

Well, tomorrow is the beginning of a New Year. Have you made any New Year's resolutions yet? What is a resolution? Dictionary.com says it's:

Resolution:

A firm decision to do or not to do something.

Truth is...you've probably already decided if you're going to make any resolutions. Yes, a resolution is a decision to do something or not do something. Did you know according to various studies, we make as many as 3,000 decisions per day? This process starts the moment we wake-up. We decide: Will I hit the snooze bar or get up? Do I have time to stop for a biscuit or is it a Pop-Tart? Do I have enough gas to get home? We make all kinds of decisions...like...well...if we'll "like" something on Facebook or not...if we'll pick up groceries this evening or tomorrow.

Did you know you'll be making a decision today? You'll be deciding whether or not you're going to follow Jesus or not. Every single person in this room will decide whether or not you'll follow the teaching of Jesus Christ, or go your own way.

After all...we just had a baptism. We've had a total of 7 baptisms today, and they represent choices by those 7 people to publicly profess their desire to follow Jesus. **Yes, AS WE come to the end of this year, 2017...let me ask you to make a decision...even now...before the invitation: Will you decide to follow Jesus? NO, I'M NOT ASKING YOU TO MAKE A NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION...Why? Because those are usually broken in about 2 weeks No, this is something that's far beyond that... I'm not talking about will-power...I'm talking about something that is supernatural! This is spiritual... This has to do with your eternal soul... This has to do with placing your life into the hands of Jesus Christ...not yourself. Oh, I pray as we go through this message that you'll make up your mind and decide to follow Jesus!**

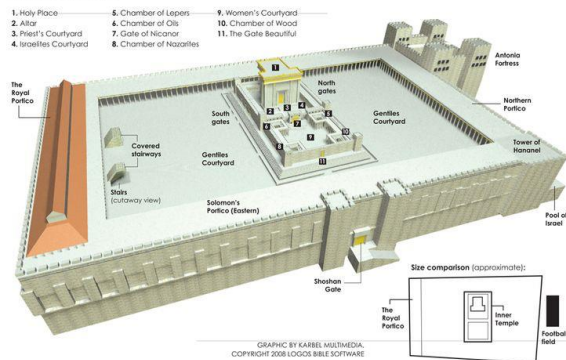
As we return this morning, to our study in the book of Matthew, Jesus was living the last week of His life on earth. He will soon be crucified. Matthew chronicles that Jesus is in fact, all the way up to Tuesday of this last week. In fact, He's back in the Temple and you'll remember, He had been there the day before, when He made a whip...



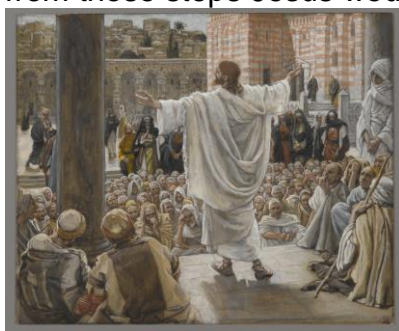
and cleansed it from the cheating moneychangers by flipping their tables... And now, on Tuesday, He's teaching in those same Temple courts again. Take a look at this diagram of the Temple...

Herod's Temple

King Herod the Great began renovations on the Second Temple approximately 20-19 BC. The entire temple wasn't completed until approximately 62-64 AD, only to be destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.



See where it says, "Gentile Courtyards" on the left side of the Temple? The side with the brown looking roof, that's called the **Royal Portico**...or **Solomon's Portico**. That's where Jesus would stand to teach. Because under that roof there were steps and from those steps Jesus would teach. See the depiction of that...



The crowds were packed in their to hear the man who had just a few days earlier raised Lazarus from the dead and came riding into Jerusalem being proclaimed as the Messiah by the crowds.

And all of this was driving the religious leaders nuts! They hated Jesus! After all, He was drawing all the people away from them and their false teachings and they were losing money. Jesus **was infuriating the chief priests and Elders of the Jews and they refused to believe in Him.**

Turn with me to Matthew 21. Jesus is going to teach another parable from those Portico steps... (this... a second parable of three that He'll teach). And once again, the parable is going to drive home the fact that the Chief Priests and Elders are absolutely belligerent in their hatred and unbelief of Jesus. Jesus is going to show the people the eternal danger of **CHOOSING** NOT TO BELIEVE in Him. Look at verse 33 with me...

