

Jesus in Jerusalem



SABBATH—MAY 28

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:1–46; Romans 4:13–16; Revelation 14:7–12; Acts 6:7; Matthew 22:1–15.

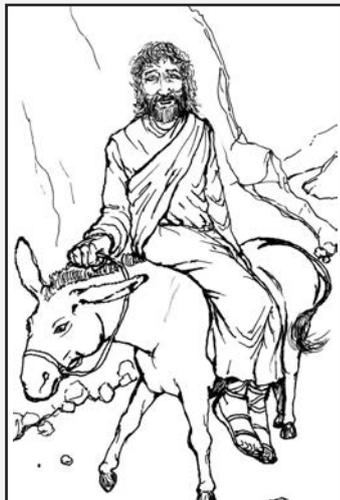
MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘Have you never [not] read in the Scriptures [Bible]: “The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD’s doing, and it is marvelous [wonderful] in our eyes?” ’ ” (Matthew 21:42, NKJV).

IN MATTHEW 20:27, 28 JESUS SAYS, “ ‘And anyone who wants to be first must be your slave. Be like the Son of Man. He did not come to be served. Instead, he came to serve others.’ ” (NirV). Here was Jesus, the eternal God, the one who created all things, who lived the life of a servant here on earth. He was serving the needs of the lost, the sick, and the needy.

We cannot understand His willingness to be a servant. But the wonder goes even deeper. This is because He, the eternal God, is now facing the whole purpose of His coming here: to “ ‘give his life as the price for setting many people free’ ” (Mark 10:45, NirV). This humble sacrifice will soon end in a mystery that even “angels desire to look into” (1 Peter 1:12, NKJV). And that is the mystery of the Cross.

This week’s lesson looks at some of the major events and teachings of Jesus as He came to Jerusalem. He was not to be crowned an earthly king, as so many people had desired and hoped, but to be made “sin for us, that we might become the righteousness [holiness] of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21, NKJV).

A COMING FORETOLD (Haggai 2:6–9)



A prophecy foretold that the Messiah would come into His kingdom on a colt. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem in this way, the people hailed Him as their King.

DEFINITIONS

1. prophecies—special messages from God to His people that foretell what will happen in the future.

Following their 70-year slavery in Babylon, the Jews began their return to Jerusalem. They were excited to be rebuilding their temple. But as the foundation was laid, those who remembered Solomon's beautiful temple realized that this second temple was not going to be anywhere nearly as nice. So, they "wept [cried] aloud" (Ezra 3:12, NIV).

The people received some unexpected encouragement from two men standing among them: an old prophet (special messenger) named Haggai and a young prophet named Zechariah. Haggai said: "The LORD says, 'I will shake all of the nations. Then what they consider to be priceless will come to my temple. And I will fill the temple with glory,' says the LORD who rules over all. 'The new temple will be more beautiful than the first one was,' says the LORD" (Haggai 2:6–9, NIV).

Things got even more hopeful when the young prophet Zechariah spoke: " 'City of Zion, be full of joy! People of Jerusalem, shout! See, your king comes to you. He always does what is right. He has the power to save. He is gentle and riding on a donkey. He is sitting on a donkey's colt' " (Zechariah 9:9, NIV).

How do these amazing prophecies¹ point to Jesus' entry into Jerusalem as shown in Matthew 21:1–11?

"Christ was following the Jewish custom for a royal entry. The animal on which He rode was the same kind on which the kings of Israel rode. And prophecy had foretold that the Messiah [Chosen One] should come in this way to His kingdom. As soon as Jesus was seated upon the colt, a loud shout of victory filled the air. The crowd of people hailed [named and honored] Him as Messiah, their King. Jesus now accepted the honors which He had never before permitted. And the disciples received this as proof that their glad hopes were to become real by seeing Him seated on the throne. The crowd of people believed that they would be set free from Roman rule. They imagined the Roman armies driven from Jerusalem, and Israel once more an independent nation."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 570.

