

# Madness: The King's Criticism

*The King's Criticism*

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**Bible Text:** Matthew 21:12-15

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I do want to encourage you this morning to open your Bibles to the book of Matthew chapter 21. As you are turning to Matthew chapter 21, today is one of those days when we are going to see a side of Jesus that we often don't think about much, much less study. Over the course of the last few weeks and months we have been walking through the book of Matthew and seeing Jesus from a somewhat different perspective. We have labeled it or named it Madness, because we see the King of kings and Lord of lords acting very differently, and what we would say from a human perspective, from an earthly king or someone of royal blood would do, being wrapped in swaddling clothes, resisting in chapter four the opportunity to rule all the nations in one full sweep, calling as his cabinet of a group of men that were not even on paper qualified.

Over the last part of this mentioned series we are going to see that rather than look at Jesus and him, per se, as the one of madness, but the message that he conveys. Today in Matthew chapter 21 we often talk about Jesus and his compassion. We talk about Jesus and his love. We talk about Jesus and his wisdom. But how often do we address Jesus getting mad? How many times do we talk about Jesus getting angry? And initially, particularly for those of you like myself who are life long Baptists, that makes us a little uneasy. That gets us a little flustered on the inside, to ask, "Well, ok, is it actually ok for him to do that?"

You know, Ephesians 4:26 it says these words: "Be ye angry, and sin not."<sup>1</sup>

The Bible speaks of a righteous indignation. And we are going to see in just a moment not only was Jesus Christ God in flesh completely justified in every aspect of what he did, but he gave us an example for our lives today.

I want you to turn with me to Matthew chapter 21 beginning in verse 12, a very simple passage of Scripture in the life of Jesus in his very last week. We are within the last few days before his crucifixion and eventual resurrection. It is that time in which he overturns the tables in the temple.

Verse 12 of Matthew 21. And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves. And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them. And when the chief priests and

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 4:26.

scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased.<sup>2</sup>

A simple passage of Scripture with profound ramifications, not only for the life and the ministry of Jesus Christ, but for our lives as well. And so as we unpack this, as we peel away the layers today of understanding what does this passage really mean and how does it impact my life today, I think the first thing that we need to address is what I want to call the phenomenon of Jesus Christ. When I say the phenomenon, the fact that his life and his ministry, who he was, was so contrary and so different and so unique from any and all that either went before or that have come after. When we look at his ministry in particular that was about three and a half years at length, there are two aspects of the phenomenon of who he was and is and always be. And the first one is this, the phenomenon of his popularity.

Maybe you haven't thought about this much, but the person of Jesus Christ is incredibly popular in our world. How often do you ever hear anybody curse in another deity's name? Think about that for just a moment. The name Jesus is incredibly popular, but in the days in which his earthly ministry resided, I told you to mark it by about three and a half years. In fact, his ministry is actually marked by what we know as the Passover event, that holiest of the Jewish celebrations and religious celebrations throughout time. His ministry began at a Passover and it ends here in a Passover. In fact there has been great discrepancy, among the "scholars" about the fact that John chapter 2 has Jesus overturning the tables at the beginning of his ministry and here in Matthew chapter 21 he is overturning the tables at the end of his ministry.

If you look at those two passages and you study them closely, what you will see is not a conflict, but a continuance. In other words, at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, at the beginning of those three and a half years, he goes into the temple during the Passover season, he overturns the tables. In fact, John chapter 2 gives us specifics that he even makes a cord of leather and actually begins to whip the tables, not just turn them over. All types of things happening.

But what is different in John 2 from Matthew chapter 21 is how many people responded to what is happening. In John chapter 2 it says that when Jesus entered the temple, remember the holiest of places on the holiest of weeks among the holiest of people and he started overturning tables, it says at that point many people began to follow him.

Now I understand the word many means more than a couple and it means more than a few, but it means many. Here in Matthew chapter 21 it mentions that the multitudes were following him. And over the course of three and a half years of Jesus' ministry, those who were enamored, those who followed, those who wanted to listen to every word he spoke, went from being the many to the multitude. You think about the amazing large number of people who came and were affected by the ministry of Jesus Christ. We know of dozens of parables that he spoke and we know of dozens of miracles which he did, but according to the book of John and the last chapter if everything that Jesus said or did had

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 21:12-15.

been written down, all the books of the world would not be able to contain it. We are only given a glimpse of the healings. We are given a glimpse of the teachings. We are given all that we need, but you want to think about this for a moment. Twenty-five thousand people being fed at the feeding of the 5000. In another event he feeds the 4000. You have the Sermon on the Mount. You have the Sermon on the Plain. Everywhere Jesus went, particularly toward the end of his ministry, the crowds began to grow. And you notice here in this passage that they became sore displeased. The leaders there at Jerusalem were because just a few hours earlier that triumphal entry occurred, what we know as Palm Sunday where Jesus Christ, riding on the back of a donkey entered the eastern gate that would have gone right up into the front door of the temple and they spread the palm leaves in front of him and they said, “Blessed are you, Son of David. Hosanna. Blessed, come in the name of the Lord.”

