal, and if you do, you don't want to drag it along with you! And so, you can buy the right ones, that have already been approved by the priests, at the temples. This is why the money-changers were here as well.

The problem, however, is *where* it was taking place. It was not supposed to happen inside the Temple Courts themselves - but that is exactly what had happened; they had (relevantly recently) moved the animal trade and money changers *inside* the temple courts, into the area that non-Jews, Gentiles, and God-fearers could come. This area was supposed to be a holy place, a *house of prayer* for the nations (Jews and Gentiles alike, all who would come to the Lord to worship Him). But instead, the temple priests and authorities had allowed it to become a "den of robbers," a place focused on making money for man rather than praying and worshipping God.

So He cleansed the temple by "overturning the tables of the money-changers" and "driving out" the animals, the sellers, and the buyers alike, emphasizing the importance of the Temple's *holiness and purity*.

A day or so later, when Jesus is back in the temple, the religious leaders confront him about this dramatic act in vv. 23-27. In v.23 they ask, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" In other words, their saying, "Who do you think you

are, shaking up things like this, making such bold claims and telling us we're doing everything wrong?"

Jesus recognizes that they aren't asking from a place of genuine faith in God seeking the truth; he recognizes their hardness of heart, that they have already rejected Him and God's promises. So he responds in a brilliant way. To paraphrase his response, in vv. 24-27, he asks in turn: where did John the Baptist's message come from? From heaven or man? But the scribes don't want to answer this question. They huddle together, whispering, saying, "If we say from man, the people will get angry because they believe he was a prophet. But if we say from heaven, that makes us look like hypocrites, because we didn't accept John either!" And so they cleverly say, "We don't know!" Like classic politicians, they just refuse to answer. So Jesus tells them he won't answer either - but that's because He's already made his point, and his answer, very clear. His authority comes from Heaven.

In fact, Jesus has this authority because *He Himself is God!* We see this explicitly in vv.15-17. Children were praising Jesus as the Davidic King, after seeing him perform miracles in the temple. But the priests and scribes did *not* respond rightly: they were "*indignant.*" They scoffed at the kids and looked to Jesus, asking, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And, implied, saying, "What are you going to do about it? Aren't you going to stop them?" They still don't believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah, God's promised King.

But Jesus doesn't rebuke the children; far from it, he rebukes the chief priests and scribes - the religious leaders. He responds by saying he does indeed hear what they are saying - and says, by implication, that *they are right*. It is absolutely right for them to praise Him as the Messiah, the Son of David, because that's exactly who He is. And he says this by even quoting scripture. But when He does so, he actually *ups the ante*; the scripture He quotes proves that what the children are doing actually even shows a *greater reality*.

He says, "Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise?'" (v.16) On one level, this justifies the children praising Him because if, after all, scripture warrants even baby infants to praise God, then how much more so older children - indeed all people of any age? But quickly we see the argument escalate - **Psalm 8** is not talking about the Messiah or a human King, but *God*; in verse 2, babies and infants are praying *God Himself*, as all of creation is meant to do so. In quoting Psalm 8:2, and applying it to

these children praising Jesus, He is saying that they are fulfilling Psalm 8 because when they are praising Jesus *they are actually praising God Himself!*

This is a bold claim of divinity. Jesus is saying it is right for these children to do so and quotes a Psalm speaking of worship of God. No one deserves worship and praise but God - and Jesus claims to be worthy of worship and praise, because *He is, in fact, God!* He is the GOD-Man. He is truly and fully human, and so rightly claims to be the very human Messianic King, the promised Son of David. But He is also *truly and fully God*. This is where His power and authority comes from!

Jesus's authority comes from heaven because *He is God*. He is God the Son - the Temple belongs to God, it is His house, and therefore, belongs to Jesus; He has authority to "clean house." Jesus is the true Temple. The tabernacle and temple were always meant to signify the Lord dwelling among His covenant people. But something greater than the Temple has now come (Matt. 12:6): *Jesus is God dwelling as a man*. He is the God-Man. He is God come to Earth, as a man, to dwell among His people - really, fully, and perfectly. And even more than this, He didn't just come down - He came down in order to *draw us, His people*, close to Himself, and bring us *back up with Him* to dwell in GOD's place forever - the true Holy of Holies!

