

Matthew 21 v 1 -17

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[0 : 00] Please, would you turn again to Matthew and chapter 21, the passage we read a little earlier, as we think about these events. Just as you're turning there, can I again just mention on Wednesday the communion service. It's an open communion in the sense that what I hope is that each one of us will come and bring something to share. Perhaps it may be a song, a hymn, maybe a reading of scripture, maybe even a thought or meditation, as it were, about Easter.

And as we gather around the Lord's table, as we share in that remembrance of his suffering and death, we may also build one another up. And again, for next Sunday as well, an all-age service means that the children will be staying with us. We know Sunday school and we shall be rejoicing in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. I hope it will be a good opportunity to invite friends to, particularly non-Christian friends or family even. It is the highlight of the year for us as Christians. I know the world makes much of Christmas and we rejoice in the coming of Christ, but how much more important it is, not just that Christ came but he died and rose again. So, please be praying for those events and please look forward to them. So, hopefully you've got Matthew and chapter 21 there, those first 17 or so verses. A man by the name of Robert Wood Johnson II was the chairman of that huge pharmaceutical medical firm Johnson & Johnson some years ago. And he was known as a very, very harsh boss with an eagle eye and he would often go around inspecting the factories under his concern and he would be very, very critical. And on one occasion he was going to make an unannounced visit.

He didn't announce he was visiting, he would always come by surprise to catch people just on the hop, as it were. But this manager had 30 minutes notice. Somebody had sort of got word he was coming on his way.

30 minutes. And so he sort of blitzed the place and he said, let's get it all tidied up. And there were some huge rolls of paper. So, he said, let's get them up on the roof. So, he got them all up on the roof, you see, out the way. And he thought, wow, this is great. It looks super. When Mr. Johnson arrives, all will be well. But when Johnson walked in the door, he was furious. He was livid. He said, what's on earth is all that junk doing on the roof? How on earth was the manager to know that he was going to arrive in his private helicopter and everything would be laid bare? Well, when we read about the arrival of Jesus on what we typically call Palm Sunday, it wasn't a last-minute surprise visit. It was something that Jesus had for a long time been prepared for, and for a long time he'd been speaking about. Back in Luke in chapter 9, we're told even several months before that he resolutely set out for Jerusalem. I think the AV says he set his face as flint for Jerusalem. And throughout his ministry, throughout his time with his disciples, he would often tell them, which they never understood and couldn't get a grasp on, the fact that he was going to Jerusalem and he was going there for a purpose. Back in Matthew 16, he says to his disciples this,

[3 : 21] From that time on, Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law, that he must be killed and on the third day rise again. But when Jesus, in spite of all these preparations to his disciples, for most people it was a surprise. For most people, his coming into Jerusalem was something that they didn't expect. And so there were different responses, different reactions. We all react differently to a surprise, don't we? Some of us can be shocked and a bit afraid. Some of us can rejoice in it and are happy with it, if it's a nice surprise, obviously. And some of us can be bewildered by it. There's different responses. And so for Jesus, as he comes into Jerusalem, we have these different responses. And in many ways, those responses that we're going to look at characterize people today. They characterize people's attitude to Jesus today, how they think on him, how they consider him, how they react to him. But more than that, especially, I believe, this coming of Jesus into

Jerusalem is a picture to us of how people will respond to when Jesus comes again. Because the clear message of the Bible is this, that Jesus is coming again. He promised that he would come again. And when he comes, it will be a surprise. Nobody will be expecting Jesus' return. I know that there's been all this hoo-ha about various dear brothers and sisters who are Christians who are saying, well, we know it's going to be this day, and it's going to be this year, and it's going to be this time.

And of course, then, of course, we get to that time and that day and nothing's happened. Jesus made it very clear that nobody will know when he comes. He said this later on in Matthew as he speaks to his disciples and those who are there. He says, therefore, keep watch because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

So you also must be ready because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. He will come. He will return. There's no doubt about that. Just as surely as he was born into this world and came that first time, just as certainly and surely and definitely he's coming again. And the question, of course, is are we ready? Well, what were the responses? What were the attitudes of the people here in Matthew 21 on Jesus' arrival? And how does that reflect people today, perhaps some of us? And how does it reflect upon his coming again? Well, first of all, there's a group of people who were ignorant of Jesus, aren't there? You read about them there in verse 10. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, who is this?

