

Matthew Chapter 21 v 1 - 17

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Welcome. It's good to... We trust that together. In God's presence we might know his blessing.

Good to welcome Dave back from being at sea and others as well. We're a few of our folk away coming up to Easter and the holidays, but it's good that we can be together and seek the Lord. Today is Palm Sunday. Today as Christians we remember and think about Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. Leading up to Easter, Good Friday, and the resurrection.

And as Jesus came into the city, Matthew tells us in his account of that day, the people began to shout, Hosanna to the Son of David.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest heaven. That incredible little phrase, Hosanna, means Lord save.

[0 : 55] And whether they fully understood what Jesus was coming to do or not, for those of us who are Christians this morning, we do know why Jesus came. We know what that salvation means. What it means to be right with God.

To know our sins forgiven. We know what it means because of the gospel. The good news of Jesus Christ. And great is the gospel is our first hymn. We're going to sing together this morning.

So if you turn in your hymn books. Number 150. Great is the gospel of our glorious God. Give me a hymn book. Give me a hymn book. Let's continue to adore Jesus, the King of love, as we come to God in prayer together.

Let us pray. How can we do anything else, O Lord our God, when we consider you and your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and your wonderful Holy Spirit, when we think upon the Godhead, that incredible and marvelous persons who have won for us and brought us into their fold, into their embrace, into the experience of their love.

How can we even do anything else but adore you? How can we do anything else but stand before you in awe and praise and wonder?

[2 : 20] We think of you, our Heavenly Father, the God who purposed and chose to save and rescue us before the world was made. And you, the Son, Lord Jesus, came into this world, came to us in our sinful state, came to us, taking to yourself our frailty, our weakness, our humanity, living amongst us and dying for us upon that cross.

How can we thank you, Holy Spirit, for that gracious work that you did in the hearts of each one of us here who has trusted in Christ? We were once dead in sin, but you made us alive.

We were once blind and couldn't see Jesus in his loveliness, but you opened our eyes. We once were deaf to the words of life. Oh, but you opened our deaf ears.

Thank you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that we have such a great salvation, such a great gospel to not only enjoy and delight in, but to proclaim and to declare and to make known to our generation, our community, to our world.

And we praise you and thank you that this morning we're here because of you, because of all that you've done and all that you are and all that you've promised and all that you continue to do for us.

[3 : 35] Lord, it's only by your grace that we have survived this week. It's only by your keeping, only by your protection, Lord, that we have been able to come here. It's only you who've given us the strength and health.

And more than that, it's you, O Lord, who has not let us go or forsaken us. We've sinned this week. We've cocked it up this week. We've made a mess of things again and again.

But you, O Lord, have forgiven us according to your grace. And you've not let us wander from you, but you've drawn us back. You've drawn us back and you'll never let us go.

Oh, thank you for that. As we come this morning, be near to us, we pray. Again, come by your Holy Spirit afresh and speak and meet with and deal with us. For those of us who are still dead and blind and deaf.

Lord, do a marvelous, miraculous work and cause our eyes to see and our hearts to believe. We pray, Lord, for those of us who are struggling and finding things tough.

[4 : 32] We pray again, O Lord, that you would cause us to lift our eyes up from the problems around about us, the things that weigh us down, cause our eyes to be lifted up to Jesus, to see him in something more of his loveliness and wonder and grace.

Oh, come and minister into our hearts and lives, O Lord, we pray. And do us good. For we know that's why you call us together as a church. Because you want to bless us.

You've given us one another, brothers and sisters in Christ. You've given us wonderful means of grace in worship and prayer and in reading your word and hearing it preached. Lord, you long to do us good.

Oh, Lord, do us good, then we pray. For we ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's turn together in our Bibles now to Matthew 21.

We've already thought about that at the very beginning of our service. It's the entrance of Jesus on Palm Sunday, as we call it.

