

MATTHEW 21

“HOSANNA IN THE HIGHEST!”

The entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem, which is recorded in the first 11 verses of this chapter, served to fulfill a very singular prophecy; and at the same time, it very significantly represented to the Jews the nature of our Lord's intended Kingdom. Even after all that He had said to undeceive them, they still expected that if He were the Christ, He would restore their lost dominion. They thought that He would set them at the head of the nations upon earth; and they imagined that He would enter as a great conqueror, with the pomp of earthly triumph, into the city of His forefather David. Yet the prophet Zechariah had very plainly forewarned them otherwise; he told them that the Messiah would come to them in meekness and lowliness – on a plain old donkey, without any of the trappings and trimmings of a pompous monarch (Zech. 9:9). And so it came to pass. In order to fulfill Zechariah's prophecy to the letter, Jesus sent two of His disciples from the Mount of Olives to a nearby village; and He told them before-hand where they would find the donkeys that were to be used on the occasion. At the same time, He inclined the heart of the animals' owner to part with them readily for His use. When everything had been prepared, the King entered the city, riding on this lowly beast! And “the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!”

The first thing that Jesus did “when he was come into Jerusalem” (verse 10) was to visit and cleanse the Temple. In His holy house, He wants us to utterly exclude not only all buying and selling, but even all thought in our minds of this world's business. While He was in the Temple, Jesus healed the blind and the lame. In the same way, when He causes us to repent and pray to Him, He employs His power to cause our blind souls to see, and He guides our feeble steps into the way of holiness and peace. It was also in the Temple that the children were crying aloud, “Hosanna to the son of David!” Therein we see the fulfillment of another prophecy from Psalm 8: “Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou perfected praise.” From this, we may learn that we should worship our Savior with somewhat of a child's eagerness and sincerity of affection. The praise which He counts as most nearly perfect is that praise which is like the joyful cry of little children: fervent, thankful, and sincere!

The next morning, the Lord Jesus caused the barren fig tree to wither up (verses 18-22). This miracle gives us a warning against hearing without faith, or of having faith without the fruit of works. “Let no fruit grow on thee hencefor-

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ The Lord Jesus triumphantly enters into Jerusalem on a donkey – verses 1-11
- ❖ He drives out the Temple-profaners and curses a barren fig tree – verses 12-22
- ❖ He discourses in the Temple with the chief priests and elders – verses 23-27
- ❖ The parables of the two sons and of the wicked husbandmen – verses 28-46

ward for ever,” is the sentence which all must look for, if they have no fruit to show when Christ demands it from them. And even though the disciples were familiar with the Savior’s mighty works, they marveled and exclaimed when they saw the fig tree wither up and die. But Jesus assured them that if they only had faith, they would be able to do similar miracles. “All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive,” He promises. Perhaps it may not be exactly what you ask for, or in the exact same manner as you ask it. But our gracious Savior, to Whom we pray, knows what is best for us. He is aware of our necessities even before we ask, as well as of our ignorance as we ask. But despite the unworthiness of our prayers, He promises to answer them for the sake of His worthy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

The manner of our Lord’s entry into Jerusalem, His healing and teaching in the Temple, and His driving away the moneychangers out of its walls were matters of such a public nature, that the chief priests and elders might seem justified in demanding, “By what authority doest thou these things?” And no doubt He would have replied to their inquiry, except that they did not ask for this information so that they might learn thereby; but rather, they asked in an endeavor to ensnare Him, and frame a charge against Him. Therefore, He asked them a question which they could not answer without either confessing themselves to be at fault, or else giving offence to the people. And when they refused to reply to this, He very justly declared, “Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.”

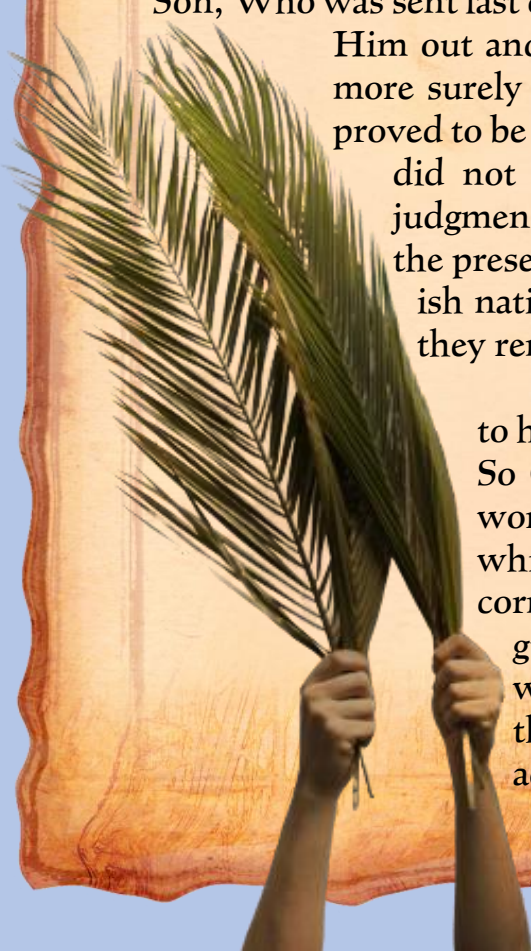
From this ensnaring question, He seized the opportunity to bring home to these men’s consciences their guilt in rejecting the baptism of John. He compares them to the second of the two sons in His parable (verses 28-32), who – in answer to their father’s desire that he would work in his vineyard – said, “I go, sir,” but never went. That is how these men were. They pretended to have great zeal in the service of God. Yet when John came to them “in the way of righteousness” – that is, preaching a doctrine which they should have known to be righteous – they refused to believe him. But those persons whose lifestyles were most opposed to the theme of his preaching actually obeyed it, by repentance and amendment of life. “And ye,” said Christ to these men, “when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.” Not even the marvelous conversion of the most hardened sinners influenced them to awake to repentance and faith.

