

Christ Church

## **“Not What We Expected”**

Passage: Matthew 20-21

Main Idea: The Gospel is Surprising

Doctrine: Gospel/Prophecy

### **PRAYER**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Matthew 20 & 21, we are entering the last week of Jesus' earthly life

- This week so important that gospel writers give a disproportionate amount of space to it; half of John's gospel devoted to final week
- Matthew devotes one-fourth of his gospel to Jesus' final week
- But that's not surprising because everything Jesus came to earth to do depends on events of this week; everything He does has purpose

In His final week, Jesus is ramping up His teaching concerning the Kingdom of Heaven (God)

- And, not surprisingly, focus of God's Kingdom is Gospel; in fact, 3 times Matthew describes Kingdom as, “The Gospel of the Kingdom”
- Gospel is what gets us into God's Kingdom = saves us; and Gospel is what gets God's Kingdom into us = sanctifies us
- As God rules & reigns as King in our hearts, we not only enter God's Kingdom, but we grow up to look more like God's kids

But, the Gospel of God's Kingdom is Upside-down; Gospel is Not What We Expected; counter-intuitive to our normal way of thinking

- Like disciples & religious leaders, everything about it surprises us
- Jesus surprised disciples last week in 19:30, when He said, “Many who are first will be last, & the last first”
- Now, in Matthew 20 & 21, Jesus illustrates & expands on this surprising principle

**MAIN IDEA**: The Gospel is Surprising

**Outline** = 7 surprising things about the Gospel in Matthew 20 & 21

Open your Scripture Journal to Matthew 20 = broad brush

**1. Mercy & Grace are Surprising (20:1-16)**

To illustrate the principle that *“the first will be last & the last will be first”*, Jesus tells a story: Laborers in the Vineyard

- Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who hired men to work in his vineyard at various hours of day: 6 am; 9 am; noon; 3 pm; 5 pm
- At 6 pm, paid laborers their wages, beginning with those hired last
- Regardless of when hired, everyone received same amount

Who complained? Not those who only worked an hour; those hired at 6 am & who worked the entire day – “It’s not fair; not what we deserve”

- That’s why we struggle with Gospel; it rocks our idea of what’s fair
- If we got what we deserve, all be separated from God forever in hell
- Story teaches about surprising Mercy & Grace of God; He shows us *mercy* by not giving us what we deserve; forgives sin; “you may go”
- But He also lavishes on us what don’t deserve, *grace*; adopts us into His family; “you may come”

Because we live in a world of “I earned & I deserve & that’s not fair”, God’s Mercy & Grace displayed in the Gospel are Surprising

## **2. Jesus’ Death is Surprising (20:17-19)**

Jesus heading towards Jerusalem; tells disciples for 3<sup>rd</sup> time what’s going to happen there = *mocked, flogged, crucified, raised 3<sup>rd</sup> day*

- No matter how often they heard it, this was surprising to disciples
- “They were looking for a Lion; didn’t know they needed a Lamb”
- They wanted a King, but what they needed was a Savior

Jesus’ suffering & death was not what they expected; surprising

- Didn’t understand there was no other way to receive the mercy & grace of God; no other way to have sins forgiven & become God’s child & live in God’s Kingdom than for Jesus to go to cross

## **3. Servanthood is Surprising (20:20-28)**

Disciples & mother didn’t understand upside-downness of Kingdom

- James & John’s mother came with her sons & asked Jesus if her boys could sit in places of prominence in His Kingdom
- When other disciples heard, were angry because wanted same thing

So, Jesus had to correct their thinking again about what greatness in God’s Kingdom looks like: Verse 26: *“Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

Gospel is surprising

- God came in flesh to serve us, not to be served by us; Jesus came to save us because we couldn't save ourselves
- The way He did that was by dying, giving His life to “ransom” many

“Ransom” means to buy back at a price; same idea as “redeem”

- Jesus' blood was the price He paid to save us from penalty of death
- No other way for us to be cleansed of sin & reconciled to God
- No other way for us to receive God's Spirit to enable & empower us to be great in God's Kingdom by being a servant to others
- If Jesus hadn't served us by giving His life to ransom us from sin, we'd have no desire, we'd have no ability to serve others