[5 : 36] And we're going to read what happened that day. What happened that day at the very beginning of Easter week. So Matthew chapter 21, if you've got one of the Red Church Bibles, that's page 988.

And we're going to read from verse 1 of Matthew 21 through to verse 17.

The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, Who is this?

The crowds answered, This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee. Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there.

[7 : 25] He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. It is written, he said to them, My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of robbers.

The blind and the lame came to him at the temple and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did, and the children shouting in the temple courts, Hosanna to the son of David, they were indignant.

Do you hear what these children are saying? They asked him. Yes, Jesus replied. Have you never read from the lips of children and infants, you, Lord, have called forth your praise?

He left them and went out of the city to Bethany where he spent the night. It would be helpful if you had opened in your Bibles Matthew 21, and that day that we call Palm Sunday that is recorded for us here by Matthew.

We know that this event is recorded by all the gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They all tell us of this. They all record this very vital and important event.

[8 : 44] If you are keen on TV quiz shows, there's quite a few popular ones. They seem to be ever inventing new ones at the moment. But there's always questions or a section of questions concerning very much the question that is here asked by the crowd in Jerusalem.

Verse 10, who is this? And so sometimes there'll be a photograph or a number of photographs of maybe a politician or an actor or a singer or somebody else like that.

Other times there'll be just a series of descriptions about this mystery person, what they've achieved, who they are, their job title, and so on. But if you watch a question of sport, I watch it, though I'm not very interested in sport just because it's quite funny.

And there's always the mystery guest round. And in the mystery guest round, there's somebody who's a sports person, and they are carrying out an everyday sort of task.

They're mowing the lawn or they're washing the windows. And you only get glimpses of them. You sort of get strange, obscure angles. They only catch their nose or only catch their chin or just not the whole picture is given.

[9 : 59] And the team has to work out who this person is. If you can put all the different views together, then somehow you should be able to work out who it is.

Now when we come to the triumphal entry of Jesus this Palm Sunday, and what happens after that as well, we are not given just a small glimpse of Jesus. We're not just given sort of an obscure

angle where we can try to work out who he is.

We are given a very clear presentation of the person of Jesus Christ. We're not meant to be puzzled about who he is. We're not meant to scratch our heads and think, well, I don't know. From this angle he looks a bit like that, or from that angle he looks a bit like that. We're to see and recognize that God has given us a very plain and unmistakable picture of Jesus.

A picture that anybody can understand, whoever we are. See, God is not in that game of playing hide and seek with us, as some people may think.

[10:59] God is not in that game where he wants us to puzzle about what he's like. And though people do have this great puzzle and question, the reality is that in Jesus we have a plain, clear picture of God.

We have a plain, clear picture of Jesus. And in this episode, in this day, particularly by two contrasting events, if I can put it that way, two pictures of Jesus, but very plain pictures of Jesus, we can understand who he is, what he's like, why he rides into Jerusalem as he does.

We see, of course, first of all, that very action of him riding on the donkey into Jerusalem. We thought about that a minute ago. And here Matthew quotes part of the prophecy, part of the promise of God given to Zechariah hundreds of years earlier.

Say to daughter Zion, see your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. We're meant to recognize that this king, this one who is coming, the Messiah, Jesus, is someone who is gentle.

Someone, not like a warrior riding in a chariot with blades at the wheels. Not a mighty sort of champion on a great steed with armor and so forth.

[12:19] We're meant to recognize the one who comes is the one who is gentle, humble, tender, meek. That's why he rides on this donkey, the everyday workhorse, as it were, of the people of that day and of the Middle East in many places even today.

But then we're also given that picture of Jesus as he goes into the temple courts. It's the same day. It happens a matter of minutes later on. And there he is, overturning tables, driving people out, speaking orders, barking orders to those as well.

And we're not meant to see that these are different characteristics of Jesus. We're meant to recognize this is a full picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. They're not contrary actions as we may immediately or think for the first viewing.

