

Matthew 21

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[0 : 0 0] Sometimes, and I know it's only sometimes, but everything falls into place.! Do you remember those moments in your life? There's probably only been about three years! Sometimes it's for a second, sometimes it's for only a minute, sometimes it's for a day or a week or a month, and everything is good. And it might be that moment where there's a great sunset, or the sea breeze, or you're on the beach or by the pool, you're you've got the right drink, nobody seems to be angry with you at that moment. You're sitting next to someone who really loves you, and life has just fallen into place. Sometimes you get that on a bigger scale, don't you? Sometimes that happens nationally, sometimes internationally, where everything comes together. I was trying to think of a national event where everything came together. It's not easy, is it? It's probably some of you. I remember in Euro 96, for those of us who were alive. I was a Welshman, but for some reason, everybody, it was a feel-good summer, England were doing well in the football, everybody, everything came together. Somebody said, I mean, this was on the moon landings. Some of you were alive 50 years ago, where everybody gathered around their TV sets. And Neil Armstrong said, isn't it, one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind. It was as if everyone was together.

It didn't matter what faith or nationality, or what religion you were. People were crowded around black and white TVs. It was a special moment. You think of South Africa winning the World Cup, the first one. And that moment when it all came together, black and white, and it didn't matter where you were from, you were pleased South Africa had won the Rugby World Cup.

Well, here's a moment in Matthew 21 where it all comes together. And where everything seems right. Jesus comes into his city, and everything seems to fall into place. And this morning we're going to see that Jesus is indeed our prophet and our priest and our king. And I hope if not before everything, this morning will fall into place for you. And so firstly, let's see the gentle king who enters into his city. The king. The gentle king who enters into his city. And Jesus prepares to enter into Jerusalem. He gives orders to his disciples, they're a little bit like generals' orders, about to invade the city. Except this mission is a mission of peace.

A thousand years before, there was King David, but now a son of David, the Lord Jesus comes into Jerusalem. And he's a king of peace. The city of peace. And this Lord Jesus doesn't come riding on a dozen black stallions. He actually comes, and he comes very deliberately and purposefully, riding a donkey. The fold of a donkey, a little colt. The sort of colt you see at the beach. Where kids can ride on it for three pounds a go. And it almost looks silly, doesn't it?

Because you see this man with such a reputation, riding on a donkey. But Jesus specifically chose that symbol in fulfillment of a prophecy. But in verse 4 and 5, this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, say to the daughter of Zion, behold, look, your king has come. He's humble. He's mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.

[3 : 4 8] Jesus is king, and he's coming into his own city, but he's a very different kind of king. See, your king comes, not to be served, but to serve. He's a gentle king.

Jesus already said, isn't he? His great invitation to you is, come all you who are weak and weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Because what am I like? I'm gentle and I'm humble in heart. And this little, this king, this same king, he weeps over a city, Jerusalem.

He weeps over a city that he came to seek and to save the lost and to save and bring peace to. And this is the kind of king who woos you, who woos you to obedience. You want to follow him. You want to be like him. A friend of mine runs a youth group, and he asked one of the girls, who do you look up to? Who do you aspire to be? Who do you aspire to be as a hero? And she said, I want to be like Jesus. I'm Beyonce. And she got it half right, didn't you? I want to be like Jesus. The king comes gentle. He's both great and gracious. He is both strong and sermon hearted. You want to be with him. You want to be like him. And

I have a moment that Penny seems to draw in Jerusalem. It fell into place. Everybody seems to be doing what they're supposed to be doing. Do you know, that's a very rare event in the Gospels. So they come with palm branches in their hands, and they lay their cloaks on the ground, and they follow him. And they lead him into the city. It's like an unplanned tick and tape parade.

[5 : 52] You know when a football team wins a division or a cap and they're on an open top bus, and they parade through a city. It's that kind of thing. There's so much joy. And the people are not just simply rejoicing, they are praising God. And they're not simply praising, they are doing it with shouts, and it is loud. And they're not only asking, they're not only praising God, they're asking for something, they're asking for salvation. So they say, Hosanna, save us to the Son of David. It's the language of Messiah. It's the language of the long expected King. The long awaited Messiah. He's here. So save us. Save us. And then we're told that the city stirs, not like a martini, but like an earthquake. Verse 8. Spread them on the road.

Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 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. Yippee! That's my paraphrase. And Jesus, when he entered into Jerusalem, the whole city is stirred, and they ask, who is this? And the crowds answer, don't they? This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth and Galilee. And for a moment they get it so right. God's people recognising God's Son and God's King, Jesus the Son of David. The prophet longed for, but only for a moment. It's only for a moment. Because this is Palmerston, isn't it?

Here. And within five days they want him dead. In five days they go from wanting to kiss him to wanting to want him. They go from wanting to praise him to releasing a convicted terrorist in his place. Weak crowds bullied by religious leaders. Weak crowds bullied by religious leaders who have their, who have the shallowness of their faith and confession exposed. This is the ugly side of humanity. Our weak, weak will. And it's not just in others, is it? Don't we sometimes despise ourselves? Or that part of us that keeps on doing the wrong thing? The Bible says we need to put it to death. That dark side of our human nature. I think of those who sat and put their backsides on the very seats you sit. Well, probably not these seats. But they met with us. They were part of us. They once praised Jesus with us. But no more.

[9 : 18] And not because they're in another church, of course not. Not because they're praising God elsewhere. But they are just nowhere. They're nowhere with respect to Jesus and his people.

They've walked away. Well, why is that? Why does that happen? For a moment everything found a place for them. But because they were bullied or they allowed themselves to be bullied by their friends or bullied by their family or bullied by just this world and the pressure of this world. They are no longer with God's people praising Jesus as their King. And so will you seize this moment? Will you seize this moment? And remember that sure, Jesus comes into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, gentle and lowly, riding on the foal of a donkey. But he will come again.

And when he comes again, the Bible is very clear. He won't come on the coat of a donkey. He will come riding on a white horse. And he will lead an army from heaven on white horses. And the symbol of white horses is victory, not just purity. And they will come. And Jesus will come with eyes like blazing fire. And he will have a double-edged sword coming out of his mouth. And he will defy and he will deal with any and every enemy of his. Because he will come to bring war against his enemies. Please know that on his thighs and on his robe there is dripped with blood. And they are written, these words, King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

So sure, Jesus came into Jerusalem gentle. But he will come again. And for those on his wrong side, they will see and encounter the wrath and the fury of the man. And so remember that when you're tempted to forget. Remember that when you're tempted just to walk away or even probably more likely just to drift away, that Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

But Jesus this morning is the servant king who woos you. So let those who have ears to hear, hear. Secondly, Jesus comes as priest to cleanse his people. So if Jerusalem is the city of David, then the temple is his dad's house. That's what Jesus says, isn't it? Jesus does what the priests of this temple should have done. He cleans up the corruption, verse 12. He enters the temple and he drives out all who sold and bought at the temple, the birra de change.

[12 : 08] And he overturned the tables and the money changers are the seats of those who sold pigeons. And he said to them, it is written, my house, my house, which can be called a house of prayer, for you making a dead robbers.

The problem is not what is happening, but where it's happening, okay? It's not what is happening, it's where it's happening. You needed animals for sacrifices. You did. It's the time of the Passover. There's people there. You needed money changers to transfer currency from coins that have had images of people who thought they were gods. They were idolatrous. They weren't fit currency to be used in the temple. So their money, coming from another part, had to be changed.

And so the problem is not what is happening, but where it's happening. The temple, we know, don't we, if you know the Bible, was the only place in the Old Testament where God promised that he would meet with his people. It was the only place where, on the feet of the earth where God had allowed his name to dwell. And nations were invited, they were told to come to the temple, to this God, the God of Israel, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. But his people, the elders and the chief priests, they'd let the business activity of that portion of the temple crowd out everything else. They'd get the business part of the temple crowd out where non-believers, where outsiders could come and become believers.

So Jesus cleanses the temple. But if cleansing the temple didn't get up the nose of the temple priests, then the healing of the blind and the sick certainly did. Jesus can't help himself.

[14:02] It's like what we see, that Jesus drags a bit of heaven with it wherever he goes in the Gospels. The sick and the lame, they're normally not able to come into the temple. They're normally not fit for God's presence. Because they weren't whole, they weren't allowed in to the presence of God. But now they're being made whole and they're being healed. And so people are being made fit for God's presence. And so again, for a moment, everything just seems right.