[6 : 05] When it meant the whole city, it means people from all over the city. It doesn't mean every single person, clearly, because some of them knew. But a lot of people were saying, who's this? Who's this? They were ignorant of Jesus. In spite of the fact for the last three years Jesus had toured the country up and down and preached and, of course, carried out miracles and met with crowds. We know there were several times he had thousands, several thousand people he was teaching and speaking to.

There were still a large number of people who knew nothing about him. Perhaps some of these people were out of the country during the time that Jesus had been ministering. Perhaps they were people actually who'd come from other countries because this week was the beginning of the Passover week. A lot of people would come who were Jews, who were from surrounding countries. So perhaps they hadn't heard about Jesus.

It may just have been, of course, that they were ordinary people who'd just been getting around life with all the busyness and hectic and chaos of life and they had other commitments. They had no time to find out about this Jesus or to understand who he was.

Whatever reason, there were many who were asking, who is this? Sadly, the truth is that there are many, even today, who have no idea who Jesus is. I'm not just talking about parts of the world which have not been touched by missionaries or by Christians. I'm talking about here, in Whitby and in the UK. There are many millions of people, children and young people and adults as well, have never really heard the gospel of Jesus Christ.

They've never really heard about who he is or what he's like. They've heard his name because he's been used as a swear word. They've heard about him perhaps for other reasons, but they've never really heard the truth about him.

[7 : 56] But when he comes again, as he surely must do, people who say, who is this, will know who he is. Everybody will know him and everybody will see him for who he is. As Jesus talks about his return at some length later on in Matthew 24, he says this, Everyone will see him and everyone will know who he is because later on in the Bible as well, we're told that when everybody sees him, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. We sang in one of our hymns earlier on, the very first hymn, I think it was, Jesus is Lord. A shout of joy, a cry of anguish. Everybody will say, Jesus is Lord. But there will be some who will see him as their Lord because they've trusted in him and followed him and loved him all their lives. And others will say, Jesus is Lord, and they've never known him until that moment.

What a time of great sorrow it will be and grief for them, be too late for them. To know Jesus and put their faith and trust in him. There are those who are ignorant of Jesus.

That's why it's absolutely imperative, dear friends, that as Christians, we live out the gospel and preach the gospel and share the gospel. It's absolutely imperative that we encourage and support and pray for and send out missionaries around the world and into our own country as well, so that when that day comes there may be less and less people will say, who's this? We seem to think foolishly in some way that we are living in a Christian country. We're not. Britain has never been a

Christian country per se.

It's been religious in the past, but it's never been a Christian country. And it's not a Christian country now by any stretch of the imagination. And dear friends, the people that we meet with every day, people that we speak to every day, are completely ignorant on the whole about who Jesus is. And if they don't hear about him from you and me, who's going to tell them? If they don't find out who Jesus is from us, well, who else is going to share with them the good news? They're going to continue until that day when he turns again and in ignorance receive him as Lord. You see, there is only forgiveness to be found in Jesus. There is only eternal life to be found in Jesus. Nowhere else. [10:35] Don't be conned, dear friends, into thinking that somehow ignorance is an excuse before God. It's not. Ignorance is no excuse before God. Salvation can only be found in Jesus. In Acts chapter 4, verse 12, Peter preaches, salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which men must be saved. Only Jesus. There is no salvation through Muhammad. There is no salvation through Buddha. There is no salvation through the myriad of millions of gods that Hindus worship.

There's no salvation anywhere else. Ignorance is not an excuse with God because God has made it very clear in his creation and the world around about us that he is there. Here's what Paul writes to the Romans. He says this, the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness. Since what may be known about God is plain to them because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. Do you understand why the devil wants us to disbelieve creation?