The second does not disprove the first. His gentleness is not a pretense when he comes on the donkey and acts. This is the real Jesus on the donkey, the real Jesus in the temple.

And these two incidences give us that full picture, that 3D picture of Christ. And that has great repercussions, as I say, because there's a lot of confusion in our day.

[13:37] Perhaps even some of us here this morning, we don't really know who this Jesus is. We're not really sure what he's like. And even if we have maybe come to faith and trust in him, there's still all sorts of questions that we have about God.

Isn't that the great question, the most important question of all? What is God like? Jesus made it very plain. He said to his disciples, when anybody's seen me, they've seen the Father.

I and the Father are one, he says in John 10. And Paul, in his letters, in Colossians chapter 1, particularly tells us that Jesus is the image of the invisible God.

Hebrews chapter 1 tells us that Jesus, the Son, is the radiance, the outshining of the majesty and the glory of God. You want to know what God is like? Look at Jesus. So what is Jesus like?

What is he really like? See, the problem is, of course, that people form their own opinions of God, don't they? Their own opinions of Jesus. If he went out and conducted a survey, the people of Whitby or any town in the UK or anywhere in the world, necessarily, we would have different responses to that question, who is this?

[14:48] Who is this? Some people would say, well, of course, this is Jesus. And therefore, he's loving. And he's gentle. And he's kind. God is love, after all.

It's one of the few things that people would say. He's the sort of God who accepts everybody just as they are. He's the God who doesn't judge people.

He's the God who accepts them with all their warts and sins and failings. He's a God who'll let everybody into heaven. He's a God who embraces all people. He's so kind.

He's not so much like a father. He's more like a grandfather type of figure. God is love. And Jesus personifies that. And so we pick out from the Bible and from the New Testament those pictures of

Jesus, of him as the one on the donkey, gentle Jesus, meek and mild.

Of course, that won't be the only view that people have. Many people will have a very opposite view to that. Some people will think of God in a very negative way.

[15:56] He's a God who is strict. He's a God who is a party pooper. He's a God who is always on the lookout for the things that we do wrong. He's a spiteful sort of God who allows suffering and wickedness and all sorts of things in the world.

He's a God who always wants to punish us. A God with a big stick. He's a God that we try to appease and try to keep happy, but we never can.

Nothing we can ever do is good enough for God. I wonder which of those views you may lean to or think of.

Or maybe one of those views you know that people that you work with or people around about you have. Which of them is the most accurate? Which of them is the most correct?

Which of them represents God as he really is? And of course, neither. Neither are a true picture of God. They're just parodies of God. They're sort of our own imagination of God or our own thoughts about God.

[17:02] They're false. They're man-made images of what God is like. But that's how people present God in that way. Perhaps that's how we pick up what God is like because of how people have described him to us.

The reality is that people today talk about having free thought and not being brainwashed by Christians and so on and so forth. But none of us have free thought. All of us are influenced and pressurized by the things we see and read and the people that we hang around with.

Nobody has free thought. Nobody has unique ideas. We are all shaped. Whether it be from our parents or grandparents. Whether it be from our peers. Whether it be from our schooling or education.

We all of us have and have been shaped in our view of God and many other things as well. By our own experiences and by others' experiences.

So how can we know what God is like? Because how God has revealed himself to us in the person of Jesus. If you want to pass on to somebody what you're really like, you explain and demonstrate yourself to them.

[18:13] If they come up to you and they say, I've heard about you. People occasionally say this to me. I've heard about you, Peter Robinson. You're a nasty piece of work, aren't you? No, they've never said that to me.

But, you know, I've heard that you're this or you're that or you're the other. And they won't say that to you. You say, no, no, no. That's not quite accurate. I'm not like that at all. This is what I'm like.

This is who I am. You get it from the horse's mouth. So if we want to know what God is like, we need to get it from the mouth of the Lord God himself. And that is Jesus.