Then, Jesus illustrates what He just taught by serving 2 blind men

#### **4. Blindness is Surprising (20:29-34)**

It's not these men's blindness that is surprising; but it is surprising in what it teaches the disciples (US) about the Gospel

- Matthew 8: Purpose of miracles: POWER of God; PERSON of God (compassion); PROOF of messenger (from God); PREVIEW of God's Kingdom (no sickness or death); and, miracles PICTURE the Gospel

Gospel: We are all born spiritually blind; do not see God or ourselves properly; like these men, we have no hope of improving our condition

- Our only hope is that God would be merciful to us; that's why He sent Jesus; Jesus IS the mercy of God sent to us, like to blind men
- He lived a perfect life which we could not do so that He could become the perfect sacrifice required by God for cleaning of sin

He rose again the third day to show God accepted His sacrifice & we are forgiven; reconciled to God

- When He ascended, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to open our blind eyes & show us Jesus as our greatest need & greatest Treasure
- The Gospel is surprising because we don't like to admit we're blind
- Surprising because it's not a work we do; like blind men, we simply receive the work Jesus has done

#### **5. King Jesus is Surprising (21:1-11)**

Triumphal Entry (Palm Sunday): This is the public coronation of Jesus as King, but the way it happens is surprising

- Jesus gives specific instructions to disciples about getting donkey & colt to fulfill prophecy in Zechariah 9

This is the first of 4 specific prophecies fulfilled in *Matthew 21*

- Fulfilled prophecy tells us God is Sovereign; All-Knowing; All-Wise; All-Powerful; Purposeful; Faithful; God is God & Bible is God's Word
- Prophecy is NOT given to fill our heads with facts *or* so we can make charts of future; prophecy is given to change how we live right now
- So we're not fearful or anxious; not fixing or fleeing; not wimpy women, but holy, hopeful, urgent, focused, joyful, godly women

Jesus planned public demonstration not only to fulfill prophecy, but to reveal Himself as King & force leaders' hand in crucifying Him

- All on purpose; even response of crowds wasn't arbitrary
- Traditionally, putting clothes & branches on road symbolized submission & joy in welcoming the King
- "*Hosanna*", means "save us", which is what Jesus came to do
- Problem is, they wanted Him to save them right then from Rome
- Recognized Jesus as the "*Son of David*"; knew He was the King, but they still didn't understand the nature of His Kingdom
- Jesus coming as a humble King, Servant, was surprising to them

## **6. Jesus' Works are Surprising (21:12-22)**

Three things, 3 works that Jesus did which surprised people:

1. Cleansed the temple (21:12-13)

- In this act, Jesus fulfilled & combined several Old Testament prophecies concerning work Messiah would do

Background: Mosaic Law required Jews to pay a temple tax which had to be paid in temple coins, so religious leaders had set up currency exchange tables in temple courtyard

- Similarly, worshippers had to have perfect animals to offer as sacrifices, so leaders accommodated them by selling those, often by rejecting animals the people brought so they were forced to buy one from the religious leaders, many times at exorbitant prices

Jesus was angry because rather than being a house for prayer & worship, Israel's leaders had turned God's temple into a marketplace

- When Jesus overturned their tables & threw them out, it was a public *demonstration* of Jesus as Messiah because He did what the Old Testament said Messiah would do; it was also a public *denunciation* of religious leaders & the hypocrisy of their religion

2. Second surprising *work* Jesus did was to receive praise from the children (21:14-17)
  - Like Triumphant Entry, response of the people to Jesus aggravated religious leaders who refused to acknowledge & praise Him
  - Jesus rebuked them with Scripture; not only did Old Testament say Messiah would be praised like this, but, by receiving their praise, Jesus was declaring He is God, since only God is to be praised
3. Jesus gives another graphic illustration of the hypocrisy & barrenness of the nation of Israel, especially its leaders, through His 3<sup>rd</sup> act: Cursing the Fig Tree (21:18-22)

The fig tree was used in Scripture to symbolize nation of Israel

- Fig trees produce green figs before leaves; figs ripen later, but a tree with leaves should at least have green figs; this tree had no figs
- Pictured false advertising; hypocrisy; looked good on outside, but nothing worthwhile on inside; no fruit – so Jesus cursed it; dried up

