



# Session 7: Matthew 21-23

## for the week of November 14th

### **The Triumph of the King: Jesus' Authority**

Matthew 16:21 was a turning point in Jesus' ministry, for "from that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things . . . and be killed, and on the third day be raised." The focus in Matthew 21-23 is on the religious leaders' opposition to Jesus as he arrives in Jerusalem. Jesus responds by rebuking them in the form of parables (Matt. 21:28-22:14), debating with them (Matt. 22:15-45), and pronouncing woes upon them (Matt. 23:1-39). This prepares us for the coming chapters when the conflict will climax in the crucifixion of Jesus.

In Matthew 21-23 Jesus arrives in Jerusalem amid praise. This scene of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem fulfills the Messianic expectations of a king who would come from the line of David to usher in God's righteous reign and bring peace to the nations and rescue God's people from exile.<sup>1</sup> While the crowds in Matthew 21:9 seem to echo this understanding of Jesus as the Davidic Messiah in their praise, we soon see Jesus engaged in conflict with the Jewish leaders about his own identity and their rejection of him. The Jewish leaders eventually lead the crowds in rejecting Jesus as the Messiah as well. Yet, by rejecting the king that God had sent these leaders abused their religious authority and defied the authority of God. Thus Jesus lays out several statements of judgment against them at the end of this section.

*This summary and the following questions are adapted from Drew Hunter's Knowing the Bible: Matthew*

### **Discussion**

- 1) Read Zechariah 9:9-13 and consider the significance of Jesus' actions in Matthew 21:2-7. Next, read Psalms 118:25-26 in the context of the whole Psalm to discern what the crowds mean by quoting this psalm in Matthew 21:9 (note that "Hosanna" is a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew word *hoshi'ah na'*, which means "save us, we pray!"<sup>2</sup>). Bring these observations together by stating what this scene communicates about Jesus' identity.
  
- 2) Jesus curses the tree in Matthew 21:18-27 because it has only the appearance of fruit. This is an enacted parable for the events occurring this week in Jerusalem. Scan the context of Matthew 21-23 and answer these questions:
  - What does the fig tree represent?
  - What does Jesus' judgment against it represent?
  
- 3) When the leaders confront Jesus in the temple, he exposes their ignorance and false motives. Then he proceeds to tell three parabolic stories, each of which is a retelling of the story of Israel up to the current generation. What is Jesus' central message to these leaders in...
  - the story of the two sons (Matt. 21:28-32)?

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<sup>1</sup> See Zech. 9:9-13.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. 118:25.

- the story of the tenants ([Matt. 21:33-46](#))?
- the story of the wedding feast ([Matt. 22:1-14](#))?

- 4) Read [Matthew 22:15-22](#). In response to Jesus' parables, the leaders "plotted how to entangle him in his words."<sup>3</sup> They do this by asking a series of three questions.<sup>4</sup> What is Jesus' primary point in his response to the Pharisees' first question ([Matthew 22:16-22](#))? As you consider your answer, note two things: The "image" on the coins was of the emperor, Caesar, and all humans are made in the "image" of God.<sup>5</sup>
- 5) Read [Matthew 22:23-33](#). The theme of a future, bodily resurrection of the dead is developed throughout the Old Testament but is not as explicit in the Pentateuch.<sup>6</sup> The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection since they drew mainly or exclusively on the Pentateuch for doctrine. In response to their questions, Jesus accuses them of knowing "neither the Scriptures nor the power of God."<sup>7</sup> How does Jesus substantiate this claim?
- 6) Read [Matthew 22:41-46](#). Now, read [2 Samuel 7:12-14](#); [Psalm 89:3-4](#); [Isaiah 11:1-5, 10](#); and [Jeremiah 23:5-6](#). With these texts in mind, is the Pharisees' response to Jesus in [Matthew 22:42](#) correct, incorrect, or incomplete? Why does David call his descendant "my Lord," in the text Jesus quotes?<sup>8</sup>
- 7) What does Jesus repeatedly call the leaders in [Matthew 23](#)? How does [Matthew 23:1-7](#) demonstrate this to be an accurate name? How does this problem show up in our own lives today?
- 8) Summarize several of the prominent issues Jesus addresses in his seven "woes" to the leaders in [Matthew 23:13-36](#). Can you identify places earlier in Matthew where this teaching also occurs?
- 9) How does Jesus' climactic lament over Jerusalem in [Matthew 23:37-39](#) inform us about how Jesus thinks and feels about those who reject him?

## **Prayer**

Spend some time in prayer together, praying for each other's needs and that the Spirit will grant us a deeper understanding of the goodness and authority of Christ and empower us for living as representative of his kingdom in this world.

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<sup>3</sup> Matt. 22:15.

<sup>4</sup> See Matt. 22:16, 23-28, and 34-36.

<sup>5</sup> Gen. 1:26-27; 9:6.

<sup>6</sup> See Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37, Dan. 12:2.

<sup>7</sup> Matt. 22:29.

<sup>8</sup> Ps. 110:1.