That is Jesus. I am the Father and one. This is the radiance. This is the demonstration. This is the picture. This is the reality of what God is like. Well, what is he like?

The problem with having two opposing views of Jesus is that in some sense there's a little measure of truth in each of them, isn't there? There's a little truth in everything.

[19:17] There's very little which is completely and utterly fake use. Usually there's a bit of truth, a grain of truth in almost everything that we hear or read.

The trouble is, is that we don't have the whole truth. If you've just got a grain of truth, you know what it's like, don't you? And it happens all the time.

You hear something and it's just a grain of truth. Part of it's true, but it becomes bigger. It's like a snowball, isn't it? When we had the snow, I'm making a snowman with John.

And so we made the body bit and we started to roll it along through the snow to try and make it bigger and bigger. That's what happens, doesn't it? It passes from one person to another and that bit of truth becomes sort of lost in all the other stuff that's added to it.

Dear friends, surely we want the truth. We want the real truth. Not a little bit of truth, not a partial truth, not a half truth. We want the real truth.

[20:25] The real truth is this, that God is love and God is angry. The real truth is that in Jesus we have the perfect, unbiased view of what God is like.

That he is perfectly loving and he is perfectly just. That he is perfectly gracious and he is perfectly righteous, holy.

So let's look at these events here. Let's look at what happens here. Let's again pick up on the picture here and these representations, these demonstrations, these revelations of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

We've said that Jesus is loving and that he is gracious and he is gentle and he is meek and he is humble and that's certainly true. And when we realize the whole purpose of him riding on the donkey into Jerusalem, it's not so much about the donkey and it's not so much about the people and their palm leaves and the people and their cloaks.

It's about what he is coming to Jerusalem to do. Why is he riding into Jerusalem? Why is he heading into the capital city of his nation? Well, we know why.

[21 : 35] He's coming there to die. He's going there to suffer. He made that plain and clear to his disciples again and again. Earlier on, just in Matthew 16, he said to his disciples, 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, the chief priests and the teachers of the law and that he must be killed.

He wasn't riding into Jerusalem and all these things were happening and the palm branches and the cloaks and the people cheering and think, this is great. Oh, why didn't I come to Jerusalem before? What a welcome.

What a reception. It's going to be a great time in Jerusalem. No, he went in there and in his heart and his mind, he knew that whatever people were doing around about him, however they were praising him and worshipping, he knew that there was only one end.

That he would not leave Jerusalem alive. That he would suffer and die in many things. Surely this is the greatest demonstration of the love of God, isn't it?

We want a demonstration. Does God love me or not? When all these things are happening in the world and all the terror is happening, there's atrocities in France near Carcassonne just this week and again, even then, yesterday, the marching of the young people, hundreds of thousands of them, some of them survivors from that terrible shooting in Florida.

[23 : 09] Where is this God of love? Where is this God of love? In a world of hate? There. There. There. There is the God of love on a cross.

There. There. There. There. There. People. There. There. More than that, there on the cross is the God who loves wicked, sinful, rebellious, evil people so much that he takes upon himself their sin. He takes upon himself their guilt. He takes upon himself their punishment. The Apostle John, as he writes in his first letter, chapter 4, says, This is love. What's love like? This is love.

Not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. An incredible substitution was taking place at the cross.

The sin of wicked people was laid upon the innocent Son of God. Any love that you and I have known, any love that you and I have experienced in this life is infinitesimally tiny in comparison to the love of God in Jesus at the cross.

[24 : 38] God is loving and he is forgiving and he is patient and he is merciful and he is kind and he is all those things to us to a degree that we can never fully comprehend.

And he is all of those things to us because of what happened at the cross. Jesus is a sin that we can never see. Our sin that deserves separation from God. Our sin that has cut us off from the love of God.

Our sin that is a mark of our own hearts, rebellion and selfishness and greed against God. He has dealt with once and for all in the only way possible. Jesus dying in our place.