It's not surprising that the disciples were astonished at how quickly fig tree died when Jesus cursed it; what is surprising is how Jesus turned this into teaching on prayer

- Verse 21: *“If you have faith & 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 & thrown into the sea,’ it will happen. And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.”*
- Not promise of health & wealth if you just have enough faith

“*Moving mountains*” is figure of speech meaning seemingly impossible things which are possible through power of God; like putting a camel through the eye of a needle = supernatural work

- This is not a lesson on cursing others, but on asking God to do a supernatural work in us; to keep us from being barren & hypocritical; to fill us with Spirit & ask Him to produce fruit in us
- Jesus' *Works* were Surprising; He condemned the hypocrisy & barrenness & powerlessness of the religious system & religious leaders

## **7. Jesus' Words are Surprising (21:23-46)**

In light of what Jesus had just done, it isn't surprising that religious leaders challenge Jesus' authority to do these *works*

- What is surprising are Jesus' *words* which puts challenge on them
- Verse 24: *“I'll tell you where My authority comes from if you tell me where the baptism of John came from – heaven or man?”*

- Jesus never asks questions for information; He's giving them opportunity to see sin, confess unbelief, repent & turn to Him

But they didn't do that; they reasoned that if they said "*from heaven*", Jesus would ask then why they didn't believe him

- If said "*from man*", lose credibility with people who believed prophet
- Stuck between a rock & a hard place, so said, "*We don't know*"

Matthew used this confrontation over Jesus' authority to introduce three parables (*2 this week; one in Chapter 22*)

- All three parables deal with these religious leaders; focus on their failure to respond positively to God's will; show the consequences of this failure for the future of the nation of Israel

#### Parable of the Two Sons in 21:28-32:

Man (God) asked his sons to work in His vineyard; first said no, but changed his mind & went; second said yes, but didn't go

- Jesus asks them, "*Which of the two did the will of his father?*"
- They get an A+ for answer: "*The first*" – the one who actually obeyed
- But by their answer, they indicted themselves because when John & Jesus preaching repentance; they said no; we're fine; we're Jews
- But when tax collectors & prostitutes heard, they said yes

Jesus' *Words* were Surprising: The scum of society, though they originally said no to God, repented at the preaching of John & Jesus

- Religious leaders who said they would do God's will, refused
- Entrance into God's Kingdom depends on what do with God's Son
- Obeying God is not what gets us into God's Kingdom – mercy & grace get us in – obeying God is proof we are in God's Kingdom
- Obedience not a *condition* of relationship with God; *confirmation*

So, *Jesus' words surprise* & silence the religious leaders when He says that it's those who obey God's will who are really God's sons

- Then tells them what the consequence of their disobedience would be in Parable of the Tenants in 21:33-46:

Man (God) planted vineyard (represents Israel); God protected Israel; provided for Israel; gave Israel leaders to do His work (tenants)

- Sent servants (prophets) to these leaders looking for fruit; evidence of changed character & conduct; they mistreated & killed them
- Finally, God sent His Son, Jesus, & they killed Him too, which is what the religious leaders were about to do

This is an overview of the history of Israel; not only did they not produce fruit, like barren fig tree, but they refused to submit to God, to listen to His prophet's warnings to repent & return to Him

- They seal their own fate when Jesus asks: *“When the owner comes back, what will He do to those tenants?”*
- Verse 41: *“He will put those wretches to a miserable death & give the vineyard to others who will give him the fruits in their seasons.”*
- Because Israel's leaders failed in producing fruit that God desired, & were about to kill His Son, He would remove the responsibility & privilege of being members of His Kingdom from them, & give these privileges to others = Surprising Words to these religious leaders

## **CLOSING**

The Gospel is surprising; the Gospel tells us that we are a lot worse than we think we are, but God's love & mercy & grace are a lot greater than we think they are

- Nothing is more important than Jesus & the Gospel; the Gospel is meant to be remembered & celebrated every day
- *“Daily preaching the gospel to ourselves makes more of a difference in our lives than probably any other discipline we can practice”*

## **PRAYER**