



Encounters
WITH
Jesus

Gospel of Matthew, Chapters 20-21

Sermon and Study Booklet

Canberra Austral-Asian Christian Church, 2024

Name:

Term 4 Calendar

- Wed 16 Oct, 7.30pm: Pre-AGM Meeting
- Sun 27 Oct: AGM
 - 10:00am Combined Service
 - 11:30am AGM
- Sat 9 Nov, 2-4pm: Seniors ministry session @ church; Topic: Cyber Security for seniors and others
- Sat 23 Nov: Building extension discussion session
- Sat 7 Dec: Open Doors (ministry to the persecuted church) @ church
- Sat 14 Dec: Carols in the Park
- Wed 25 Dec: Christmas service

Introduction to Matthew 20-21

As we continue our journey through the Gospel of Matthew, we'll again be seeking answers to these questions: Who is Jesus? What does He want for us and from us? We'll find some answers through six encounters and two parables.

Six encounters

1. Jesus condemns self-promotion and shows himself to be the Servant King (20:20-28)
2. Jesus meets 2 blind men and shows himself to be a merciful Lord (20:29-34)
3. Jesus enters Jerusalem and shows himself to be a humble King (21:1-11)
4. Jesus cleanses the temple and shows himself to be the Mighty Prophet (21:12-16)
5. Jesus condemns a fig tree, confronting hypocrisy, and shows himself to be a true Judge (21:17-22)
6. Jesus meets Israel's leaders and shows himself to be authorised by God (21:23-27)

Two parables

1. Jesus teaches that saying yes to God means doing what he says (21:28-32)
2. Jesus teaches that whoever honours Jesus is honoured by God, and vice versa (21:33-46)

Below is our schedule for studying these wonderful passages:

Sermon series

1. 13/10. Kingdom Greatness (Matt 20:20-28)
2. 20/10. "Lord, Son of David" (Matt 20:29-34)
3. 27/10. The Triumphal Entry (Matt 21:1-11)
4. 3/11. Jesus cleanses the temple (Matt 21:12-16)
5. 10/11. Jesus curses a fruitless fig tree (Matt 21:17-22)
6. 17/11. A question of authority (Matt 21:23-27)
7. 24/11. The Parable of the Two Sons (Matt 21:28-32)
8. 1/12. The Parable of the Tenants (Matt 21:33-46)

Sermon#1. Kingdom Greatness (Matt 20:20-28)

For many chapters of Matthew, Jesus has been teaching the Jewish people the upside-down nature of God's kingdom ('the kingdom of heaven'). Chapters 20-21 are book-ended by 3 'vineyard parables' that highlight the scandalous nature of God's grace, and the way *only* those who know they *need* it, will in the end receive it and bear its fruit. This further inflames the Jewish leaders, who believed God's kingdom was already theirs by birthright and law-keeping. They respond by 'looking for a way to arrest Jesus' (21:46).

Study #1. Kingdom Greatness (Matt 20:20-28)

Context:

Remind yourself what Jesus has already said about how to be great in God's kingdom (18:1-5). What has he just told his 12 disciples? (20:17-19)

Observation and Imagination:

What do Mrs Zebedee and her sons (James and John) come to ask Jesus, and what does it signify? What do you think was motivating Mrs Zebedee? (Can you identify?)

Summarise the ensuing interchange between them and Jesus.

Why are the other 10 disciples *indignant* when they hear? (Picture their faces and hear their voices!) What does the whole episode reveal about what is in all their hearts?

What does Jesus now teach them about kingdom greatness? How does he use contrast, inversion, and example?

Meaning:

What do we learn about ourselves as fallen humanity, Jesus the Son of Man, and God's kingdom?

Application and Prayer:

Is kingdom ambition wrong?

What do the greatest in God's kingdom excel in? Do we?

Sermon #2. "Lord, Son of David" (Matt 20:29-34)

Study #2. "Lord, Son of David" (Matt 20:29-34)

Context:

What have we just learned about what Jesus came to do? (20:20-28)

Observation and Imagination:

If we were depicting this episode in a stage production, what would the set look like? How many actors would we need? What kind of people would you cast as the blind men, and why?

