

Mark It Up – **Matthew 21:1-17**

¹ Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will send them at once.” ⁴ This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying,

⁵ “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’”

⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. ⁸ Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” ¹⁰ And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, “Who is this?” ¹¹ And the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.”

¹² And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. ¹³ He said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of robbers.”

¹⁴ And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. ¹⁵ But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” they were indignant, ¹⁶ and they said to him, “Do you hear what these are saying?” And Jesus said to them, “Yes; have you never read,

“‘Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise?’”

¹⁷ And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there.

Zechariah 9:9

⁹ Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;
righteous and having salvation is he,
humble and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Psalms 8:1–2

¹ O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.
² Out of the mouth of babies and infants,
you have established strength because of your foes,
to still the enemy and the avenger.

Psalms 118:25–26

²⁵ Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success!

²⁶ Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We bless you from the house of the LORD.

Let's Warm Up

1. If you could make a grand entrance, what would it be like?

Would you ride a procession of elephants and camels (<https://youtu.be/Xl93sYWAhWw>)? Or would you prefer to ride comfortably inside your Gold State Coach (<https://youtu.be/gqXQxX3LGOw>)? If you like to dance, try a palanquin (<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/21rnEwAPzkk>)!

In this week's passage, Jesus' entrance says a lot about who He is and why He came.

2. Have you ever met a famous person? What was it like?

Pastor Bryan told a story about meeting a former president of Botswana. President Masire came off as a pretty chill guy and they had a good time together.

How about you? No, Pastor Vinh doesn't count. Was this a celebrity (international, local, whatever) you cared about? Did the interaction leave you feeling positive or negative about them? Was it a brief moment or was there some time spent together? Can you introduce them to me?

In this week's passage, the people in Jerusalem get a face-to-face encounter with the King of Israel.

3. Did you have something you originally thought was beneficial but turned out harmful?

I grew up in the 80s and 90s when schoolwork began shifting into the digital age. I wrote essays in WordPad and researched with Microsoft Encarta '95 (<https://youtu.be/KEKm4Laodlg>). It was a huge help, especially since our local library was tiny! **BUT** I spent waaaay too much time on AOL Instant Messenger and ICQ chatting with friends (or just waiting for them to log on). Then in college, peer-to-peer file sharing blew up, allowing me to waste even more time bootlegging video games and movies. Ultimately, computers and the Internet probably had a net negative effect on my grades.

In this week's passage, some of the systems meant to help people worship God prevented them from worshipping Him.

Let's Get Started

4. Why is it difficult to obey an authority figure such as a king? What about Jesus?

Pastor Bryan noted the disciples immediately obeyed Jesus' command to get his ride. He also said, "Willingness to submit and obey King Jesus is very counter-cultural in our individualistic me-focused,

western society. We don't want to be told what to do – we want to call the shots.” Is it easy or hard for you to be told what to do? Why?

5. Which false version of the gospel do you see the most around you? Why is it wrong?

Pastor Bryan mentioned his friend Ken Esau listing three wrong versions of the gospel.

Get out of Jail Free Gospel. God is righteous and judges sin. Believe in Jesus so you won't get punished.

Hipster Gospel. God loves peace, love, and justice the way you define it.

Mercedes Benz Gospel. God wants to bless you with material riches.

6. What does someone's entrance say about them?

Years ago, I went to Steveston and there were crowds of Asian women. Turns out that famous Korean actor Lee Min-ho was filming a show there. When he walked out with his entourage the ladies went nuts. I'm not sure why. It's not like he would run up to a particular girl, hold her hand, look her in the eyes, and say, "Your blood-curdling screams drew me to you. Be my girlfriend!" I'm not an international celebrity, so maybe I'm wrong.

I had never heard of this guy before, but when I saw all that all these ladies did their research to know where and when he would show up, went there to wait for him in the rain, and then lost their minds when they saw him indicated that he must be pretty famous. The fact that he didn't talk to any of them but went straight to his tent suggests he probably keeps some distance from his fans.

In this week's passage, we can learn about who Jesus is through His entrance, too.

7. When does a good thing become a distraction?

Selling animals started as a convenient way for people to buy animals to sacrifice. Changing money also helped people to have appropriate currency to pay the temple tax. These were helpful things. How do you think they became distractions for people who came to worship God?

Perhaps you can think of ways good things became distractions in your life.

8. Does God need our prayer or worship?

The temple was a house of prayer. Why was that such a big deal to Jesus? Did God somehow suffer when fewer people prayed? Did people not praying cause Him to be weaker or limit His ability? Who was the house of prayer for?

Let's Dig In

9. Pastor Bryan said, "You don't elect kings, you obey them." What's your gut reaction to this statement?

I grew up in the States where we famously rejected monarchy in favor of elected officials. Now I'm a Canadian citizen 🇨🇦! On one hand, we're under King Charles III. On the other hand, he has limited power (constitutional monarchy) and doesn't get involved much in our politics. We still have elections to determine who is in charge and pride ourselves in being free. Being free is in our national anthem! We live in society where people choose who to follow.

Does it feel weird obeying someone you never agreed to obey? Would you prefer to pick your own king? Do you believe supreme executive power derives from a mandate from the masses or a farcical aquatic ceremony?

10. What is the significance of Jesus' grand entrance?

Jesus has traveled from Jericho to Jerusalem. Watch what that trek was like: <https://youtu.be/zVmagXx-n34>.