Here are the Jewish people from all over the world. They gathered on the holiest of holy days in the holiest of cities and the holiest of places, and guess who everybody is paying attention to? Jesus. Not the religious leaders and not the scribes and not the Pharisees and not the Sadducees. He was an incredibly popular individual such that people literally came and bound him. The Bible says at times he had to go to the mountains and pray just to get a little time away.

Maybe you have never thought of the phenomenon of how popular Jesus really was, but his popularity led to the second phenomenon. I like to call it the polarity. When it comes to the person of Jesus Christ you are either for him or you are against him. And we live in a world where some people believe that they can be neutral. We are going to address this in a few weeks when we talk about the person of Pilate. When Pilate made “no decision” for Jesus, he made a decision of no for Jesus. When it comes to the person of Jesus you are either believing in him or you are rejecting him. There is no in the middle. You are either for or you are against.

Let me demonstrate this in this passage. Look in verse 14. “And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them.”<sup>3</sup>

The blind and the lame, the woman with the blood issue of 12 years, a centurion with a child who is desperately in need of a touch, a woman whose daughter has passed. All the stories in Scripture, they came to him and they said, “Jesus, you can help. I have tried everything.” They came to him for healing. They came to him for deliverance. They came to him for help of all sorts. But then look at verse 15.

“And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased.”<sup>4</sup>

And there are really two polar opposites that one can land on when we decide about Jesus Christ. We are either for him or we are against him. We either believe in him or we reject

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 21:14.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 21:15.

him. And that is the phenomena of Jesus. Jesus Christ in his own words, in the Bible's words, does not give us the option of indecision. Neither by any other name by men must be saved, but the name Christ Jesus. There is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." As I said last week, let me reiterate, Jesus is either Savior for all or he is Savior for none. He creates that polarity. You don't have the option to add Jesus to your list. He cannot just be another. He cannot be the best thereof. He must be exclusively the only one. This is the phenomena that his popularity was such and he created such polarity.

That is the backdrop for this famous scene when he comes into the temple and he overturns the tables. But you probably have the same question that I have had for years. What was the problem? What was Jesus so upset about? Why would he in John chapter 2 at the beginning of his ministry and particularly now in Matthew 21, why would he go into this place at this time and cause such a ruckus? What was his problem? What was he so irritated about? What was he so mad about? What was Jesus so angry about?

There were two things that were taking place in that temple that we need to understand so that, number one, we don't get caught in the same trap, but, number two, we will recognize when we see it happening in the world around us. Problem number one. They were making a profit. It says here in verse 12.

"[he] cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves."<sup>5</sup>

Now let me explain what this means when it says they were making a profit and they were buying and they were selling. In those days, when you would go to the passover season, when you would go into Jerusalem, you would go to make a sacrifice, you would go to have an atonement for your sins. It was the holiest of days, the holiest of seasons where forgiveness would be granted and a sacrifice would be offered. In fact, it would be a few days later in the book of Acts chapter 2 where it says that Jews from all nations of the world were present in those days. They would often times travel hundreds and hundreds of miles. Why? This was the one day you did not want to miss. This was—and I hate to use the parallel, but it is there—this was the Easter of the Jewish faith. This was the day that everybody came out if for no other reason, you don't miss this one. But understand in that sacrificial system, it even mentions specifically here about the selling of doves, that there had to be brought a blood sacrifice. Can you imagine, particularly in those days without mass transit and without the combustible engine, can you imagine traveling tens, much less hundreds of miles with those entities in tow?