What are their 3 lines? What is Jesus'?

What did they *see* about Jesus, despite their blindness?

Meaning:

What does mercy mean here? Why was it needed?

Contrast the request and response of 20:20-28, and 20:29-34. What does Jesus say yes to?

Application and Prayer:

What do you want Jesus to do for *you*? What is the mercy *you* need?

Does this episode give you confidence about what's in your heart? And about how Jesus would respond to it?

Sermon #3. The Triumphal Entry (Matt 21:1-11)

Study #3. The Triumphal Entry (Matt 21:1-11)

Context:

The events of Matthew ch1-20 took place over 3 years and 6 months. However from 21:1 to the end of Matthew (8 chapters) is only ~58 days in duration. The narrative slows down dramatically. It's the climax of Jesus' mission – and this episode is setting much of the scene for what is to come.

Read the prophecies in 2 Samuel 7:12-13 and Zechariah 9:9 before continuing.

Observation and Imagination:

What are the strange and striking events in this episode?

How is Jesus being treated?

What prophecies are fulfilled?

Meaning:

What kind of king is Jesus?

Why does our world need this kind of king?

Application and Prayer:

Do you see Jesus for who he is? Does he have your heart's worship?

Sermon #4. Jesus cleanses the temple (Matt 21:12-16)

Study #4. Jesus cleanses the temple (Matt 21:12-16)

Context:

Jesus has just ridden into Jerusalem - Zion, the city of God (Psalm 48:1-3) - as its promised King (Zechariah 9:9). This episode is his first act following the 'triumphal entry'.

Observation and Imagination:

Picture the bustle and noise of the outer courts of the Jewish Temple. What does Jesus do on entry? What is his likely emotion? Why is he feeling it? (see Jeremiah 7:1-11 for the OT parallel)

Why are the chief priests and teachers of the law (the Jewish religious leaders) indignant?

What is Jesus claiming about himself, in his reply to them?

Meaning:

What things matter to Jesus in this episode? Dwell on this together.

Application and Prayer:

If you were in the Temple, would you be on the side of the indignant, or those shouting Hosanna? What makes you say this?

Bring your hearts before God in prayer.

Sermon #5. Jesus curses a fruitless fig tree (Matt 21:17-22)

Study #5. Jesus curses a fruitless fig tree (Matt 21:17-22)

Context:

This episode is notoriously easy *and* challenging to understand. Is Jesus being hangry? Harsh? Arbitrary? Because he is never any of these things, and because his teaching and actions always have a point, v18-19 are typically understood as an acted parable, where the fig tree represents God's people Israel (or at least her leaders). v12-16 are the immediate and relevant context, but read 21:43 also before you start.

Observation and Imagination:

Where has Jesus come from, and where is he going? Remind yourselves what happened in the city the previous night.

What must Jesus have expected from the leafy fig tree, given that he went up to it while hungry? What did he find instead?

What did he say to it, and what happened to it?

We might expect the disciples to ask Jesus why he curses the tree, but instead they are amazed at Jesus' show of miraculous power - which shifts the focus of the episode quickly from the acted parable, to a different lesson entirely.

What would you expect Jesus' answer to be, to their question in v20?
(Because I _____)

What is it instead? (If you _____)

Why would he answer with a 'you' instead of with an 'I'? What is he wanting to teach them about the power that he used to wither the tree?

Meaning:

Taking v19 and v43 together, what does Jesus want from Israel and her leaders? What will happen to them if they don't?

Jesus' teaching in v22-23 about the availability of God's power to his people is huge. What are the conditions for its availability?

NB. A key principle of biblical interpretation is to let Scripture explain Scripture. So we conclude from the rest of the NT that Jesus' teaching here is qualified by other important factors. But don't throw the baby out with the bathwater. We have to let the thrust of his point stand; the enormous earth-shaking, mountain-moving power of God Himself is accessible, through prayer, to those who trust in Him!

Application and Prayer:

Jesus wants fruit, and invites bold faith. How should this shape our prayers to God?