Matthew 21:33

33 "Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country.

Now, let's stop here... This is a common scene. They're in an agrarian society. There are vineyards and farms everywhere in Israel. Still to this day there are vineyards all across Israel...



Now, this master of this vineyard that Jesus is talking about has really taken care of his vineyard. How do we know? Because he's put up a fence and a tower to protect it and he's made the investment in a winepress. So, this landowner has made a big-time investment! And he's wealthy enough to hire out some tenant farmers to run his vineyard while he goes to another country.

Take a guess who the vineyard owner might be in His parable? Who, AFTER ALL, owns everything? That would be God! Look at verse 34. Jesus continues...

Matthew 21:34-36

³⁴ When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. ³⁵ And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. ³⁶ Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them.

This is unbelievable! These tenant farmers are killing the owner's servants who have come to rightfully collect the profits from their owner's vineyard. This is amazing! These evil tenant farmers did this to two waves of servants. I mean...this could have been half-a-dozen murders! This is crazy! Why in the world would the vineyard owner send a second group of servants to collect his money, when the first group had all been murdered? Well, this shows the amazing mercy and kindness of the owner to give the tenant farmers another chance. Isn't that just like God...to give us more chances... Yet, tragically, when they killed the second group, it showed the maniacal, evilness of the tenant farmers. This scene is so heinous!

Oh, but it gets worse... The owner is going to send His Son...surely they won't hurt the Son.

Matthew 21:37-39

³⁷ Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' ³⁸ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.' ³⁹ And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

They killed the Son! Okay...if God is the vineyard owner...who is the son? Jesus! And this is the insidiousness of these evil tenant farmers... Since the son came to take the profits for His father, the tenants said, "This is the heir," and they may have even assumed the vineyard owner had died, and that's why He sent His Son. So, they thought, "Oh yeah!!! We'll kill the Son and since the Father might be dead...we'll get the son's inheritance." And so, they killed the son, and threw him out of the vineyard (by the way, that's what these same religious leaders would do to Jesus in just three days on Friday, they would have Him crucified outside of the walls of Jerusalem and then, if Joseph of Arimathea had not taken His body, they would have had it thrown in the burning dump heap called Gehenna, outside the city walls).

Oh... Can you sense how the crowd might have felt in hearing all of this? Jesus has now brought the parable to a crescendo) and He asks the question:

Matthew 21:40

40 When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

Now, take a look at this depiction of Jesus teaching in the Portico...



To whom did Jesus direct the question? The religious leaders... And they answered...

Matthew 21:41

41 They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons."

Yeah...Jesus turned to those Chief Priests and Scribes... Keep this image in your mind...



and He asked that most penetrating question? What should be done? Man... oh man, the tension there must have been... You can cut it with a knife! And what do those guys do? They indict themselves by saying, "Kill those wretches with a miserable death, and get some new tenants."

Church family, those fools just indicted themselves. They have levied their own sentence! They are the evil ones and Jesus exposes them once again the people as frauds! Watch!

Matthew 21:42

42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:

"The stone that the builders rejected

has become the cornerstone;

this was the Lord's doing,

and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

Oh, Jesus sarcastically says: "Surely you guys know the Scriptures...that's what you're to be studying all the time." He asks, "Have you NEVER READ THE SCRIPTURES." You see, what Jesus quoted in Psalm 118 was as common as the words are to us of "Amazing Grace." He quotes part of what is called the Hallel, which is Psalm 113-118. Every Jew knew this by heart, just like we know "Amazing Grace" and John 3:16.

It's the same Psalm (118) the people and the children were singing when this happened...

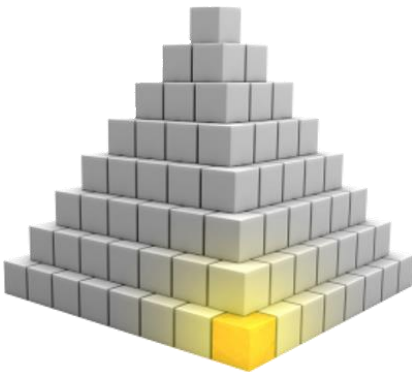


Yes, just two days early, the people were singing "Hosanna to the King," and do you know what they were quoting? The Hallel! And so, Jesus quotes the Hallel to these pompous, evil men. See it again...