This comparison between the self-righteous and the most depraved sinners – illustrating the readiness with which the latter enter into the Kingdom of God, over the former – is frequently insisted on by our Lord. It should frequently, therefore, engage our most serious consideration. A family such as our own, in which the reading of the Scriptures and the duties of devotion are openly observed – a family such as this needs to be often warned that these things do not automatically cause us to be more near to God than those who are

reckoned as the most immoral among mankind. Yes, we may be better than they in the sense that our words and actions are less wicked; but in this sense, better also were the scribes and Pharisees than the publicans and harlots. Their conduct was less wicked in itself; but in reality, it was *not* less wicked. Why? Because they knew so much better, and they professed so much more! Many persons whose case we are inclined to think is most desperate, may be making – for all we know – greater efforts to repent. Such persons may be yielding God more fruit from their as-yet-imperfect faith, than those who so rashly pass sentence against them. Therefore, when we read of publicans and harlots going into the Kingdom of heaven before respectable Pharisees, we should lay to heart several profitable conclusions. First, it is not for our own works' sake, but out of God's free gift, that any of us shall be saved at all! Second, however great our sins may have been, we may be justified through God's grace, by faith in Jesus. And third, when we wish to estimate our faith by its fruits, we must not try our works by comparison with our neighbor's; but rather, we must measure them up against what we know of God's revealed will in God's written Word. And let us pray for the Savior's grace to enable us to obey it better and love it more.

Jesus proceeded to teach the priests and elders with another parable (verses 33-41). The householder in this parable represents Almighty God. The vineyard is the covenant of His mercy through Christ. The husbandmen or tenant-farmers picture the people of Israel, to whom that covenant was especially entrusted. The servants whom they killed are the prophets that the Lord sent to them – whom they either despised, persecuted, or put to death. The Son, Who was sent last of all, is Jesus Christ Himself. As for Him also, they cast Him out and murdered Him – imagining thereby that they would more surely retain the exclusive possession of the vineyard. Yet it proved to be far otherwise with them, for the fruit of their misdoings did not have a happy ending; and they themselves, in their judgment of this parable, gave sentence against themselves. For the present time, God has removed His covenant from the Jewish nation as a whole, and bestowed it upon the Gentiles; and they render to Him the fruits thereof.

Up to this point, the priests and elders do not seem to have been aware that they were condemning themselves. So Christ drives home to them the parable by adding the words of a prophecy from the Psalms: "The same stone which the builders refused is become the head stone in the corner" (Ps. 118:22). The builders were the Jews who were guilty of rejecting Jesus. He was the Cornerstone Who was rejected by them, but Who was received with joy by the Gentiles. And just as a cornerstone unites two adjoining walls of a building; so also, Christ unites both



Jews and Gentiles in one spiritual building, if they truly believe in Him. Our Lord makes this meaning clear, and He makes the application of the parable strictly personal, by saying further to His listeners, “The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.” Herein He very plainly tells them that they would be rejected from being God’s favored people; and He also forewarns them that this privilege, which they were so jealous of, would henceforth be extended to all who would bring forth fruits that were worthy of it. The Cornerstone – that is, Himself – would be a stumbling-block to the faithless, causing them to fall and be broken. And it would also fall upon the rebellious and willfully disobedient, and grind them to powder – that is, utterly destroy them. But alas! The priests and Pharisees at last perceived that He was speaking of them; however, instead of paying more heed to His words, they only sought even more eagerly to lay hands on Him. Such was their aversion to the truth, which was here driven home to their own consciences.

Let us pray for grace to be different from these men. Let us not be afraid to search out most diligently, and read most frequently, those places of Scripture in which God most plainly reproves our own sins. Let us also try to see, in all places, what may most apply to our own selves. Even here, where our Lord spoke chiefly to the Jews, He spoke to us also. O that we may not be like them – remaining satisfied with the possession of our privileges, rather than taking care to improve them! May we not be quick to count others as being excluded from God’s favor; rather, may we more anxiously endeavor to improve the privileges that we enjoy, for the salvation of our souls. May we not desire to keep the vineyard to ourselves; but instead, may we render to our Lord the fruits in their seasons. Oh! If we sin willfully, after having enjoyed the knowledge of the truth and the good gifts of the Holy Spirit – is not this slaying the Son Himself? Is not this crucifying our Savior afresh, and putting Him to open shame? Let us always labor faithfully in God’s service, acknowledging that the vineyard which we enjoy the use of belongs to Him. Let us ascribe to His goodness all that we have here. And above all things, let us reverence His Son! It is in mercy that He has sent that Son, so that through Him, He might reveal to us His will. Let us reverence Him by doing what He commands. And since that Son – out of the same mercy – died for us upon the cross, let us reverence Him by a devout and lively faith in His precious work of atonement!

Heavenly Father, we ascribe all praise and honor to You for mercifully sending Your Son to us; and also to Jesus Himself, Who mercifully atoned for our sins by His own death upon the cross. We also pray that our children and grandchildren – in their earliest youth – may imitate the little ones who cried “Hosanna” in the Temple. During the days of their youth, may they show serious concern about You, about Your favor and love, about the benefits of Your redemption, and about Your honor and glory! Amen.