That Jesus the king comes into his city and Jesus the priest comes to his temple in his dad's house and he cleanses it from its corruption, just like Malachi had predicted. The bodies of the sick are restored and fit for God. And the children sing. They sing of the wonderful things that God thinks that God is doing. They're inspired to praise. Hosanna to the son of David. Three year olds, five year olds, eight year olds going ballistic. It was just so right. Children and their brothers at home, good way away. It's all so right but only for a moment. Just one little caveat for it. Let's take a commercial break here. Look at verse 16. Verse 16 is the greatest argument of having children in worship. If you're a mum here and you've got noisy children, you're very, very welcome. And your children are very welcome. Because out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies, you've prepared praise. And there's all sorts of things out there that come out of the mouths of nursing infants and babies.

So noisy children, you're welcome. Where were we? The religious leaders, they're resentful, aren't they? Verse 15. They're resentful of what Jesus is doing. It's astonishing. It's the way the verse is written. When the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, Hosanna, save us to the son of David, they were indignant. Funny that, isn't it? What's really funny is they weren't indignant when people were buying and selling stuff in the temple courts, were they? When people were being stopped praying because they were buying and selling, that didn't make them upset at all. But what made them upset is Jesus healing and bringing holiness and making people fit for the kingdom of God.

And seeing children come and want to praise him, now really got up their nose. Because they hate what is good and they love what is evil. They hate what is good and love what is evil. So I think if you talk about how sex is to be a pure gift, to be kept within a covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, in our culture, that's offensive, isn't it? And if you say that any sexual activity outside of a covenant of marriage between a man and a woman, that is forbidden by God. But that is for our good, that is the pathway to blessing, that is a good law for the benefit of human beings, there's a pro in our culture where that is missed. They hate it. They detest it. But when we talk about abortion with tears in our eyes and an unsuspecting infant in the womb, we talk about the right to life, what's the reaction to that? The reaction to that is often hatred, isn't it? And to celebrate that freedom. Because our culture hates what is good and loves what is evil. Why is that?

Well because our culture does not know the Lord Jesus Christ. But here in this passage, I want to say to you, it's not the world out there, it's the church, isn't it? Do you see that? And it's the leaders of the church, it's the priests who should have known better.

[18:24] And Jesus deals with them like he deals with the devil. And in chapter 4, like he does in chapter 4, he pulls out the sword of the Spirit, that's the word of God, and he quotes for the psalm 8. He says, do you hear what these children are singing? The priests are asking, can you shut these children up, Jesus? Jesus says to them, have you never read, have you never read under the

mouths of infants and nursing babies you prepared praise? He quotes Psalm 8, which was written by King David. And he turns that very moment of the little ones worshipping into a prophetic fulfilment. And then he applies Psalm 8 to himself, and he makes himself equal with God in one simple quote. I love it. I love the way that children have a way of reminding us of the God we so often forget. And so what that says to you little ones this morning, little children, if you listen to this, it says this, it says the praise of the most insignificant kid shuts the mouth of the arrogant. And he always has and he always will. I've got two images in my mind right now. Let's think of a kind of foolishness that takes place in a philosophy class at a top university in London. Where they spend most of the first term coming up with reasons why God doesn't exist. And why you can't know anything. So that by the end of philosophy, one of the top London universities, you end up thinking you really can't know anything except the fact that you don't know anything. And now I think of the collective wisdom you find in our children's Sunday school this morning. Our little ones, little ones are praising Jesus and thanking him for dying for them. What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. Our God is a great big God. That's right, isn't it, Phoebe? And Jesus says he loves to hide himself from the wise and the learned and to reveal himself to little babies. I have a friend who has a five-year-old daughter and she was sharing in family worship her love for Jesus. My friend couldn't help himself and he said, Manny, you know more than 90% of all the professors in all the universities in the world. He said, why, really, Dad? Wow.

