

The Gospel of Matthew 21

Charles Dailey © 2024 NLT
Updated 10/16/2025 Printed 9/4/2025

Introduction:

Following the climb from Jericho to Jerusalem the story takes a different turn. Jesus was now in the countdown to the cross and He understood that very well. We read this in the previous lesson:

"Listen," He said, "we're going up to Jerusalem, where the Son of Man will be betrayed to the leading priests and the teachers of religious law. They will sentence Him to die. (19) Then they will hand Him over to the Romans to be mocked, flogged with a whip, and crucified. But on the third day He will be raised from the dead." Matthew 20:18-19 NLT

The ancient inn, half-way between Jericho and Jerusalem, has been replaced with a museum that shows what might have been in the time of Jesus.



PREPARING FOR THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

(1) As Jesus and the disciples approached Jerusalem, they came to the town of Bethphage on the Mount of Olives. Jesus sent two of them on ahead.

- It had been a long climb from Jericho to **Jerusalem**.

These travelers were far from fresh,

even if they had stayed overnight in an inn. Based on the story of the Good Samaritan, an inn did exist. Luke 10:35.

- **Bethphage** means the "house of the unripe" fig. It was close to Bethany. Both were on the Mount of Olives



(2) "Go into the village over there," He said. "As soon as you enter it, you will see a donkey tied there, with its colt beside it. Untie them and bring them to Me.

- Jesus sent two disciples to retrieve a **donkey** and her **colt**. They would be needed for Jesus to ride and also to fulfill prophecy.
- Instead of riding on a white-plumed horse like a conquering general, the Prince of Peace would be riding a **colt**.

(3) If anyone asks what you are doing, just say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will immediately let you take them.'

- Naturally, there would be a guard to question about taking the animals and heaven had the password and it worked.

(4) This took place to fulfill the prophecy that said, (5) "Tell the people of Jerusalem, 'Look, your King is coming to you. He is humble, riding on a donkey -- riding on a donkey's colt.'"

- Matthew is reminding his primarily Jewish readers that the Prophet Zechariah had foretold this moment hundreds of years prior:

Fulfillment

Rejoice, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph,
O people of Jerusalem! Look, your King is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet He is humble, riding on a donkey -- riding on a donkey's colt.

Zechariah 9:9 NLT

(6) The two disciples did as Jesus commanded. (7) They brought the donkey and the colt to Him and threw their garments over the colt, and He sat on it.

- While the **two disciples** are unnamed, we speculate that **Jesus** often sent Peter and John to get things done. They threw their own **garments** over the **colt** and **Jesus** mounted it.
- Mark adds some significant words:

"Go into that village over there," He told them. "As soon as you enter it, you will see a young donkey tied there that no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. Mark 11:2 NLT

Barclay observes that for a beast to be used for a sacred purpose, it should never have been used for another purpose. He cites Numbers 19:2, Deuteronomy 21:3 and 1st Samuel 6:7.

"Now then, take and prepare a new cart and **two milk cows on which there has never been a yoke**;

and hitch the cows to the cart and take their calves back home, away from them.

(1 Samuel 6:7 NASB)

THE GLORIES OF THE ENTRY

(8) Most of the crowd spread their garments on the road ahead of Him, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

- The **crowd** had gathered and **spread** their **garments** and **tree branches** on the **roadway**. This happened in the time that Jehu was proclaimed as king. 2nd Kings 9:13.

(9) Jesus was in the center of the procession, and the people all around Him were shouting, "Praise God for the Son of David! Blessings on the One who comes in the name of the LORD! Praise God in highest heaven!"

- **Jesus** was at the **center** of the celebration. **People** were **shouting**. Again, they were shouting lines from their inspired hymnbook:

Bless the one who comes in the name of the LORD. We bless you from the house of the LORD. Psalms 118:26 NLT

The local representatives of the Temple were greeting the arriving king. (Based on **From the house of the Lord.**)

- Our *New Living Bible* translation uses a different word, but many translations use the term "Hosanna." It means "Save now." It is the people's cry for deliverance.

(10) The entire city of Jerusalem was in an uproar as He entered. "Who is this?" they asked.

- The local people from **Jerusalem** heard the **uproar** and wanted to know **who** this person was.

(11) And the crowds replied, "It's Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

- The **crowds** knew: **Jesus the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee**. But **Jesus** wanted the **crowds** to realize that He was more than a **prophet**. He was the Son of God and the long-awaited Messiah of Israel.