Now it has literally nothing to do with the sacrificial system, but please, understand the world that my family lives in. About two years ago we got this ridiculous idea to adopt a dog. You know what I am talking about. When you go by the pet store and you see the agencies that are out there and the sad looking puppies and the sad looking dogs. And we

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew 21:12.

drove by and there was this dog that wasn't in the cage. He was actually looking into the cage. And we decided on that day that I our family needed to adopt an 80-pound-food-a-month eating, 155 pound Great Dane that can't hear. Yes, it is true. I have actually got pictures to prove it. When we go back home to visit family do you think we put him in the mini van? Why, because if we took him on that trip somebody is going to die and it is not going to be me, ok? It is not going to work out well, why? Because he is massive. He is large. He stinks. That is a whole other issue. But imagine taking even a domesticated dog with you on a trip, particularly a dog of that size. Can you imagine coming from North Africa to Jerusalem with your own family lamb? Can you imagine how difficult that would be, how incredibly arduous that would be, much less the fact of how often you would arrive and the lamb would not have made it. And so the service that was being provided was not a bad service. They were saying, hey, you are coming from all over the world. We have been scattered. We just want you to have the opportunity.... but what happened is they were taking what was meant to focus on God. They were taking what was meant to be a sacrifice and it says that they were making a profit off it. In other words, for something that should have cost 100 dollars they were charging 250. And then when they switched the currency from your currency to their currency they were making a little off the top there. We live in a world today where we have looked at this passage of Scripture and I have actually had these conversations and I have been in these church business meeting where we struggle with this passage.

Well, you are not supposed to buy and sell in the church. I know of churches that have gotten in knock down drag outs about putting a Coke machine in the gym, because you are not supposed to buy and sell in the church. I have seen churches get upset because you can't sell a hot dog at a fall fest because you are not supposed to buy and sell in the church.

For those of you who lean that way, I have got some news for you. Outside right now it feels like it is 22 degrees. It doesn't feel that way in here, right? Because we are buying electricity. Thank you, brother. I finally got an amen off that, ok? So understand this wasn't about charging somebody to go to youth camp. This wasn't about exchanging a few dollars for a Wednesday night meeting. You need to understand. What they were doing is they were gouging and profiting and "selling" salvation. What they were saying is unless you do this this way and that way, you cannot have access to God, a very dramatically different picture than we have often times pictured in our world today. They were profiting. But the second thing that they were doing or the second problem Jesus had is they were exhibiting a power and a position. Notice it says that they were sitting at the tables.

When you would enter into that temple mount and would proceed to retrieve your sacrifice you were prepared as a family to get the lamb or the doves or whatever it may be at that time, and you walked in, you could not go to the holiest of places. You could not go to the sacrifice. You could not go to the "presence of God" unless you went through them.

Jesus wasn't just upset that they were making money off God, but Jesus was frustrated,

bothered and overturned the tables because they were doing something completely contrary to everything that he was and is and always will be. It is the fact that they said that you must come through us to get to God. We live in a world today where millions if not billions of people are under this false impression that they must go through another human being to get to God.

And I want to be honest with you. I love you and I am thrilled to be the pastor of this church, but the pastor of a church, according to 1 Peter chapter five is to be a shepherd to lead and to guide the flock. If you or anybody you know thinks you are getting to heaven through me, you are in a for a world of hurt. You cannot gain forgiveness through me. You cannot receive salvation through me. In fact, if you don't have a Baptist background, let me give you a phrase that we kind of coined. It is called the priesthood of the believer. It means that nobody, I mean, nobody can and does and has the opportunity to stand in the way between you and God himself. You have direct access to the throne of God. When Jesus Christ died on the cross and the veil tore and the ground shook God said, "Nobody stands between you and me, nobody."

But we live in a world that says, "Oh, I have got to go through this person. I have got to go through that person. And unless I get approval from that person, or I have the check mark by that guy, no, no, no." That was the problem. Jesus was upset, number one, they were gouging people and taking the focus off the number two. Jesus said, "Whoa, nobody stands between me and my creation."

You know, often times we lose the impact of this. But it was about 500 years ago that there was a personal hero of mine by the name of Martin Luther who realized that it was happening in his day. And what had originally started out as a good thing—and we are going to see this in a moment—had turned into a pretty sore thing. And he started or he initiated what we know as the Reformation, by putting 95 Theses on the door of the Wittenberg church there in Wittenberg, Germany. He stated 95 things that the church at large had gotten wrong. And if you wanted to narrow those 95 things down to two things: the church was profiting off of salvation and they were standing in the way of sinners receiving forgiveness from God directly. Those were really the two pillars that he struggled with. And I think often times we can forget how dramatic this scene was in Matthew chapter 21, but thankfully, because of the world of cinematography, I want to show you a clip from the life of the man known as Martin Luther and I want you to see from this clip what he as a young man was exposed to when he saw basically Matthew chapter 21 lived before his eye. It is somewhat of a lengthy clip, but it is going to give you insight into what was really happening at the temple when Jesus overturned the tables.

