

When Hosanna Got Hot!

Matthew 20:29-21:22

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29 And as they went out of Jericho, a great crowd followed him. 30 And behold, there were two blind men sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" 31 The crowd rebuked them, telling them to be silent, but they cried out all the more, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" 32 And stopping, Jesus called them and said, "What do you want me to do for you?" 33 They said to him, "Lord, let our eyes be opened." 34 And Jesus in pity touched their eyes, and immediately they recovered their sight and followed him.

21 Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once." 4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, 5 "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'"

6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. 7 They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. 8 Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" 10 And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" 11 And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

12 And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. 13 He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."

14 And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. 15 But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant, 16 and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read: "'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise?'" 17 And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there.

18 In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he became hungry. 19 And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he went to it and found nothing on it but only leaves. And he said to it, "May no fruit ever come from you again!" And the fig tree withered at once. 20 When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree wither at once?" 21 And Jesus answered them, "Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' it will happen. 22 And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith." (Matt 20:29-21:22).

Last week we learned about the upside-down logic of Jesus. We discovered that Jesus calls his followers to a life that is often opposite of how our world operates. We saw this in regards to what is fair, what victory looks like, and what true authority is all about. The big picture lesson from last week is simply that you've got to be careful that you not miss what Jesus is saying because it is so different than what is normal.

However, the key to this section of Matthew is not just understanding his teaching; you also have to understand who Jesus is and what he is like. You've got to understand what moves his heart in compassion, what brings him to tears, and even what makes him upset.

Many people dangerously develop an image of Jesus that only shows one aspect of his nature. They see him as a compassionate healer, a lover of children, or a friend of sinners. But there is another side. In fact, Jesus was righteously angry. There were times when he got hot! And this is important to realize because while it is very true that he is full of compassion, gracious, and a forgiver of sins; it is also true that he is and will be the judge world, vindicating the name of God against the offense of sin. He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. That reality is hopeful to those who know him personally, but it should be fearful to those who are his enemies.

So the questions we are looking at today are: what made Jesus hot and what does it tell us about him? We're going to see this in four snapshots:

The Mercy Giver

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem where the drama of his passion will play out. Matthew will begin to increase the intensity of encounters with Jesus as he makes his way toward his divine destiny. Verse 29 tells us that he left Jericho with a great crowd that was following him. The road to Jerusalem was a 15 mile walk, uphill, and ascended about 3,500 feet.¹ That is why there are Psalms of Ascents (Ps 120-134). They were sung as people traveled up to the temple mount. Since this was a familiar road for many religious people, there were often disabled people who would ask travelers and pilgrims for help.

Two blind men were sitting along the road when they heard that Jesus was coming their direction. Therefore they began shouting, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" The combination of these words in Matthew's gospel is code for belief that Jesus is the Messiah (see Matthew 1:1). So these two men cry out in faith for Jesus to have mercy – divine favor, grace, and compassion – on them. They sat along the road because they needed help, and they believed that Jesus could help them.

The crowd (likely Jesus's followers – how ironic!) told them that they needed to be quiet. Apparently their need and desperation was disruptive to their procession. But the men would

¹ David Turner, Matthew – Baker Exegetical Commentary, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Publishing, 2008), 491.

not stop. Their need for mercy eclipsed the embarrassment of what others would think about them, and they began to cry out even louder with the same petition – “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David.”

In verse 32 we see that Jesus stops and asks them, “What do you want me to do for you?” Isn’t it interesting that Jesus asked them this question. After all, it would have been fairly obvious what their need was. So why did he ask them this question?

Once again we see Jesus pulling out and revealing the faith of those who would receive his healing. He could heal them without their willing participation, but Jesus is not on the earth just to heal people. His healing ministry serves a bigger purpose: to demonstrate who he is and how worthy he is to be trusted. Based upon their response – “Lord, let our eyes be opened” – Jesus “in pity touched their eyes.” Immediately they were healed, and they followed Jesus.

We see here a beautiful portrait of Jesus as the mercy giver who brings healing to people in response to their faith in him. Jesus is full of compassion, full of power, and those who trust him and believe in him experience the beauty of what he can do. Jesus is ready to give mercy to those who believe that he can help them.

The Humble King

The next scene is often called the Triumphal Entry or Palm Sunday. It is the story of the way in which Jesus enters the city of Jerusalem a week before his crucifixion. It marks the beginning of what is traditionally called Holy Week, and it is an important moment in the life of Jesus.