And then she said, what is a professor? She might not know what a professor is, but she knew that God created the universe by the word of his power and she knew that God sent his one and only son, the Lord Jesus, to the cross to take the punishment for her sin. Thirdly, let's say Jesus is prophet of judgment. Jesus is not just a king. He's not just a priest, he's a prophet. And so now it's Monday and on Monday he returns to Jerusalem, back to the city, back to the temple. He's four days away from Good Friday and he may well be prophet, priest and king and he may be God in the flesh, but he gets hungry. He's fully human. And so he's hungry and for the life of me, I don't understand, he wants figs. I can't understand why anyone want figs, but the Lord Jesus in his humanity likes figs. And he sees the fig tree and he's attracted to the fig tree again. And it's a fig tree that promises so much. And when he gets there, it delivers so little. There's no fruit of the vine. And he basically curses it. And it dies straight away. We're not supposed to get between a man and his food. But Jesus is not pronouncing this judgment because he's angry or hungry. Why is he pronouncing a curse on the fig tree? It's because this is the teachers. It's like the prophets of the Old Testament.

They used visual aids, didn't they? Symbols to communicate truth. Particularly Ezekiel, if you've read that of Jeremiah. And they use visual aids and symbols. And here Jesus is cursing a tree that symbolizes Israel. The faithlessness of Israel. The people of God. And he issues a judgment upon it. And he's giving a foretaste of what is to come. It's a warning, as Jesus tells us, this is a warning of what will take place. So take heed, Jesus comes looking for fruit. Verse 18, very early in the morning. As he was returning to the city, he became hungry and seen a fig tree by the wasteland. He went to it, found nothing on it, but only leaves. And he said, it may no fruit ever come from you again. And the fig tree with it immediately. Jesus didn't spray it with weed killer and come back a week later and it had wilted. He issued a judgment, a curse upon it, and instantaneously, as instantaneously as the blind men were healed in the temple, the tree was killed. Judgment had fallen upon it. And so Jesus comes at the end of a long line of prophets, bringing his word to Israel. And he's come as the prophet of God, to the people of God looking for faithfulness and fruitfulness in his people, and he finds so little. Do you know what? Jesus is still looking for that, isn't he? Today, he looks at his church and he looks for fruitfulness in his people. The fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. So we've got to understand that what God is interested in is fruitfulness. Faith without works is theirs. It always has been. It always will be. Faith and works are as inseparable as Siamese twins who share the same heart. You cannot divide them. You cannot have faith that does not resolve itself in good works. And Jesus has come after a long line of God sending his covenant faithful prophets saying, turn back, turn back to me and bear fruit, bear fruit. Trust and obey. What did Jesus say in Matthew 7? He says, on that final day, not everyone who comes to me, who's been part of church life and says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of God. But only the one who does the will of my Father. And so take note of this judgment on this tree. It's a loving warning from your heavenly Father. Not just Israel, but to us. Then Jesus does a really weird thing, I think. The

disciples seem to be more impressed with the skill of the miracle than the point of the parable. And so my last point is this. Jesus is king, he is priest, he is prophet. And the last point is faith in Jesus who moves mountains. It gives interest in turn here. To the disciples' amazement. When the disciples saw this, they are marveled. Say, how did the fig tree wither at once? And Jesus answered them, truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but if you take a little mountain, be taken up and thrown into the sea, it will happen. And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive for your faith. I'm surprised that the disciples are surprised. They've been with Jesus for three years. And yet they're still surprised. And so Jesus goes to this parable of judgment on Israel, who fails to bear fruit. And then he turns it into an instruction on faithful prayer. And he inspires us to pray big. He says, pray to the God who can do the impossible. And here is a promise of the power of prayer in faith. And Jesus says, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you curse trees, but you can move mountains. Now, let's think about this. Let's take this literally for a moment, okay? Should we give it a go? My Everest is just too big. That nervous is too far away. Let's try Horses and then hell. So who thinks that God can uproot Horses and hell? And let's say let's plunge it into the south coast, English Channel. Who thinks God can do it? Not only that God can do it, but God will do it. So let me pray right now that God does that. Let's make it literally. Should we pray? It seems silly, doesn't it? Jesus says, if you pray with confidence, that you'll give us whatever we ask and we'll be able to do it. How do we deal with this? Do we pray something like, you've talked Lord about the actual uprooting of a mountain and placing it into the sea. And so we give you this opportunity to uproot Horses and hill and put it in the English Channel. And we pray this for your glory. Amen.

[28 : 36] There's no amens. Why didn't it happen? It's a really flat reading of the text, isn't it? Literally. It's that there's a lack of faith here this morning.

Well, I do want to say this. I don't think there has been recorded in the history of the church mountains being moved in response to prayer. Some of you are better church historians than I am, but I can't find it. As far as I know. You may correct me, but it's never happened as far as I'm aware. We also know, don't we, we let the Bible interpret the Bible.