Sermon #6. A question of authority (Matt 21:23-27)

Study #6. A question of authority (Matt 21:23-27)

Context:

Jesus' teaching and actions continue to divide people into 2 groups - those who embrace him and his Kingdom, and those who hard-heartedly reject it. Here again, as he has many times in his ministry, he shows himself the master of answering a test with a test.

Remind yourself what Jesus has been doing, authoritatively, to make the Jewish leaders indignant (21:12-16).

Observation and Imagination:

After overnighing in Bethany, Jesus returns to the temple to teach. What do the Jewish leaders ask him (essentially the same question twice), and what are they hoping to achieve by their question?

How does Jesus respond? Read about John's baptism in Matthew 3:1-12 if needed.

How does Jesus' reply both answer and incriminate them?

Meaning:

Who is really being examined here? How are they doing?

What have you learned or noticed about Jesus from this episode?

Application and Prayer:

Do you recognise Jesus' authority as being from God? What response does that call for?

Sermon #7. The Parable of the Two Sons (Matt 21:28-32)

Study #7. The Parable of the Two Sons (Matt 21:28-32)

Context:

How do you think the chief priests and elders felt after the interchange in 21:23-27?

Read 21:28-32 and see how Jesus continues to challenge them. NB. A parable is a story where fictional characters or events are used to represent real ones, and to drive home a point.

Observation and Imagination:

Summarise v28-30 -

Son #1 _____

but _____

Son #2 _____

but _____

Which son did the right thing by the father and why?

Who and what do Jesus say they represent? v31b-32

'Son' #1 _____

who _____

because _____.

'Son' #2 _____

who _____

because _____.

Meaning:

Who/what pleases God? Who/what doesn't?

Who thinks they please God, but don't?

Application and Prayer:

Which son are you?

It's never too late to enter God's kingdom, but it takes humble repentance and faith to see the way of righteousness in Jesus. Pray for us and people around us to be quick to see it and enter, if we haven't.

Sermon #8. The Parable of the Tenants (Matt 21:33-46)

Study #8. The Parable of the Tenants (Matt 21:33-46)

Context:

Recall the indignant leaders of 21:15, the fruitless fig tree of 21:19, the hard-hearted priests and elders of 21:23-27, and the 2 contrasting sons of 21:28-32.

Read 21:33-46.

Observation and Imagination:

Sketch out the scene and characters of this parable.

Summarise:

- Visit 1:

- Visit 2:

- Visit 3:

- Owner's response:

Who does Jesus indicate the characters and their behaviour represent?

- Landowner:
- Tenant-farmers:
- Servants:
- Son:

How does the prophecy from Psalm 118:22-23 support this?

Meaning:

What is it that God wanted from his people, Israel? v42-44

What did they do instead?

Application and Prayer:

What is your relationship to the Son, the cornerstone?

Suggestions for getting the most out of Cell Groups¹

Come to the study prepared. You will find that careful preparation will greatly enrich your time spent in group discussion.

Be willing to participate in the discussion. The leader of your group will not be lecturing. Instead, he or she will be encouraging the members of the group to discuss what they have learned. The leader will be asking the questions that are found in this study.

Stick to the topic being discussed. Your answers should be based on the verses which are the focus of the discussion and not on outside authorities such as commentaries or speakers. These studies focus on a particular passage of Scripture. Only rarely should you refer to other portions of the Bible. This allows for everyone to participate in in-depth study on equal ground.

Be sensitive to the other members of the group. Listen attentively when they describe what they have learned. You may be surprised by their insights! Each question assumes a variety of answers.

Many questions do not have “right” answers, particularly questions that aim at meaning or application. Instead the questions push us to explore the passage more thoroughly. When possible, link what you say to the comments of others. Also, be affirming whenever you can. This will encourage some of the more hesitant members of the group to participate.

Be careful not to dominate the discussion. We are sometimes so eager to express our thoughts that we leave too little opportunity for others to respond. By all means participate! But allow others to also.

Expect God to teach you through the passage being discussed and through the other members of the group. Pray that you will have an enjoyable and

¹ Adapted from Getting the Most Out of 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus, IVP LifeGuides

profitable time together, but also that as a result of the study you will find ways that you can take action individually and/or as a group.

Remember that anything said in the group is considered confidential and should not be discussed outside the group unless specific permission is given to do so.