We learn that Jesus sent two of his disciples ahead of him to secure a donkey and a colt. However, the real point is the fulfillment of a prophecy in Zechariah 9:9 which Matthew quotes: “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden’” (21:5). The point of this prophecy was that their King was going to be marked by humility. Kings did not ride anywhere on a donkey since a donkey was a farm animal. It would be like the president being transported on Inauguration Day on a farm tractor or a riding lawnmower. It would be so ridiculous that you might even smile or even be embarrassed. But Jesus is not the kind of King that most people expected.

The crowds responded to Jesus’s entrance with great enthusiasm. Regardless of his means of entering the city, they believe that their deliverer has come. Now most of them believe that Jesus is coming to give them what they want. They are looking for healing, freedom from Roman tyranny, and the restoration of the national identity of Israel. Therefore they cry out, “Hosanna (save now!) to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” (v 9). Their statement is an enthusiastic cry for deliverance, divine

destiny, and conquering power. They certainly do not fully understand what they are saying or the implications of what is going on here. All they know is that a prophet from Galilee has entered the city, and they are hoping that he'll restore their national pride.

The crowd and noise swelled to such an extent that "the whole city was stirred up." (v 10) Jerusalem was large, but the news of Jesus's entrance causes the city to ask who this is.

This remarkable moment shows us the incredible contrast between people's perception of Jesus versus whom he really is. The crowds were enthralled with Jesus when they thought that he was going to give them what they wanted. And in just a week the entire situation will dramatically change. They were really crying out, "Blessed is he who comes to give me what I want."

This is often the problem with people and Jesus. Many people follow him because of what they think he will give them. They come to Jesus because he will make them happy, fix what is wrong, bring them blessings, or make them whole. And while Jesus can do all of that, the real issue is whether or not Jesus is accepted for who he really is: Lord. In some cases people do not really even know what they are saying about Jesus.

To receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior not only means that he has saved you from your sins; it also means that he comes to take over your life. It means that you are no longer in control of your life or your future. It means that Jesus has the right to rule your life. You are saved by letting go of your agenda. You have to let Jesus be Jesus. In order for Jesus to be your hope you have to let him define the future and the path to get there.

The Purifier

It is not uncommon for people to think of Jesus as a mercy giver and a humble king, but often they miss another dynamic of who Jesus is. Verses 12-17 give us a picture of Jesus as the purifier when he cleanses the temple.

The temple area was the scene for this telling event in Jesus's life. Herod the Great had expanded the temple mount to a space the equivalent of 35 football fields.² There were four courts that were restricted to particular people: the inner court or the temple proper was only accessible by the priests, the Court of the Israelites where the sacrifices were offered, the Court of Women where all Jews could enter, and finally the Court of the Gentiles. It is likely that it was in the Court of Gentiles where this incident took place.

Worship at the temple involved many people coming from all over the known world, and it was big business. Apparently the Court of the Gentiles became a place for currency exchange and a

² Turner, 499

place to purchase sacrificial animals. It was considered offensive for pilgrims to donate to the temple with a currency that had a foreign inscription on it, and many travelers were not able to bring their sacrificial animals with them. Therefore, the exchange of money and the purchase of animals was a major activity in the temple mount. This was, at one level, a helpful service to those coming to worship.

However, Jesus takes this practice to task. Verse 12 says that he “drove out all who sold and bought in the temple.” He over-turned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. This would have involved an aggressive display of righteous anger. What is the problem here?

We get a clue from verse 13 and from what happens afterwards. Jesus interpreted his actions through the quotation of Isaiah 56:7 – “My house shall be called a house of prayer but you make it a den of robbers.” It seems that Jesus is upset because the environment of the temple was no longer about worship; it was about the business of worship. Imagine what the Court of Gentiles would have been like with all the currency exchange, the animals, and the traffic. And in the midst of this loud, commercial activity people were trying to worship. Additionally since Jesus used the phrase “den of robbers” there must have some kind of dishonesty taking place. The people had made the temple mount a place heart-less, commercialized worship. They had added so much support to worship that they neglected the very heart of worship.