Again and again, we see how Bible prophecies were fulfilled, but at that time, the people did not understand what was happening. What lessons can we learn for ourselves about how people's own ideas can twist truth?

JESUS IN THE TEMPLE (Matthew 21:12–27)

Ever since the Fall in Eden, animal sacrifices were God's chosen way of teaching the world the plan of salvation. Those who believed received salvation by grace² through faith in the coming Messiah (read Romans 4:13–16). A powerful example of this truth can be found in Genesis 4. This is the story of Cain and Abel and the terrible event that followed. This event had to do with worship, among other things (read also Revelation 14:7–12). So, when God called Israel as His chosen people, “ ‘a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ ” (Exodus 19:6, NKJV), He also established the sanctuary service as a fuller and more complete explanation of salvation. The gospel was shown in the symbols of the sanctuary service.

As history went on, the services became more and more unholy. They were the same services that God had put in place in order to show His love and grace to a fallen world. By the time of Jesus, things had become terribly spoiled by the greed and selfishness of the priests. (They were the very ones who were entrusted to keep the services holy!) So, “in the eyes of the people the holiness of the sacrificial service had been deeply destroyed.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 590.

Read Matthew 21:12–17. What lessons are here for us, as worshipers of God?

As in so many other places, Jesus quotes the Bible to support His actions and to prove them to be right. What Jesus does shows us that, as followers of the Lord, we must make the Bible the center of our whole worldview and of our beliefs about what is right and wrong. Besides Jesus' quoting Scripture, there are the miraculous healings of the blind and the lame. All this gives even more powerful proof of His nature as God. How sad that those who should have been the most sensitive and open to all this proof were the ones who fought the hardest against Him. Fearing for their own earthly treasure and position as the “stewards”³ and “guardians” of the temple, many would lose out on the very thing that the temple service was pointing to: salvation in Jesus.

How can we make sure that we are not letting our desire to gain anything on earth, even something good, spoil what is really important: eternal life in Jesus?



Ever since the Fall, animal sacrifices were God's chosen way of teaching the world the plan of salvation.

DEFINITIONS

2. grace—God's gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.
3. stewards—managers of another's property. The priests were stewards of God's temple and all the truths that its services taught.

NO FRUIT (Matthew 21:18–22)

Jesus' cleansing of the temple was an act of mercy. It was in the Gentile (non-Jewish) courts where the buying and selling took place. And Jesus wanted His house to be a place of prayer and worship for all peoples.

But the cleansing was an act of judgment, too. The priests who ran the temple had ruined their chance to bless all peoples. Their day of judgment was near.

Read Matthew 21:18–22. How does Jesus' cursing of the fig tree relate to His cleansing of the temple?



Jesus cursed the fig tree so that it would serve as a parable to warn others not to become like the priests who bore no fruit of goodness in their lives.

DEFINITIONS

4. parable—a short story that teaches a moral (having to do with the difference between right and wrong) or a spiritual truth.

Jesus cursed the fig tree so that it would serve as a parable⁴ to warn others against becoming like many of the leaders of the Jewish nation who were finally reaping what they had sown. We must remember that this parable was not about all the religious leaders. Many of them did come to faith in Jesus as the Messiah. “Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7, NKJV). However, just as the fig tree bore no fruit, neither did the temple ministry (work done for God), which was soon to be made useless.

This action and Jesus' harsh words must have come as a powerful shock to the disciples. They still were trying to learn the lessons of mercy and of bringing others to God who were often overlooked or left out. These are lessons that Jesus showed throughout His ministry. This is the same Jesus who declared that He had come, not to judge against the world but to save it. It is the same Jesus who claimed, “ ‘The Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them’ ” (Luke 9:56, NKJV). Every word and action in His ministry was devoted to restoring (making new) fallen humans, to point people toward the hope and promise of a new life in Him. So, for Him to act and speak so roughly, with such finality, surprised the disciples. This is why Matthew wrote that they “marveled” at what He had done.