Therefore, His authority cannot be questioned - that is the response of unbelief, and it leads to judgment. Instead, it calls for *faith*.

### **III. What Does This Mean for Us? We Must Believe and Obey Him or We Will Face His Judgment (21:18-22)**

Jesus, as the God-man, the promised Messiah, Savior, and King, has *all authority*. And He demands that His Word - the very Word of God - be believed and obeyed. There is no middle ground. This is the point of vv.18-22.

This scene comes right after the cleansing of the temple and right before Jesus is back in the temple being challenged by the priests and scribes; in this scene might seem a little strange to us at first. In vv. 18-19, we see Jesus on his commute back to Jerusalem from the nearby town of Bethany, where he was staying. He's hungry, and sees a fig tree covered in leaves, so he walks over to eat some figs for breakfast; but when he saw that there weren't any figs, he cursed the tree, causing it to wither up and die.

So here's what's going on: It's not the season for figs; Mark explicitly states this in the parallel passage (Mk. 11:13). It's right before Passover, in early Spring, when fig leaves typically started to grow their leaves back, but not yet grow any fruit. By late Spring/early summer, the trees had a full covering of leaves and were already producing fruit - small figs, not fully ripe, but they were edible, especially when someone was hungry and traveling (as Jesus was). Despite the time of year, this fig tree had already sprouted leaves, which it's only supposed to do when it was bearing fruit. But when Jesus looked closer, it became disappointingly clear: despite its leaves, it had no fruit. In other words, it was announcing publicly and from a distance: I'm bearing fruit! UNTil closer inspection reveals otherwise, leaving the hungry man disappointed.

Jesus's point is: this is exactly how He has found Jerusalem. The great city of David proclaims to believe in God's promises of a messiah, but now that Jesus, the true King, has arrived, they don't believe in Him. THE religious leaders and the city as a whole give the appearance (from afar) of being very religious, fearing God and wanting to obey Him! But upon closer inspection, they don't truly have faith in God's Word or want to obey Him. They disobey the Word of God and reject His promises by not obeying Jesus's Word, by rejecting and disbelieving His messianic and divine authority.

In other words, they are just like the fig tree: they look good on the outside, they give the appearance of faith and obedience to God - but inside, they have no faith. And this can be seen because, upon close inspection, they *don't have any real fruit on the outside, either.*

Those who do not "bear fruit" - who do not obey because they do not believe - will face the judgment and wrath of God, just like the tree was cursed. Alternatively, the following verses (vv. 20-22) show what our response *should* be instead: **faith.**

So the main point of it is that we must respond to Jesus's identity and authority as God and King by *trusting him with genuine faith.* And it teaches us two lessons about faith:

First, that true faith produces *obedient fruit.* If we truly believe in Jesus Christ and trust in the gospel by faith, then we must *obey the word of God.* If we claim to believe but do not repent or obey at all, we're like a tree with leaves but no fruit. But if we do believe, then it will be backed up by the fruits of repentance and obedience in our lives.

Secondly, we see that genuine faith in the Word and promises of God *produces faithful prayers to GOD,* trusting and praying according to His Will, perfectly confident that the Lord will

answer such prayers of faith in Him and His Word. That's what we see in vv.20-22, where Jesus speaks of praying with faith, and not doubting, we receive whatever we ask.