Why is evolution and the Big Bang so forcibly taught in our schools and in our TVs, in our media? Why does the devil want people not to believe in creation? Because in creation we see the hand of God.

And if we can get rid of God out of the picture of creation in some way or another, then we can do away with him altogether. That's why it's so forced. Don't think that it's a neutral agenda. Please don't think that those people who are promoting evolution and the Big Bang and those science, so-called science, are doing so out of neutral means because they just want to be educators. There is something behind that and it is of the devil because he does not want us to see the wonder of God's handiwork in this world because when we see God's handiwork, then we're without excuse. And ultimately, the simple answer to all these things is this. If the Big Bang created the world, who created the Big Bang?

There's got to be somebody at the beginning. There's got to be somebody who did something. There can't just be nothing. Unless there is God, then there cannot be anything. We need to evangelize. We need to share the gospel. There are many people who are ignorant of Jesus. Then we read about these people who are hostile to Jesus as well.

[13:26] They're the religious leaders, aren't they? Do you see what happens when people praise Jesus? In verse 15 and 16. We're told in verse 15, the chief priests, the chief of the law, they saw the wonderful things he did. The children shouting in the temple, they were indignant. In other words, they're furious. They're angry. And they say to Jesus, do you hear these children are saying?

Elsewhere, as we read in Luke, they say, tell them to stop. They don't want people saying these things about Jesus. They were angry. They hated Jesus. They were religious people, but they hated what Jesus stood for. They hated what Jesus taught.

So much so that they sought to kill him and put him to death. In Mark's account of the Palm Sunday, he tells us that after these things, this is what they did. Sorry, Mark 11 and verse 18.

The chief priests and the teacher of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him. For they feared him because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. They were jealous of him. All the people were coming to Jesus to learn about God. They weren't going to them with their dry and dead rules and laws. And they were proud. They didn't need Jesus. They didn't need Jesus to make them right with God. They were right with God because they considered themselves to be righteous in their own eyes. They thought they were good enough for God.

[15:01] So they plotted to kill him and indeed succeeded, if we can put it in that way, to put him to death. They hated Jesus. They were hostile to Jesus. Now, dear friends, that's how some people are today, even now. Not just those who are fanatical Muslims in other countries, but others as well.

All people who are religious tend to hate Jesus because religion is all about self. It's about me making myself good enough for God. It's about me doing things to be accepted by God. It's about me working my way into heaven. But more than that, it's not just those who have religion who hate Jesus. Of course, it's those who have no religion. Those who are atheists.

Those who have no belief in God. They, again, trust in themselves. They believe that they have all the answers and they hate Christ. Why is it that when we look around the world, we see that there are those countries again and again which seek to kill and persecute and oppose Christians? Christians who never raise a gun. Christians who never form a riot. Christians who never break the law. But in Buddhist countries, in Hindu countries, in Muslim countries, in communist countries, in all parts of the world, in Roman Catholic countries as well, it's not just in these things, but in every part of the world, we find that Christians are attacked and persecuted and hated. And dear friends, it may well happen here.

It may well happen here. More and more, we see that our government is becoming more and more anti-Christian. This isn't a political party soapbox that I'm on. This is just the reality of our world. Christians are being told to shut up, keep quiet, lock yourselves away in your building, and don't disturb anybody. As Christianity, we're told, is a private thing just for you and yourself and your God, but it's not. It's a public thing. It is something for the whole world. It is something that the whole world needs to hear. But there are those who hate Christ, who hate him in their hearts, who hate him because of all that he stands for, because he points out their sin, he points out their weakness, and he points out their need. But you see, no matter how much they tried and have tried to oppress Christianity, and since the day of Jesus' crucifixion ever since, you can read it in the book of Acts, and you read it through church history, there have been those who have hated Christianity and have sought to crush and destroy it and afflict it and drive it out, and wherever that's happened, it's always failed. Here's the church 2,000 years on. One of the evidences and the realities that Jesus Christ Israel is that the church still exists. The church is still preaching the gospel. The church is still going forward. In those places like China, as we know, Christianity has blossomed and bloomed under persecution. In other places, it's hard-pressed, like North Korea. But dear friends, we need to be praying for our Christian brothers and sisters in persecuted lands. There are more Christians dying now than ever before for the faith. In fact, I'm told, and I believe it's true, that during the 20th century, more Christians died for their faith than in all the 19 centuries before.

