

# The Road to The Cross – Part 1

## Paved with Challenging Truth

As we approach Easter, I would like to take us on a Journey with a series of messages entitled “The Road to The Cross” This morning we see Jesus on the Road to The Cross through the events of Matthew 21. Let’s listen in...

### **Matthew 21 New International Version (NIV)**

#### Jesus Comes to Jerusalem as King

<sup>21</sup> As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. <sup>3</sup> If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

<sup>4</sup> This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

<sup>5</sup> “Say to Daughter Zion,  
‘See, your king comes to you,  
gentle and riding on a donkey,  
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”

<sup>6</sup> The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. <sup>7</sup> They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on. <sup>8</sup> A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup> The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

<sup>10</sup> When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

<sup>11</sup> The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

## Jesus at the Temple

<sup>12</sup> Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. <sup>13</sup> “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.’”

<sup>14</sup> The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. <sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> “Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked him.

“Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read,

“‘From the lips of children and infants  
you, Lord, have called forth your praise’?”

<sup>17</sup> And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.

## Jesus Curses a Fig Tree

<sup>18</sup> Early in the morning, as Jesus was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. <sup>19</sup> Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, “May you never bear fruit again!” Immediately the tree withered.

<sup>20</sup> When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. “How did the fig tree wither so quickly?” they asked.

<sup>21</sup> Jesus replied, “Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done. <sup>22</sup> If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”

## The Authority of Jesus Questioned

<sup>23</sup> Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?”

<sup>24</sup> Jesus replied, “I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. <sup>25</sup> John’s baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?”

They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’”<sup>26</sup> But if we say, ‘Of human origin’—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.”

<sup>27</sup> So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.”

Then he said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

### The Parable of the Two Sons

<sup>28</sup> “What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’

<sup>29</sup> “‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

<sup>30</sup> “Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.

<sup>31</sup> “Which of the two did what his father wanted?”

“The first,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.”<sup>32</sup> For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

### The Parable of the Tenants

<sup>33</sup> “Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place.”<sup>34</sup> When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

<sup>35</sup> “The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third.

<sup>36</sup> Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way.”<sup>37</sup> Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said.

<sup>38</sup> “But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’”<sup>39</sup> So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

<sup>40</sup> “Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?”

<sup>41</sup> “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.”

<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:

“The stone the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone;  
the Lord has done this,  
and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”

<sup>43</sup> “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. <sup>44</sup> Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.”

<sup>45</sup> When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them. <sup>46</sup> They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

Matthew 21 begins with the triumphal entry into Jerusalem as Jesus is welcomed with shouts of praise

**Matthew 21:9 New International Version (NIV)**

<sup>9</sup> The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna<sup>[a]</sup> to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”<sup>[b]</sup>

“Hosanna<sup>[c]</sup> in the highest heaven!”

Quickly the attention turns from this moment of great welcome and praise to the temple courts, where we see Jesus drive out the money changers and those who were buying and selling there. He then scolds them for turning His Father’s house into a den of thieves and robbers.

However, this isn’t the first time Jesus cleansed the temple. The gospel of John records in chapter 2 that early on in his ministry Jesus challenged the activities that were taking place there.

## **John 2:13-17 New International Version (NIV)**

<sup>13</sup> When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

<sup>14</sup> In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. <sup>15</sup> So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. <sup>16</sup> To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!” <sup>17</sup> His disciples remembered that it is written: “Zeal for your house will consume me.”<sup>[a]</sup>

It is here that we see the first challenging truth...

### **1. Jesus wants us to be SINCERE, SOLD OUT, and SANCTIFIED**

This really is a message for those who claim to be followers of God, for those who say they believe in Jesus

Jesus challenges us to stop living for ourselves and start living for him. In our relationship with him we must be sincere. This isn't a light thing that he has done for us and committing our lives to follow him is no light thing either.