Now, the point of these verses is *not* that we will get whatever we pray for *so long as we can drum up enough faith, positive thinking, or willpower in ourselves*. There are several things wrong with this: 1. We are never told that we will get whatever we ask for, without any bounds or limits - such promises are conditional, requiring that we are praying *according to God's will, as revealed in His Word, the Bible*. 2. The power of prayer doesn't come from us - it comes from GOD. It doesn't come from positive thinking or just "believing in ourselves" or simply having enough vague "faith" that if we believe hard enough, hope enough, and try hard enough, we'll get what we hope for. But that's simply unbiblical and ungodly thinking. We're never exhorted to have a vague sense of faith. Biblical faith is never defined as "positive thinking." Nor is biblical faith ever defined as *believing in ourselves*. Many prosperity gospel false teachers abuse such verses as this to say that we just simply have to drum up enough faith - that the problem is us, the power comes from us, and whether or not our prayers are answered depends on how much *faith* is *inside of us*. But that's just a gross misinterpretation of the text.

Biblical faith is always to be grounded in God, who He is, what He has said, promised, and done! Our faith is to be found *in Jesus Christ; believing in the Gospel and trusting in the Word and promises of God!* THAT's what we're exhorted to here. And just as our fruit of obedience reveals genuine faith, so also do our *prayers*. Genuine faith is a *praying faith*. When we truly have faith in Christ, believe the gospel, and trust GOD's Word, it leads us to come to God in prayer, praying bold prayers of faith *based on His Word, according to His promises and Will*. Such faith prays *without any doubt* because we're not trusting in ourselves or wishful thinking - we're trusting in the unfailing Word of God. Therefore, we're promised that if we pray *with faith, according to the Will of GOD as revealed in His Word*, then such prayers cannot fail.

So here's a summary for us: the whole thrust of these verses is to emphasize the importance of *faith*. We must respond to who Jesus is and the Word of God by *believing and trusting in Him*. And if we do so, the fruit of faithful obedience and faithful prayer will surely follow. The fruit of our lives - even our prayer lives - reveals the inner state of our hearts.

So those who do not believe and obey face God's judgment, while those who do believe, expressed in the fruit of obeying GOD's Word and praying according to GOD's Will, are blessed

as GOD's Word is fulfilled in our lives. Therefore, we must examine our hearts and lives. True faith is *repentant and obedient*. We must always beware a mere *profession* of faith without *genuine faith* in our hearts. And a sure sign of such hypocritical faith is a *fruitless life*. We have already seen the incredible authority of Jesus- both as the promised, Messianic King, and as God Himself! Therefore, He demands that we *obey Him*. This is a sure test of true faith: if we truly believe in Christ Jesus - if we truly trust Him as our only Savior, as the God-King over all, and as our personal Lord, then we must *obey Him*. True faith always bears fruit. We are not *saved* by our obedience; we are saved by faith alone - by trusting in the finished work of Christ, His perfect life, death, and resurrection in our place, alone! But such true faith is never alone. True faith is an obedient faith. Genuine faith in Christ *obeys the Word of Christ*. Not perfectly - but genuinely. It doesn't just profess faith with the lips - it displays it in a fruitful life.

Do you claim to be a CHristian? Do you claim to trust in Christ as your Lord and Savior this morning? I hope and pray you do! But even more importantly: do you truly believe Him in your heart? And does your life reflect such faith? Or do you merely claim to have faith while bearing no fruit? Are you bearing fruit in your life by obeying the Word of God - the Bible - and following Christ in all things? Are you confessing and repenting of your sins, trusting in God's grace for obedience because of the gospel, and striving to obey Him in all things? I hope and pray that that's the case for each and every one of us this morning!

If it is, let us continue to believe in the gospel of Christ by faithfully worshipping God, praying to Him with full faith in His promises, and obeying Him because we believe Jesus truly is the God-Man, our savior, and the King over our lives!

But if that's not true of you this morning, or if it hasn't been, here's the *good news*: it can be! Right now! All you have to do is see who Jesus is and *believe!* Believe that Jesus is the God-Man, the true King of all who came and lived a perfect life in your place, died for your sins, and was raised from the grave on the third day in victory! Simply *pray* with faith, and God's promise of salvation will be yours! Simply trust in Jesus and follow Him! And then make your faith public by being baptized and joining a gospel preaching church!

If you have any questions about that, or if you are already a Christian and are interested in church membership, I would love to speak with you; you can come now or you can find me after the service. Let us pray.