[18 : 29] We don't know so much about it, maybe, but we need to. Christians dying simply because they love Jesus. What a terrible day it will be when Jesus comes again, when those who've hated him and have sought to squash his church, those who've sought to reject him and to force him out, as it were, when they stand before God. You see, at the moment, it seems perhaps there's no justice in the world.

Those who've acted wickedly and those who've acted harshly, those who've persecuted and put to death, those who are bent upon destruction. It seems they get away with it so often.

But there is a day of judgment coming, and those who've hated the Lord Jesus will actually stand before him as their judge. In Acts chapter 17, Paul preaches and tells the people gathered there that God has set a day of judgment, and he set a judge in place, and that judge is Jesus Christ. Stand before him and answer to him. So there's those who are ignorant, and there was those who are hostile, and then there are those who we might call who were superficial followers of Jesus, those who were nominal, we might say. And there was a large crowd of them, wasn't there, in verse 8, 9, a very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road. Others cut branches. The crowds that went ahead of him, those that followed shouted. These were people who gave the appearance of being followers of Jesus, but they weren't followers of Jesus. How do I know they weren't followers of Jesus?

Well, because we know what happened. Afterwards, just a matter of days later on, these crowd who filled Jerusalem were the same people who shouted out, crucify him, crucify him. It's the same people, they're in Jerusalem. Here's the large crowds. And when, in fact, Jesus is crucified, there's only a few handful of people, of men and women, stood by him.

[20 : 30] They're people who did lots of things which resemble true disciples, don't they? They did lots of things that looked like true disciples. They praise him with their mouths. They do acts and put down their cloaks and things to show that they are followers of Jesus. They say things about him. He's Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth. They knew something about him, but they didn't truly trust him.

They didn't truly love him. They didn't truly follow him. They shouted for his death. And the reason they shouted for his death and the reason that they shouted and cheered him now was because they had an agenda that they wanted Jesus to fulfill. They thought Jesus coming into Jerusalem was the start of a new age for Israel. It meant a new time when he would come and throw out the Romans who occupied them. He would set up a new kingdom like Solomon and David's kingdom where there would be freedom from oppression and prosperity. They looked for a warrior king. But when Jesus did none of those things, when Jesus didn't meet their expectations, when Jesus didn't come up to what they wanted, they were there with the religious leaders shouting for his death. I suppose really this crowd represents the majority of people in Whitby and in the UK today. People who would call themselves Christians, at least in one way or another. They like songs of praise. They like carol services. They like Christmas and Easter and they like to go and have their babies done and they like to get married in a church and they hope that they'll get their funeral with a minister or a vicar or someone like that. They even like to say nice things about Jesus. Well, we think Jesus is a good man and he was a good teacher and he was very moral and yes, there's good things about him that we could follow.

But they've never ever put their faith in Jesus, never ever trusted him, never ever accepted him. Censuses are taken up, aren't they, around the country to find out what people believe and what religion they are and so on. And even just recently there's over 50% of the UK who would call themselves Christians. Probably 80% who say they believe in God and in Jesus. And yet the reality is that church attendance is much less than 10%. And attendance amongst Bible churches, gospel churches is less than 5%. So there are many who are nominal Christians who say that they belong, say that they believe in him, they want him there for those occasions in life. But they're going to have a terrible shock, aren't they? A terrible, terrible shock. Because Jesus tells us what's going to happen when he comes again to those people who say they're Christians, who say they know him, but have never truly trusted in him. In Matthew chapter 7, not everyone, Jesus says, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven. But only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you.