JESUS CLEANSED THE TEMPLE A SECOND TIME

(12) Jesus entered the Temple and began to drive out all the people buying and selling animals for sacrifice. He knocked over the tables of the money changers and the chairs of those selling doves.

- The business operated in the Court of the Gentiles. Renting the space provided added income for the priests.
- **Jesus** had cleared out the **buying and selling** when He opened His ministry (John 2:13-16) and here He closes His ministry of several year with the same intensity. He had not changed during those years.
- He didn't create chaos by turning the **doves** loose. He **knocked** over the **chairs** of the **sellers**.

(13) He said to them, "The Scriptures declare, 'My Temple will be called a house of prayer,' but you have turned it into a den of thieves!"

- Jesus fortified His actions with Old Testament quotations. One is from Isaiah 56:7 and the other is from Jeremiah 7:11.
- The **thieves** comment adds to the view that worshipers were being vastly overcharged for animals and birds to sacrifice.

JESUS HEALED RIGHT IN THE TEMPLE

(14) The blind and the lame came to Him in the Temple, and He healed them.

- Jesus further proved His identity by **healing**. The sellers and their landlords were *taking from* the worshipers, but Jesus was *giving to* the **blind** and **lame**.

(15) The leading priests and the teachers of religious law saw these wonderful miracles and heard even the children in the Temple shouting, "Praise God for the Son of David." But the leaders were indignant.

- The **wonderful miracles** riled the **Temple** officials. They were further agitated when **the children shouted praise** for Jesus. They may have heard the adults saying this.

(16) They asked Jesus, "Do You hear what these children are saying?" "Yes," Jesus replied. "Haven't you ever read the Scriptures? For they say, 'You have taught children and infants to give You praise.'"

- The jealous officials challenged **Jesus about** the **praise** for the **children** and **Jesus** responded to the Temple administrators by reminding them of the Old Testament which they knew thoroughly.

You have taught children and infants to tell of Your strength, silencing Your enemies and all who oppose You. Psalms 8:2 NLT

LESSON FROM A FIG TREE

(17) Then He returned to Bethany, where He stayed overnight.

- Jesus and His men may have stayed with friends at **Bethany**. Who would want to sleep in Jerusalem where there were hate-filled men who wanted to kill you?

(18) In the morning, as Jesus was returning to Jerusalem, He was hungry, (19) and He noticed a fig tree beside the road. He went over to see if there were any figs, but there

were only leaves. Then He said to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" And immediately the fig tree withered up.

- That **Jesus** was **hungry** reminds us that He often called Himself the "Son of Man." He had taken human form and experienced hunger just as the rest of us do.
- This **fig tree** brought out it's fruit first followed by its **leaves**. With **leaves** showing but no **fruit**, it was defective.

(20) The disciples were amazed when they saw this and asked, "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?" (21) Then Jesus told them, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and don't doubt, you can do things like this and much more. You can even say to this mountain, 'May you be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' and it will happen. (22) You can pray for anything, and if you have faith, you will receive it."

- An implied truth here is that **Jesus** had prayed about the **fig tree**. He had prayed and not doubted and told them of the power of prayer.

PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS

(23) When Jesus returned to the Temple and began teaching, the leading priests and elders came up to Him. They demanded, "By what authority are You doing all these things? Who gave You the right?"

- The angry **Temple** Officials demanded that **Jesus** reveal His source of **authority** because they handed out the **authority** here.

(24) "I'll tell you by what authority I do these things if you answer one question," Jesus replied.

- **Jesus** was never trapped. He took advantage of their love of **questions**. Here it comes:

(25) "Did John's authority to baptize come from heaven, or was it merely human?" They talked it over among

themselves. "If we say it was from heaven, He will ask us why we didn't believe John.

- **Did** the **authority** of **John** the Baptist come from **heaven**? Now the Temple officials were on the horns of a dilemma and they discussed the dilemma among themselves.

(26) But if we say it was merely human, we'll be mobbed because the people believe John was a prophet."

- For their rejection of heaven's authority to be concealed, they had to claim that **John** was preaching only from **human** authority, but the worshipers at the Temple believed that **John was a prophet**. The Smart Ones were looking at riots or even death from the crowd. Their solution was nearly unbelievable.

