

Come Follow Me
Elo Viz production
Week 21

Matt 21-23, Mark 11, Luke 19-20, John 12

In my opinion the reading for this week should have been spread out over 4 weeks. There is so much packed in these chapters there is no way to get through it all. But we are going to sure try. In Matthew 21 there are four main events that take place. Each is significant in its own right but there is a doctrinal thread that links them together.

It starts out with Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. This event fulfills so many prophecies given in the old testament. This one event, on this exact day should have told all the world who Jesus was. The prophesied Messiah that was foretold before the world began. It was so important that this happened in the way that it did, with the Donkey, the palm branches and the shouts of Hosanna. We won't go into detail here about it but it is worth the study.
(Daniel 9)

When Jesus gets to the temple in Jerusalem we read that he "casts out all of them that bought and sold in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves." (Matt 21:12)

We read similarly in Mark and Luke. But the account of John is different. In John this happens at the beginning of Jesus's ministry. Soooo, what are we supposed to do with this? Well, most scholars believe that this happened twice, once at the beginning of Jesus's ministry and recorded in John and a second time in the last week of his earthly life as recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke.

But this event is something that some don't like to talk about. This isn't the Jesus that we know and love. What happened to gentle Jesus? Meek and kind? Some have a problem with His temper and what may seem like rage at these, that defiled the Lord's house.

Well, there is an explanation and I hope you will indulge me for just a second while giving a brief background to why this happened.

In the days of Jesus, during this time that we now call palm sunday, all that were able, would come to Jerusalem to the temple. And they had set up in the courtyard of the temple, for lack of a better word: a flea market. Josephus the ancient Greek historian called it the "Bizarre of Annas". Annas was the jewish high priest at this particular time in jewish history. And Annas set up these shops or booths to make a ton of money. And this is how he would do it. During this time of Passover people would come to the temple by the thousands and everyone 20 years and older would be required to pay a half a shekel as a temple offering. But the problem was that in that day the most common currency was Roman coins. Which, it was not acceptable to pay your temple tribute in Roman currency. So they would be required to exchange it there for temple money called a shekel. And what Annas would do, is when they got there he would

charge them this outrageous amount to exchange their money into an acceptable temple currency. And that was only one way that he would line his pockets, the other way was through animal fees. They were also required by law to sacrifice a lamb. Well, if you're traveling many days through the desert you probably didn't want to bring a lamb with you. You wouldn't want it to get injured along the way or attacked by wild animals so most likely you would have to purchase one when you got there. Or, if you did bring one on the journey they would have to show it to the priest to make sure it was an acceptable offering before it was sacrificed. And if your priest back home certified it it would have to be inspected again and they would do all sorts of things to prove that these lambs were not free of blemish and basically force them to buy one of their lambs and they were sold at ridiculous rates. Some bible commentaries say as much as ten times the cost of a normal lamb...ten times. Kind of like when you go to the movies and you pay \$12 for a ticket and then when you get in, it is \$40 for popcorn and a drink. They know they got you, so you have no choice but to pay these outrageous prices. It's extortion really. It got so bad that some scholars believe that Annas the high priest in today's dollars by setting up these shops and charging these exorbitant rates, in today's dollars he would have raked in between 3-5 million dollars a year. So it was a racket. Annas turned the sacred into the secular and he did it by ripping off the people, coming to worship the true and living God. No wonder Jesus was angry. The temple had become a place of profit instead of a place of prayer.

So what are we to learn from this? I have heard so many people use this account to talk about keeping the sabbath day holy, and how we shouldn't buy things on Sunday. I can see how this can be used in that lesson. However, I don't believe that is what Jesus intended when it was recorded in all four gospels. I think it goes so much deeper than sabbath activity. There are many in the church that use their position, their calling, and even their membership to get gain among their fellow saints. This practice has become so commonplace that it could be considered the norm. And I get that people have to make a living and provide for their families and we can't always do things for free when people request help, but, I do know one thing. That when we read about the city of Enoch, or the Nephites just after Christ's visit to the Americas that these practices were nowhere to be found. They were all of one heart and one mind and there was no poor among them, and they had all things in common. I think sometimes we are so worried about getting taken advantage of, or making sure things are fair that we forget that everything we have is a gift from God meant to be shared with His children. The blessings that come from heaven are so much greater than any earthly possession, and those can only be had if we forget about ourselves and give willingly to all in need.

In the next few verses of Matthew 21 we see a strange act by the Master as He curses a fig tree that it dried up and died. And you may be asking; How are these 2 events connected? Well... "fig"uratively speaking they have a lot in common.

Fig trees have a pre-season and a late season. And the early season is a foreshadow of the late season. What this means is that when Jesus passed by in the early season and there was no fruit on the tree, that means that in the late season there would also be no fruit to harvest on the tree, therefore He cursed it that it died. As you know, fruit is a great symbol of good works. This curse was a symbol for the people of the Jews, that would crucify the Lord. That there

would be no fruit in the early or the late seasons and that because of their wickedness they too would be cursed and ultimately destroyed.