Away from me, you evildoers. Can you imagine people who are so religious, people who are so outwardly Christian doing these things, supposedly in the name of Jesus. But when he comes, he said, I never knew you. You did all the outward things. You painted the picture, you put on the clothes, you put on the face of being a Christian, but there was nothing of a relationship with myself. [24:06] What a terrible day that will be. How important it is then, dear friends, that we don't take it for granted that everybody who calls themselves a Christian is a Christian. It's important that we are discerning. You see, we live in an age of great confusion, don't we? Great confusion. Everybody has their own opinion on what a Christian is. You can have a survey in the street and somebody would say, a Christian is somebody who cares for other people. A Christian is somebody who believes in God. A Christian is somebody who gives to charity. A Christian is somebody, and so it can go on. We all have our own levels of Christian. But the Bible is very, very clear, isn't it? That there is only one type of Christian. That's somebody who is born again of the Spirit of God. Somebody who has come into a real and living relationship with Jesus Christ, who has accepted him as their Savior and their Lord, and trusted him, and their lives are changed. It's important, dear friends, that we are clear about the gospel when everybody else around us likes to muddy the waters. Because, you see, there is one group left, isn't there? There are those who are ignorant. There are those who are hostile. There are those who are nominal. But there are a group, a small group of real disciples here. Real disciples who are genuine, who you can tell apart from the false. I don't know if you watch Antiques Roadshow or any of those sort of things. They seem to be on all the time. And there's the experts, and somebody comes, and they've got this bit, this sort of silver-looking teapot. And they get out their little speck thing, ice thing, don't they? And they turn it over, and they look on the bottom. Is there a hallmark on it? Tells you when it was made. Tells you what quality of silver it is. Tells you who the maker was. Or they have a piece of porcelain, and they look again on it, and they say, yes, I can see this was made at Stafford, or wherever it was, and it's genuine Wedgwood. And they can tell the false from the real. And there's a great deal of difference between the false and the real, isn't there? The false is basically worthless and mass-produced. The real is genuine and valuable. And so there is a hallmark, a particular and specific hallmark that we see in the lives of the disciples of Jesus here, that we need to look for in our own lives, that we

might have that confidence and assurance that we are true disciples of Jesus. And what is it? Well, it's simply this. They did what he said.

They were obedient to Jesus. We have this event, don't we, about them going to fetch a donkey from the village nearby. Jesus gives them instruction, and what happens? Verse 6, the disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. Do you remember we read earlier on about the fact that Jesus had said very clearly, those who will enter the kingdom of heaven are what?

Those who do the will of my Father in heaven. The will of my Father in heaven, Jesus tells us in John 6, to believe on the Son he has sent. So the question I need to ask you and I need to ask myself is this. Am I a Christian? And do I show it because in my life I have acknowledged Jesus as my Lord, not just once or even when I was baptised, but it's something daily in my life. He is the one who I wake up and then instinctively, instinctively, there is that desire to do what he wants.

Instinctively, there's that longing to obey his commands. Instinctively, though I struggle with it, and though I get it wrong, and though I fail, as his disciples did, one betrayed him even, and others ran away and left him, but each one of them ultimately came to him and followed him. Do you have a heart for Jesus like that?

Do I? Have we believed on him? Have we bowed the knee to him? You see, the wonderful thing is when Jesus comes again, it will be a surprise for us. We can't sort of prepare for it. We can't, in that sense, be ready because we say, yes, it's tomorrow, but we need to be ready today. We need to be ready every day. It could well be today. It could well be tomorrow. It could well be in my lifetime or yours. We just don't know. The question is, are we ready? Because when Jesus comes again, for those who are ignorant of him and those who are hostile to him and those who are just nominally Christians, for them it will be a terrifying and awful shock. It will be something of great misery and sorrow and sadness as they have to stand before God without their sins forgiven, without peace with him.