(27) So they finally replied, "We don't know." And Jesus responded, "Then I won't tell you by what authority I do these things.

- **Jesus** had won again. Their fear was so great they tried to lie their way out of the dilemma.

(28) "But what do you think about this? A man with two sons told the older boy, 'Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.'

- Jesus, the master storyteller, had a tale for these angry leaders to consider.

(29) The son answered, 'No, I won't go,' but later he changed his mind and went anyway.

- The older **son** refused to work in the vineyard, but changed his mind and worked **anyway**.

(30) Then the father told the other son, 'You go,' and he said, 'Yes, sir, I will.' But he didn't go.

- The younger **son** was **told** to go and work and he responded with a **yes but he didn't go**.

(31) "Which of the two obeyed his father?" They replied, "The first." Then Jesus explained His meaning: "I tell you the truth, corrupt tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the Kingdom of God before you do.

- The officials easily answered the question, setting themselves up for the jarring **truth**.
- Those **who get into the Kingdom of God** first will be:
 - **The corrupt tax collectors.**
 - **The prostitutes.**

(32) For John the Baptist came and showed you the right way to live, but you didn't believe him, while tax collectors and prostitutes did. And even when you saw this happening, you refused to believe him and repent of your sins.

- This **John the Baptist** was truly a prophet and showed them the way and they **didn't believe him**.
- The **corrupt tax collectors** and **prostitutes did believe John**.
- The Temple officials stubbornly refused to **believe** and **repent**.

THE VINEYARD OF THE LORD

(33) "Now listen to another story. A certain landowner planted a vineyard, built a wall around it, dug a pit for pressing out the grape juice, and built a lookout tower. Then he leased the vineyard to tenant farmers and moved to another country.

- The Master Teacher had yet another **story** for the Temple rulers to judge.

(34) At the time of the grape harvest, he sent his servants to collect his share of the crop. (35) But the farmers grabbed his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another.

- The landowner had leased his new vineyard to tenant **farmers** and expected a payment from the sale of the

crop. The result was that the farmers beat the servants who came to collect. **One** was **beaten**, **another** was **killed** and yet **another** was **stoned**.

- The landowner was more than patient as we see next.

(36) So the landowner sent a larger group of his servants to collect for him, but the results were the same.

- More **servants** came to **collect** but the results were the same.

(37) "Finally, the owner sent his son, thinking, 'Surely they will respect my son.'

- The **owner** then sent **his son** to collect, still ascribing good qualities to the tenant farmers.

(38) "But when the tenant farmers saw his son coming, they said to one another, 'Here comes the heir to this estate. Come on, let's kill him and get the estate for ourselves!' (39) So they grabbed him, dragged him out of the vineyard, and murdered him.

- Instead of seeing mercy and patience by the coming of the **son**, the wretched **farmers** saw a chance to get control of the **estate** for **themselves**.

(40) "When the owner of the vineyard returns," Jesus asked, "what do you think he will do to those farmers?"

- **Jesus** took advantage of the leader's desire to answer all questions.

(41) The religious leaders replied, "He will put the wicked men to a horrible death and lease the vineyard to others who will give him his share of the crop after each harvest."

- The know-it-all officials spelled out their own condemnation. The **wicked** farmers should be put to **death** and the **vineyard** should be leased to someone who would pay their bill each season.

(42) Then Jesus asked them, "Didn't you ever read this in the Scriptures? 'The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone. This is the LORD's doing, and it is wonderful to see.'

- **Jesus** chided the Temple operators by calling attention to a **Scripture** they really did know.

Fulfillment

The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone. This is the LORD's doing, and it is wonderful to see. Psalms 118:22-23 NLT

(43) I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation that will produce the proper fruit. (44) Anyone who stumbles over that stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush anyone it falls on. "

- Jesus then pointed to the Temple guardians as the ones rejecting the cornerstone because they were rejecting Him.

(45) When the leading priests and Pharisees heard this parable, they realized He was telling the story against them -- they were the wicked farmers. (46) They wanted

to arrest Him, but they were afraid of the crowds, who considered Jesus to be a prophet.

- They hadn't seen themselves in the **stories** until now, but they came to the **realization** that **Jesus** meant them. They didn't have any words to refute Him, but they wanted to **arrest** the Lord, getting Him out of the public eye. However, the **crowd considered Jesus to be a prophet.**