Peter who noticed what just took place with this fig tree asked Jesus what it all ment and this is the answer form the Master:

“**21** Verily I say unto you, If ye have **faith**, and **doubt** not, ye shall not only do this *which is done* to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this **mountain**, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.

22 And all **things**, whatsoever ye shall **ask** in **prayer**, believing, ye shall receive.”
(Matt 21:21-22)

In much of the Christian world they believe this is figurative. I have heard many Christian pastors preach on this idea of moving mountains. You wouldn't believe the explanations that are transposed about this level of faith. And if we are not careful we can fall into the same trap of watering down the power of faith.

But look here in Ether Chapter 12 verse 30 it says:

“**30** For the brother of Jared said unto the mountain Zerin, **Remove**—and it was removed. And if he had not had faith it would not have moved; wherefore thou workest after men have faith.

31 For thus didst thou manifest thyself unto thy disciples; for **after** they had **faith**, and did speak in thy name, thou didst show thyself unto them in great power.

32 And I also remember that thou hast said that thou hast prepared a house for man, yea, even among the **mansions** of thy Father, in which man might have a more excellent **hope**; wherefore man must hope, or he cannot receive an inheritance in the place which thou hast prepared.”

That's real faith. That's powerful faith. That's real life power!

Elder Bruce C Haffen once told this story:

“I once had an experience that taught me a great lesson about the way a highly developed tolerance for “being realistic” can inhibit the workings of the Spirit in our lives. When I had been on my mission in Germany about a year, I was assigned to work with a brand new missionary named Elder Keeler, who had just arrived fresh from converting—or so he thought—all the stewardesses on the plane from New York to Frankfurt. Within a few days of his arrival, I was called to a meeting in another city

and had to leave him to work in our city with another inexperienced missionary whose companion went with me. I returned late that night.

The next morning I asked him how his day had gone. He broke into a big smile and said that he had found a family who would surely join the Church. In our mission, it was rare to see anybody join the Church, let alone a whole family. I asked for more details, but he had forgotten to write down either the name or the address. All he could remember was that the family lived on the top floor of a big apartment house. “Oh, that’s great,” I thought to myself as I contemplated all those flights of stairs. He also explained that he knew so little German that he had exchanged but a few words with the woman who answered the door. But he did think she wanted us to come back—and he wanted to go find her and have me talk to her that very minute. I explained to him that the people who do not slam the door in missionaries’ faces are not all planning to join the Church. But off we went to find her, mostly to humor him. He could not remember the right street either, so we picked a likely spot in our tracting area and began climbing up and down those endless polished staircases.

After a frustrating hour, I decided that I really needed to level with him. “Based on my many months of experience,” I said, “it is simply not worth our time to try any longer to find that woman. I have developed a tolerance for the realities of missionary work, and I simply know more about all this than you do.”

His eyes filled with tears and his lower lip began to tremble. I remember it so well—he said to me through those tear-filled eyes, “Elder Hafen, I came on my mission to find the honest in heart. The Spirit told me that that woman is going to join the Church, and you can’t stop me from finding her.”

I decided that I had to teach him a lesson. So I raced him up one staircase after another until he was ready to drop, and so was I. “Elder Keeler,” I asked, “had enough?”

“No,” he said. “We’ve got to find her.”

I began to smolder. I decided to work him until he pled with me to stop—then maybe he would get the message.

Then, at the top of a long flight of stairs, we found the apartment. She came to the door. He thrashed my ribs with his elbow and whispered loudly, “That’s her, elder. That’s the one. Talk to her!”

Not long ago, brothers and sisters, up on Maple Lane a few blocks from here, that woman’s husband sat in our living room. He was here for general conference because he is the bishop of the Mannheim Ward. His two boys are preparing for missions; his wife and daughters are pillars of the Church. That is a lesson I can never forget about the limitations of the skepticism and the tolerance for ambiguity that come with learning and experience. I hope that I will never be so aware of “reality” that I am unresponsive to the whisperings of heaven.

<https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/bruce-c-hafen/love-is-not-blind-thoughts-college-students-faith-ambiguity/>

The point to all of this is that: When Jesus comes into our lives and over turns the tables of stability and He breaks the cages of our idols. When it seems He is destroying everything and taking away everything that is important to us. What He is really doing is moving everything away so we can see what we are truly meant to see: The temple of our God. Our temple. Our true selves. Selfless, honest, generous, faithful. Willing to submit to all things which the Lord seest fit to inflict upon us. A faithful servant willing to give to any in need, even if it's your last loaf of bread. Why? Because you know, that once you are willing to give up every world possession, God will move mountains for you, literally, He will move mountains to give you everything you desire.

Of this truth I testify, In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.