But for the Christian, for you and I, if we have trusted Christ and if we love him, it will be a day of great rejoicing and celebration. It will be a day of great delight when we see him, who we've loved, who we've longed for, coming into this world, coming to receive the glory he deserves and a day of great blessing for us too. Jesus promises it will be a day of great rewards. Matthew 25, in the parable of the talents, he tells us that when the master returns, he will say to his servant, well done, good and faithful servant, come and share in your master's happiness. It's a day we should be looking forward to and rejoicing in. It's the goal for all that we're about, his coming again.

[29 : 34] And so as we're close, here's the question once more, and I say it to you, dear friends, with all seriousness, with all sobriety, and I say to you, dear friends, what are you today? Are you ready for Christ's return?

Are you ignorant of him? Then find out about him. Don't just say, well I don't know, I'm ignorant, I haven't made my mind up yet. Find out, do something about it, don't stay in your ignorance. If you're someone who hates him and says, I'm good enough, I don't need him, then let me say this to you, dear friend, you can't fight God. You can't fight God. Yield to him. Submit to him. You're not going to beat him. You're not going to win him over to your side. He is merciful and gracious at this time. He is willing to receive you and to forgive you, no matter how better your heart is, no matter how proud your heart is. He will do that, because now is the day of salvation, now is the day of grace.

Don't leave it any longer. And for those of you, perhaps, you've thought you were a Christian all your lives, or you think you're a Christian because something happened, or because you believed in something, or because you do something, or because you're in a Christian family, let me say this to you now as well. Don't just rest upon something that's happened in your life, but rest upon a real, true faith today. Don't say, well, I was baptized. That makes me a Christian, or I've go to church, or I'm a member of this church, or that church, or I've done this, or that. Don't trust in those things.

Now come to him. Even today, come to him. Lord, I don't know whether I'm yours or not, but I want to be yours, and I want to trust you, and I want to bow the knee to you, and I do it gladly. Make sure. Don't leave this building until you've got it right with him. You just don't know. And for those of us who are Christ's, those of us who are true disciples, then dear friends, let's serve him. Let's praise him.

Let's love him. Let's proclaim him. Let's stand up for him. Let's look forward to that day when he comes again. But let's look forward and work towards that day, knowing that he is yet people he wants to rescue and save, knowing that he is yet people who need to hear this glorious message, this warning of judgment, but this wonderful message of forgiveness and peace. And no matter how

difficult life may be at this moment for you, dear Christian, no matter how people around you may treat you because you are Christ's, keep your eye upon that day when he comes again and he says to you, well done, good and faithful servant. Don't lose sight of that. Press on. Persevere till the day he comes and takes you home to himself. Let's pray together now.

[32 : 32] Lord Jesus, we're so grateful that you came into this world and you came especially that you might enter Jerusalem on that fateful week for the purpose of dying and suffering in our place to earn for us what we could not earn for ourselves, forgiveness and peace with God.

We're so grateful again and we stand in awe and wonder because we know that you rose from the dead and are alive even today, alive that we might know you and be in fellowship and relationship with you, alive that you might give to us the wonderful gift of life everlasting and peace everlasting. We pray again, oh Lord, that you would please prepare us and make us ready for when you come once more, when you come again into this world, when you come again to bring judgment and justice and reward, when you come again, oh Lord, to stand before all men and all women and we will be there on that day.

We will be there with all those who've ever lived and ever shall live and see you and each one will bow and say, Jesus is Lord. Oh, but Lord, help us to bow even now and to acknowledge you now so that on that day when you come, our hearts may leap with joy rather than be crushed with sorrow and regrets.

Oh, what terrible, terrible regrets it will be to spend all eternity thinking, if only I had, but I never did. Thinking for all eternity, if only I had listened, if only I had trusted, but I never did. Oh Lord, how much punishment that will be to be so angry and so bitter with self that we were so foolish and stubborn of heart. Melt us, Lord, deal with us, Lord. Make us, Lord, those people who rejoice in Jesus, who call upon him and who live for him day by day.

[34 : 19] Oh Lord, work in our hearts and take us on from this time. For Jesus' name's sake we ask. Amen. And may God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. And may your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.