Matthew 21:42

42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:
"The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
this was the Lord's doing,
and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

Who is the cornerstone and who are the builders? Simple. Jesus is the cornerstone and the builders are the religious leaders. Jesus is using the Scriptures that they know so well to indict them...to expose them before the people! They were rejecting Him as the cornerstone. Do you know what a cornerstone is? Builders do... Take a look...



Ultimately, when a builder sets the cornerstone, he's gets the building "plumb and square." In other words, everything is going to be measured from that cornerstone. If the cornerstone is off...the entire building will be off...the walls won't be square and the building could collapse. Often times, you'll see a cornerstone in a building with a date on it...



Like this building built in 1910. If get the cornerstone wrong, you'll ruin the building. As these leaders were rejecting the cornerstone...Jesus.

Turn to Acts 4. Let me show you what the Apostle Peter would say to these same religious leaders after Jesus' death. As you are turning there, I'll remind you that what we're going to see in Acts 4 happened after the resurrection of Jesus and the church has been founded in Jerusalem.

So, here's the scene, the Apostles Peter and John are continuing to gather in the Temple courtyards to teach the new believers, and they've just healed a lame beggar...but, the Temple Police and the religious leaders step in...

Acts 4:1-4

And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, ²greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. ³And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.

Jump down to verse 11 and you'll see that Peter said the same thing that His Master had said:

Acts 4:11-12

¹¹This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹²And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

You see, even after the resurrection of Jesus, they refused to believe and they were still rejecting Jesus! And Jesus knew this would happen...and that's why He told those men what He did in **verse 43. Go back to Matthew 21...**

Matthew 21:43

⁴³Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.

What does that mean? It means that Jesus was telling those religious leaders of Israel "Hey, I came to you...my own people and you received me not...therefore, I'm going to offer myself to not only Jews, but Gentiles and anyone who receives me, I will not cast out."

And you see, once again the Apostle Peter would parrot the words of Jesus in...

1 Peter 2:4-10

⁴As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶For it stands in Scripture:

"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious,
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

Yet, the Chief Priests, the Scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, ALL THE RELIGIOUS ELITE of Israel...well they rejected Jesus... **Now look back at verse 44** at what Jesus said would happen to those who won't accept Him...

Matthew 21:44

“And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”

Oh Church family, what Jesus has described here is plain and simple. It's the terrible consequence of unbelief...it's the fact that people who choose to reject Jesus will be crushed under the weight of their own pride!

Well, how did the religious leaders react to hearing this pronouncement from Jesus?

Matthew 21:45-46

45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. 46 And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.

What a horribly sad and messed up group of prideful men! HUMMMPPPH!

Now, I must tell you, at the beginning of the message I gave you a definition for the word: "Resolution." But I must tell you that it has more than one definition. It actually has two definitions, according to Dictionary.com. I want to show you the second meaning.

Resolution:

#2 the action of solving a problem, dispute, or contentious matter.

Now church, would you agree with me that what we've just witnessed...this scene in the Temple with Jesus and the religious leaders has been a contentious matter? I think we can all say, "Yes," don't you? Yes, the thoughts of being crushed is a problem that definitely needs resolution...a proper decision...a proper choice. **I want to show you a picture...**



Do you know what that is? It's a spider. Can you tell if it's dead? Oh...it's dead... I promise you that...our I wouldn't have gotten this close... Here's another picture of it...



Do you know what happened? It made a bad resolution...a very bad decision... It climbed down into a plastic tub and couldn't climb back out. It needed help...but, none was to be found.

Listen...do you know that we're like that spider? We need help! Our plastic tub is our sin. And the truth is...we can't rescue ourselves any better than that spider could... See it again... That's us...



But it doesn't have to end the way it did for the spider! Jesus came to save us and pick us out of our tub of sin!

You see that's the point of the parable. That's the point of Jesus coming in the first place.

Yes, God is the owner of everything...and we're just stewards for a little while...but, He sent His Son to be honored and revered and received... But, so many people are foolish, like those religious leaders...foolish enough to reject Him. Well, if that's you...according to Jesus, you're going to be crushed under the weight of your own poor decision.

Don't do that! Don't be like those foolish religious leaders! Make the right decision on this last day of 2017. No! I'm not talking about making a New Year's RESOLUTION that will only last for 2 weeks. I'm talking about placing your life into the hands of Jesus Christ...the One who came to save you...to rescue you...from your inescapable plastic tub! I pray you will decide to follow Jesus today, one of the last decisions you'll make in 2017!