...What we know as the Reformation didn't begin over a meal Wednesday night, or a Coke machine in the gym. It started over an institution that said unless you pay a certain amount of money or unless you do a certain thing you can't be forgiven. You can't go to heaven. And Jesus came into the temple in Matthew 21, he literally turned the tables on that idea and he said, "Not in my house."

So, in conclusion, I want to address what I call two prophetic elements or two prophecies regarding this passage. We can address what happened then and we understand what Jesus meant and we understand that he alone is the instrument and the means and the person of salvation, but how does this passage affect us today? When we leave this place, when we go into the market place, when we go into the byways and into the highways, into the ball fields, into our homes, how does this affect us? What does this mean for us? And I think there are two prophetic elements. And the first one is this. I want to call it a prophetic propensity. A propensity means the inclination for something to occur. Do you notice what Jesus says when he does this? “My house shall be called the house of prayer; but you have made it a den of thieves.”<sup>6</sup>

Now it is interesting that in John 2 at the beginning of his ministry he said, “My Father’s house is to be a house of prayer.” Here at the end of his ministry, about to give his life for the sins of the world, he says, “My house is to be a house of prayer. You have made it a den of thieves.” There is a propensity for that which originates for the heart of God, for the worship of God and for the instruction of God can turn into the world very quickly.

Let me give you kind of an acronym that I like to use, that every what we know as a ministry at church starts with a man. And understand that in this local church and every local church in our contemporary world at some point there was a man who felt led of God to start a house of God and they began to grow under God’s provision. And as that church begins to grow it becomes a ministry and what I mean a ministry is it becomes the extension, it becomes the arm, the feet, the mouth of Jesus Christ. Those who are saved by Jesus start living out Jesus. But it can occur and it does occur and I think we are living in a world where we are seeing it happen a lot, where that ministry turns into a machine.

And what happens is that we have got to keep the wheels going and we do programs just because we are supposed to and we do things just because we are supposed to and we have things because we are supposed to. Why? Because we have got to keep the machine going. And then it becomes, eventually a monument. So what started out as a ministry becomes a machine. Then becomes a monument. Let me tell you how it becomes a monument. When you start hearing how good it used to be.

I am going to stop for a dramatic pause there, because how many times when it comes to the “influence of the church” have you said how impactful it used to be? You see, the prophetic element in this passage and at least in western culture here in the United States of America, is the church as a whole has become a big old monument. Do you know what monuments are? They are dead. And they are cold. And they don’t do much but sit out in the rain.

What Jesus declared is I am about ministry. Never in our personal lives, never in a church’s life should we become a machine or a monument. We should always stay ministry focused, Jesus focused. And what happens is God will overturn the table of your

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew 21:13.

lives if you get in the machine mode.

But there is a second prophetic element of this passage. It is the last two words of verse 15. Sore displeased. Not only is there a propensity in particular our culture for the “organism” of the church to become an organization, but there is the rise of persecution. Now let me share with you my honest heart here for a moment. I know that there are people that struggle day in and day out. And I get the emails and the phone calls and whatever it may be and the communication. I think you have every right to be disturbed as we are concerned when we look at the world around us and see the world encroaching upon the impact and the influence of the church. And it is disturbing wondering “What is going to happen next?”

Let me share with you what happened in Matthew 21. Jesus did not upset the Romans. He upset the religious ones. The religious ones who once they became a machine and become a monument, joined hands with the secular world so they could survive. Let me be “prophetic” for you in a moment. Martin Luther was persecuted by religious people, not the world. Jesus Christ was persecuted by religious people, not the world. And as a child of God who believes in Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior, the “monument,” dead, 21<sup>st</sup> century church will join hands with the world at some point and persecute you for being ministry-led and not being a big old white-washed monument. Two chapters later we are going to address it next week in chapter 23. Jesus takes on those religious individuals who had joined hands with the world and had said, “Maybe we ought to see it the world’s way and join hands with the world.” What happened is they ended up turning on Jesus.

If you decide today from this point forward that Jesus Christ is the only way, that he alone provides salvation, that the Bible alone is the trump card of truth and salvation in the world, listen, persecution will come. The question is: How soon, how bad and from what direction? Jesus made this statement in John 15. “Marvel not that the world hates you, it hated me first.”

So in conclusion, before our time of invitation, what does Matthew 21 teach us about the future? That the institution of “the church” will accelerate with the propensity to become a monument and when that happens those who hold hands together in ministry will have to hold hands tighter as we are persecuted similarly to the ones who have gone before us.

How is that for feel good preaching? That is why my books don’t get 13 million dollar advances and aren’t sold in Wal-Mart.