So we know that Jesus asked for things which he did not receive. In the Garden of Gethsemane, he's going to pray, let this cup pass from me. That was his request, but he didn't get what he asked. We also know that the Apostle Paul, on three occasions, he prayed that the thorn in his side would be removed. He asked for something, and it didn't happen. He got, the only answer he got was, my grace is sufficient for you to live with it. Well, that is already qualifying. And what we have here, trusting in Jesus, who is our prophet, priest, and king, and God. Of course, our God can move mountains, we know that. And so what is Jesus' purpose at the end of this section? It's quite obvious, isn't it, that the thrust of this point is that you will pray big. And that you and I will pray confidently in the God who can do the impossible. Now, we've seen that. It's the prayer of faith that has moved some of you from being hard-hearted, anti-God, atheistic beings who hated the notion of God, and God has moved you to being gentle children of God, who love Jesus and want to tell others about you. You've seen that in our own lives, haven't we, as the people of God?

God, in moving us from being guilty and condemned to being forgiven, and children of the king of kings, who experience the privilege of knowing that we are children of God. So has God not turned fear-ridden, anxious little lambs into ferocious lions for Jesus? I've seen that.

I've seen the timid ask God to transform them into children of the king who are proud to boast in his name. I've seen God answer and provide in the most remarkable ways, in ways that we couldn't have believed or imagined were possible. And so do you know what I'm afraid of? I'm afraid of that we rightly pray at the end of our prayers, your will be done. But the reason why some of us do that is, why some of us pray that is because we're afraid to expect anything from God. And so we've used the right prayer for a wrong reason. And that prayer, your will be done, is not to restrict the vision. You can pray what appears to be the impossible and allow God to do his wonderful work. But I think we protect ourselves. If I don't pray too big, or I pray your will be done, that I don't have to really expect it, and I therefore don't need to know the deep disappointment of God saying no. And so I have decided as a result of this passage to pray big prayers. To pray that the Lord would grant to this church that we would multiply over the next ten years. That the church planted in Ebb's Bridge would not just be planted, but it would grow and thrive and become a church which plants churches.

[32 : 36] Big, hairy, audacious press. That I submit to a God, and I know that that's in line with his will. That he wants people to be saved. He promised that he will build his church.

But I do, for your will be done. And I'm prepared to accept whatever the verdict. And so don't we want Jesus to come riding as a king into the hearts of people in West London. To move their hearts from being anti-God. Of course we do. And so I'm tired of praying a small prayers.

Please help me to get through today, you know. You know we're in LA to be good and for you. And for them to have a good day in school. That's a good prayer. It's a very little prayer, isn't it? Your will be done. What is God's will? That his people would honour him. And to honour the name of God. For his people to be jealous of his glory. And we all want one or two, do we? We want them to know thousands. So that Ealing and Hanwell and Greenford and Exquid would be transformed and that people would see the results of that. So will you pray big with me? Of course your will be done. But let's not hide behind it. I don't want to pray too much in case I'm disappointed. Pray big prayers. So what are we? We're about, I don't know what we are, we're about 150. We eat this morning. Let's pray that we fill this building. That it would be packed by fruitful believers. Let's pray that the church plant would get established and blossom and fire. Club 16 wants to come on, 20 kids at the moment. Let's pray for 40 by the end of the year. Ignite, it's got 15. Let's pray for 30 by the end of the year.

In this language class, that's pretty big. Let's pray big prayers because we have a God who can move mountains. He's not interested in moving mountains, he. But he is interested in moving hearts. So let me encourage you this morning. Why don't you today draw up a list of 10 impossible prayer points? 10 things that aren't impossible for God, but you kind of feel that they're impossible. You know the person you've given up on, the father, the brother, the sister, the work colleague. And pray every day. And see how many of these impossible prayer points he's made possible by his friend next year. God loves to answer prayer that's consistent with his will. And so that's your application today. It may be someone you've given up on. It may be your neighbor who's just been so aggressive to you.

It may be your boss who's so difficult. It may be the loan that we have in the church that it'll be paid off in the next year rather than 20 years. Pray big and pray every day.

[35 : 32] And pray to the wonderful God who will do the impossible. Let's pray.