I think there are many who like to proclaim that they are Christ followers. They say they live him like the crowds they welcome him with shouts of praise, but they don't sincerely let him change their lives.

Perhaps there is a reason Jesus cleanses the temple twice. Jesus came to clean up our mess, but not so we could continue to make messes and keep living in them. Rather, that we could be free from our messes and enjoy the freedom of living the way he wants us to live

Jesus wants us to be sold out in our commitment to him. We want the benefits of living in his hour while still living for ourselves. He told them that they were not doing what God had intended for them to do with his house. Instead they were doing what they wanted to do and perverting the true purpose for God's house.

Jesus call us to be sanctified, which means to be set apart, holy. If he were to come into your temple today, would he be pleased with what he sees, or would he need to drive some things out

This isn't the only place in this chapter we see this challenging truth. Matthew 22 has an interesting layout.

- The triumphal entry – which we have already said establishes the fact that these truths are for those who supposedly welcome him
- Two stories about actions Jesus took
- The questioning of Jesus authority which separates the two actions from
- Two parables that close out the chapter

Interestingly the two parables in the second half of the chapter parallel and repeat the challenging truths presented in the first part of the chapter

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Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. <sup>32</sup> For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

Notice that in this first parable, Jesus challenges them with the same truth as the cleansing of the temple.

#### 1. **Jesus wants us to be SINCERE, SOLD OUT, and SANCTIFIED**

This time he uses the parable of a man who had two sons. When asked to go work in the vineyard, the first said he would not, but then changed his mind and went. The second said he would but did not. The emphasis here is on the fact that our actions speak louder than our words. We can claim to have a relationship with Jesus, but it is what we do that matters. Jesus told the religious leaders that the tax collectors and prostitutes had more a relationship with God because they actually listened to John’s

message, believed him and repented. Their relationship was sincere, sold out and sanctified.

Remember that mess that we talked about earlier? The one that Jesus came to clean up. The first step in being sincere, sold out and sanctified in our relationship with God is to believe that we need Jesus to clean up our mess. We must believe that we have sinned and are in need of a savior, we must believe that he wants us to leave our nets behind and follow him, we must believe that his way is the right way.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Eikon Church in Kyle Texas

The fact is the road to the cross is paved with challenging truths. Will you be sincere, sold-out and sanctified in your relationship with Christ?

Following the cleansing of the temple in Matthew 21 we see Jesus Curse a fig tree. His disciples are amazed that the fig tree withered so quickly. Jesus tells them they too can do incredible things - even tell mountains to be cast into the sea - if they have faith and believe. And so, the real lesson here gets lost as we, like the disciples, focus on the power that we can have in prayer, rather than the challenging truth of the lesson of the fig tree...

## 2. Jesus wants us to PRODUCE FRUIT

What a challenge to us as believers to know that Jesus expects us to produce fruit. That's why Jesus said that you will know them by their fruit. That's why James said that faith without works is dead. Without fruit, we are no better than the fig tree. We may have leaves that proclaim we are Jesus followers, but without fruit there is no substance to our claims.

Again, Jesus tells a parable in support of this challenging truth...

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“The stone the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone;  
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and it is marvelous in our eyes’<sup>[h]</sup>?”

<sup>43</sup> “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.

This parable is all about fruit. Jesus tells them plainly that the kingdom of God will be taken away from them because they are not producing fruit.

But rather than listen to this truth, repent and be changed, they continued to question his authority. They knew he was talking about them but sought only to find a way to arrest him, to shut him up, so they would no longer have to be confronted by the truth that he spoke to them.

What about you? Are you willing to hear what Jesus would have to say to you about your relationship with God?

Now, lest you think that you must somehow conform to these truths in your own strength; I want to remind you that it was Jesus sacrifice on the cross that made a way for us to forgiven, set free and transformed. It is in submission to his presence within us that we have power to live out the truths he has give us. But you must submit to his truth rather than reject it and create your own. ARE YOU READY?