Donkeys. Some important people in the Old Testament rode donkeys (Judges 10:4; 12:13-14). By riding it, Jesus fulfills Zechariah 9:9. It's not a glamorous animal.

The Lord Needs them. It's not like he has Donkey Evo to see the donkeys available. He demonstrates supernatural knowledge to know where to find it. He also knows exactly what to tell the animal's owner.

Cloaks and Branches. When Jehu was anointed king, the people put their clothes on the ground (2 Kings 9:13). It shows reverence and support for the person walking on them. Would you put your jacket on the ground for anyone to walk on? Of course not! They had better be pretty important to you.

Hosanna. Hosanna is a Greek transliteration (writing out the Hebrew in Greek) of the Hebrew word הוֹשִׁיעָה (hoshiah). It was originally a cry for God to save. Perhaps this Jesus guy would be the one to save God's people?

Stir. Passover was always a big deal because tons of Jewish people came from all over the Roman Empire to Jerusalem to worship at the temple. This time, there's a bigger-than-normal commotion that leads everyone to wonder what's going on. This will lead to the climax of Jesus' ministry.

11. Why did Jesus cleanse the temple?

Why temple? Since Adam and Eve rebelled against God by eating the fruit (Genesis 3), people have always wanted to do their thing instead of following God. In the Bible, we see that people worshipped idols, murdered, committed adultery, lied, and stole from each other. They loved money and themselves more than God and other people. All this rebellion against God was sin. Sin separates people from God and deserves His punishment.

Because God is loving and merciful, He gave the people a system to deal with sin. He allowed them to sacrifice an innocent animal that died in their place and took on their punishment. These sacrifices happened in the temple. As people sacrificed to God, their sins were dealt with and they could celebrate in God's presence. (Jesus would be the ultimate innocent sacrifice to end all sacrifices.)

The temple also served as a central location for people to gather to pray to God.

Buying, Selling, Changing Money. People could purchase animals to sacrifice in the temple. It's easier than bringing sheep from far away. People also had to pay a temple tax (Exodus 30:13) so they had to exchange for acceptable currency. Providing these services could be a big help.

The buying, selling, and changing money weren't necessarily bad. They became problematic when they drew focus away from prayer. Buyers, sellers, and money changers were focused on maximizing profit instead of facilitating worship. One Jewish religious leader around Jesus' time was angry because high demand had made sacrificial birds prohibitively expensive (Mishnah Keritot 1.7).

These transactions also happened where people should be praying. Bibles, notebooks, and pens allow us to look at God's Word and write down what He's saying to us. But imagine if Willingdon had a booth with a cash register in the sanctuary so people could buy them during the worship service. How could we focus on worshipping God if we kept hearing the *DING* of the credit card machine or people discussing what they're going to buy?

Blind and Lame. Those with physical disabilities worshipped God in the outer areas. Jesus healed them so they could go in and worship God. Those who wanted to make money made it hard for people to approach God in prayer, but Jesus allowed them to get closer to God.

12. How are we tempted to turn worship into something else?

The temple was a house of prayer, a place for people to collectively approach and experience God's presence. Some people saw it as a way to turn a profit, turning it into a den of thieves.

Chances are, most of us don't see Sunday worship, Life Group gatherings, or other moments of worship with other Christians as a means of getting rich. But we are all tempted to make it something else.

When I was a kid, church was a religious duty so I could do whatever during the week. As a teen, it was a place to meet cute girls so helping out was a way to impress girls with how many chairs I could carry. As a seminary student, Sunday school was a time to impress people with my Bible knowledge and Sunday worship to demonstrate my preaching ability. Being a regular attendee, helping with manual tasks, teaching, and preaching are all *good* things we can do as worship. But in my heart, I turned them into a den of Jonathan.

How about you? Is it a way to make God happy so you can get what you want? Making friends to battle loneliness or building your network to grow your business opportunities? A safe place to put your kids so they'll be good boys and girls?

13. How can you get back to obeying Jesus?

You realize you've been refusing to obey Jesus or you've turned the worship of God into something self-serving. Good! God's opened your eyes to see what you've done wrong not to beat you over the head and make you feel bad (Romans 8:1), but so you can turn around to come back to Him (Romans 2:4).

Identify where you went wrong. What misconception about Jesus led you there? Is He your king or just an optional authority figure? Does He care about your actions or your heart? Learn the correct way to see Jesus, confess your sins, and ask for forgiveness. If you're not sure, ask others in your Life Group or a pastor.

You can focus on why you should worship Him. Think of Jesus' love for you by dying on the cross to take on the punishment for your sins because of your rebellion against Him. Meditate on how amazing and awesome God is because He created the beautiful world we all live in. Read your Bible to learn eternal truths about God and process your past week to see what He's doing today.

You can ask Him for help. Jesus knows you're weak! But instead of looking down on you, He sympathizes with your weakness (Hebrews 4:15). He knows we need His help, so He gives us the Holy Spirit. Ask Him to strengthen and empower you. You can also ask others to pray for you. God can use the people around you to strengthen you, too.

14. How can we help others obey Jesus?

Perhaps you could think about how you can set an example for others to follow. What would you want others to do for you if you were in the same situation (Galatians 5:14)? Are there examples of how others helped you in the past?

Are there any barriers you may be putting up? Sometimes we want things a certain way to make us happy, but by doing so we alienate others. For example, we may just want to worship and have fellowship with our friend group instead of inviting outsiders to join us.