Jesus suffering for our sin. The perfect picture of God is seen in Jesus. But how do we know that this love is so great?

What makes this love so amazing? What makes this love so marvelous is because of what we see in the second part of the day. Because after Jesus had received the adoration of the crowds, after the hubbub had died down to a certain degree and he went straight to the temple.

[25 : 52] That place that he had known from a boy. If you remember in Luke's account even at the age of 13 or 12 he was there in the temple. His parents wished to go up every year to the temple to make the sacrifices that went called for.

He goes straight to the temple and what does he do? He immediately begins to throw out and to react to what is going on there where people are being cheated.

People are using the worship of God to line their pockets. You see if you went up to the temple then usually you would come miles away. You would have to bring some sort of an offering.

One you would have to bring a particular monetary offering which had to be in the temple shekel. It had to be a particular coin. It wasn't the everyday currency of the day because that was of course the Roman coinage of the day.

So you would have to have an exchange. It would be like a bureau exchange except the bureau exchange was basically so that these people could make money. And then you would also need to bring maybe a dove or a lamb or a goat or something like that to make an offering as well.

[27 : 00] So you wouldn't be able to really bring them all the way. Particularly if you didn't own such things you'd have to buy them. But if you bought them at the temple they were at exorbitant rates. They were expensive. More expensive than if you bought them anywhere else.

So people again making money out of the worship of God. People being robbed. People being cheated. In the name of God. Isn't it amazing what people will do in the name of God when they have actually no faith in him at all?

So Jesus reacts. Responds to the injustice that he sees. He responds to it as he should do. And he turns over the money changers' temples.

And he drives them out. And he says, God has said, my house. Well rather he says, it is written, my house.

Because it's Jesus' house. And therefore he's got the right to say, in my house there will be prayer. But you're making it a den of robbers.

[28 : 06] See, God does not stand idly by when he looks at the wickedness in the world.

Sometimes people think, well why isn't God doing something in the world? Why isn't he? Doesn't he care about the suffering? Doesn't he care about the injustices? Doesn't he care about the wickedness? Yes he does.

And God is doing something. But God has done something. He's done the one thing that is absolutely necessary for this world. And that is to deal with sin at its root cause.

Which is at the heart of you and I. At the cross of Christ, God is dealt with sin.

And he's dealt with it by dealing it a terrible blow. A deathly blow. A fatal blow. Because at the cross, Jesus himself took upon your sin and mine.

[29 : 06] And God punished it in him. We see that when we read the gospel accounts. But we see that when we read the whole of the Bible. Isaiah 53 particularly speaks about and looks to this incredible event.

What was going on under the surface, as it were, at Calvary. Isaiah 53 verse 4 speaks about Jesus being stricken by God.

Smitten by him. That means hit. And afflicted. In verse 5, the next verse, it says, The punishment that brought us peace was upon him.

Verse 6, the Lord has laid on him the iniquity. That's the law breaking of us all. Verse 10, it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer.

That's why on the cross, we have those incredible words from Jesus. We have the prayer of forgiveness for those who are crucifying. We have the word of tenderness to his mother and to John. We have those words of thirsting.

[30 : 06] But we have that awful cry. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And he knew the answer to that. He's quoting from Psalm 22.

The reason that Christ was forsaken is so that you and I might not be forsaken. He was forsaken by God the Father. The one that he'd enjoyed eternal delight and fellowship with was now cut off for the sin of his people.

When I quoted that verse from 1 John chapter 4, I was using the New International Version. And it takes a word in the Greek, which is a word that's in the AV and many other translations, and makes it more modern, makes it for us to understand.

It takes a word which is propitiation. Propitiation. Propitiation. And it turns into a turning sacrifice. Yes, it means much the same thing, but propitiation has a greater sense to it.