So when (v 14) Jesus begins healing the blind and the lame and when children begin crying out, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” the religious leaders become indignant. Jesus had caused quite a stir! He had attracted a large crowd upon his entrance into city, disrupted the lucrative commercial activity in the temple, and now he was doing miracles and receiving praise from children on the most sacred ground in their nation. Don’t miss the spiritual irony here! The religious rulers are annoyed by all the wrong things. They were not put off by the distracting and unscrupulous traders that were complicating true worship, but they were put off by Jesus, the miracles that he did and the praise he received.

It happens so often that religious people in their expression of religion neglect the essence of what real religion is. Listen to what Isaiah 1 says about this:

11 "What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. 12 "When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? 13 Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.14 Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.15 When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. 16 Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, 17 learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring

justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause. 18 "Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. (Isa 1:11-18)

Jesus aims to purify the worship of the one true God, and it is remarkable and a bit frightening that it is often the most religious who miss the heart of what true religion is all about. Jesus got hot when God's people are so busy in the preparation and production of worship that they miss the purpose of worship – to meet with God. Jesus wants to purify our worship, and he is willing to turn over the tables of our lives to get us there.

The Judge

Finally we see yet another side of Jesus, and this one makes us a bit uncomfortable. Verse 18 tells us that Jesus, on his way back to the city the next morning, walked by a fig tree. He was hungry so he walked up to the fig tree for a closer look only to find that the tree had no figs but only leaves. And in response to this fruitless tree, Jesus cursed it saying, "May no fruit ever come from you again." Right before their eyes, the fig tree withered. This must have been a stunning parable for the disciples.

It is a remarkable picture first of all as to who Jesus is. He is hungry which shows us clearly his full humanity. But there is more here than just hunger. Jesus's power is on full display. To merely speak to a fig tree and then to see it wither would surely show you that Jesus is so much more than just a man on the earth. He is God in the flesh, and he has the power to judge.

So what is the lesson in the fig tree? It seems that Jesus uses this moment to reinforce his disdain for religious fakery. The tree gave every outward sign of bearing fruit but it actually bore none.³ D.A. Carson says, "Its leaves advertised that it was bearing, but the advertisement was false." There are few things that incite the judgment and wrath of God than religious pretense. Chapter 23 will feature a series of "Woes" to the Scribes and Pharisees for their spiritual pomposity. For now we just see very clearly that it is this condition, pictured in the fig tree that prompts the judgment of Jesus.

It reminds me of what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. Notice the parallels:

16 You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?
17 So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. 18 A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. 21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will

³ Leon Morris, The Gospel According to Matthew, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1992), 530.

of my Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' 23 And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness' (Matt 7:16-23).

The passage concludes with the disciples being amazed (and probably afraid) at what just happened. They asked Jesus how the fig tree withered at once. Jesus's answer highlights the primacy of genuine faith and trust in God. Fakery and fraudulence have no place in Christ's kingdom; faith is what wins the day.

21 And Jesus answered them, "Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' it will happen. 22 And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith. (Matt 21:21-22).

It is faith that works in Christ's kingdom. Standing before Christ at the ultimate judgment day, the only answer that will save your soul from the consequences of your sin is that you have placed your faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. And the way that you live your life after that is to continually live by faith in what Jesus can do.

How We Need to See Jesus

It is eternally important that everyone understands who Jesus really is. We have to see him clearly in the Word of God in all the ways that he reveals himself. Let me give you four implications of what we've seen in this text:

- 1. Jesus is full of mercy for desperate people.** We, like the blind men on the road to Jerusalem, can receive Jesus's mercy if we will cry out in desperation, "Lord, have mercy on me." What do you need the Lord to do for you today?
- 2. Jesus is a humble Lord.** Only Jesus can bring those two words together. Only Jesus can ride into Jerusalem on a donkey and change the world. Only Jesus could give his life so that he could take over yours.
- 3. Jesus still works to purify his people.** He not only came to bring redemption; he came to show us what real righteousness looks like. And after establishing the possibility of righteousness, he is still working to purify his people. He is a part of God's discipline (Heb 12:5-7), pruning (John 15:2), and purifying process (1 Peter 1:6-9).
- 4. Jesus is coming as judge.** The Bible couldn't be any clearer on this, and therefore you must know today if you really know him. Because he is not just a Savior filled with mercy and humility; he is a coming King who will judge the world:

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. 13 He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. 14 And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. 15 From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 19:11-16).

This is what Jesus is like. And every aspect is eternally important.

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