It has a sense of turning away the anger. Almost like a shield deflecting the arrow. And when Jesus went to the cross, as it were, he deflected the anger of God against your sin and mine.

[31 : 21] He deflected it by absorbing it to himself. So mysteriously, yet wonderfully, yet amazingly, God punishes his own son for something he has not done.

But he took the blame of those who'd done it. You and I. Turns away God's wrath. So when Jesus is in the temple and he's turning the temple, he's not having, if I can put it this way, a temper tantrum.

He's not just losing his temper. He's not just sort of becoming out of control. Rather, he is showing the settled anger of God against sin.

God is not indifferent. He does not look down from heaven and simply say, what a shame. He's a God who has dealt with sin in the heart. He has judged it and he has judged it and found it guilty and he has punished it.

So that every single sinner who puts their trust in Jesus may know full and complete forgiveness. But more than that, a change of heart.

[32 : 32] How do you change a world? You change it one person at a time. One heart at a time.

One life at a time. Becoming a Christian, which is the outworking of Jesus' saving work, means that that sin and evil in the world is reduced by one person turning from evil and turning to Christ.

The God that we worship in the Lord Jesus Christ is the God who deals with sin and he begins in you and he begins in me.

Yes, God is love. And yes, God is just. And yes, God is faithful. And yes, God gets angry.

So the question comes back to this. Who is this? This is the perfect God. The holy God. The merciful God. The gracious God.

[33 : 42] The just God. But there's a more important question and this is a question that you and I have to answer for ourselves. Who is Jesus to me? We see them painted as he truly is.

The God of love and the God of justice. The God who came to save and the God who takes upon himself punishment for sin. The question is, who is he to you? Is he, is God simply that still, that grandfather who's going to let everybody into heaven no matter how they live, no matter what they've done, no matter what they're evil?

That goes against him as just. God must punish sin. And either your sin and mine has to be punished at the cross or it has to be punished in eternity. Because if we will not receive the forgiveness and if we will not give our sins to Jesus now, then we keep them to ourselves and we stand before God with them ourselves.

And God can do nothing other than deal with us justly, fairly, and pronounce a sentence upon us of eternal, eternal and everlasting punishment.

So who is he to you? Do you recognize Jesus for who he is? And if you do recognize him for who he is, then what are you going to do with him? The people here praised him and worshipped him and threw their robes down before him.

[35 : 06] Will you do that? Will you acknowledge him as your king? Will you acknowledge him as your savior? Will you receive him as the one who alone can make you right with God? Or will you be like those indignant religious leaders?

Indignant. I'm not going to give him any honor. I'm not going to give him any glory. I'm not going to give him his rightful place in my life. I'm going to continue in just the way I am.

And I'll take my chances with God when I stand before him. Because I think actually I'm really not too bad. There's only one thing we can do, dear friends.

One thing we must do. It's imperative that we do. It's essential that we do. It's essential that we cry out, Hosanna! Lord, save me!

Because of your love. And because of your justice. And because of Jesus.

[36 : 14] Who has done everything. Perfectly well. Let me urge you, dear friends. Again, even as we draw near to this Easter.

As we draw near to that Good Friday. As we think again upon the cross. I urge you more than ever before. Please see Jesus for who he is. And act upon the reality and the truth of who he is.

The one who died for you. The one who lives for you. The one who is coming again for you. Amen. Oh Lord our God, we thank you again.

That you are the perfect God. The only God. The God who is gracious and just. We pray, oh Lord, that you would again give us clear vision of who you are in Jesus.

Keep us, Lord, from our own foolish views. And those views of the world that would press in against us. Cause us to see Jesus as our saviour, our king, our lord.

[37 : 20] Our redeemer. Yes, our judge. Oh Lord, we pray that each day we may grow. In that knowledge and love of Jesus. That we may make him known.

And tell others of the one who came to die. And rise again. To save. For we ask it in that name. That wonderful name of Jesus Christ.

Your son, our saviour. Amen.