No question, sooner or later some people fully refuse God's mercy and grace. (Read Genesis 6:13; Genesis 15:16; Genesis 19:24; and Revelation 22:11.) But why is it so important that we leave those kinds of judgments to God and never make them about others or even about ourselves?

THE STONE (Matthew 21:33–46)

If you had just a few days left to live, what would you do with them? One of the things Jesus did was to tell stories that would leave a deep influence on His listeners.

Read Matthew 21:33–46. Who is represented by each of the following?

Landowner: _____

Farmers: _____

Servants: _____

Son: _____

Notice Jesus' quotation of Psalm 118:22, 23. In quoting the prophecy of the rejected stone, Christ speaks of an event in the history of Israel. The event is connected with the building of the first temple. When the temple of Solomon was built, the immense stones for the walls and the foundation were cut at the place where the stones came from. After they were brought to the building itself, not a tool was to be used upon them. And no sound of chiseling and hammering was to be heard. The workmen had only to put them in position. For use in the foundation, one stone of bigger size had been brought. But the workmen could find no place for it. So, they would not accept it. It was a bother to them as it lay unused and in their way. There it remained, an unwanted stone, for a long time.

"But when the builders came to the laying of the corner, they searched for a long time to find a stone of the right size and strength and shape to fill that chosen place. It also would need to be able to support the great weight which would rest upon it. . . . But at last attention was called to the stone so long overlooked. . . . The stone was accepted, brought to its chosen place, and found to be an exact fit."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 598.

Read Matthew 21:44 again. Two different ways of relating to the Rock are shown: one is falling on the Rock and being broken. The other is to have the Rock fall on you and crush you. What is the important difference between the two? (Read also Psalm 51:7 and Daniel 2:34.)



The workman could find no place for the stone.

THE COST OF GRACE (Matthew 22:1–15)

The great news of the Bible is that we were created by a loving God who has provided us with a way out of this mess of sin and death. It was done through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. This is a theme that appears in one way or another all through the Bible. We can see it in the following parable that Jesus tells.

Read Matthew 22:1–15. What does this parable teach about salvation by faith?

The truths of this parable might seem unkind. But it is good to remember that the issues are important: eternal life or eternal destruction for every person. Otherwise, what else is really important?

Suppose we look at the Cross. Look at what it cost God to make possible the salvation of humans. We should be able to see just how huge (big) and deep the issues are. We are talking about One Person (Jesus) of the eternal Godhead (Father, Son, Holy Spirit), accepting upon Himself the full punishment of God's own anger against sin. It does not get more serious than that. This is a theme that we will be studying throughout eternity. And it is no surprise that we barely can get our minds around it now.

So, we have these powerful words in the parable. God had made everything ready for everyone to be part of the wedding feast (read Revelation 19:7). Everything that was needed had been kindly given at a cost so deep that no parable could even explain it. So, it was bad enough that the people who had been invited to the wedding thought nothing of it and went about their own business. But some even attacked those who came to give them the kind invitation. No wonder God was angry.

What is the meaning of the “wedding garment (clothing)”? Read also Revelation 19:8.

The garment shows the righteousness (holy life) of Christ. It is a righteousness that is shown in the life and acts of the saints. The man without the garment (robe) is like Christians who claim the rights and honors of grace and salvation without letting the gospel change their lives and characters (thoughts; feelings; actions). At a great cost, every gift had been given for those who would accept the invitation. As this parable shows, there is more to entering the kingdom of God than just showing up at the door.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: The London newspaper headline read: “Woman dead in flat [apartment] for three years: skeleton of Joyce found on sofa with telly [television] still on” (<http://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/Oct/09/joyce-vincent-death-mystery-documentary>). Dead for three years in a London apartment, and no one missed her? No one called to check on her? How could this have happened, especially at a time when there are so many kinds of communication in the world? When the story first broke, it made international news. People in London were stunned. How could she have been dead for so long and no one have known about it? Without the hope and promise of the gospel, and of the salvation that was paid at a great cost for us, we are all doomed to the same fate as this poor London woman. But our situation is far worse, because there will be no one to find us and even mourn over our death three years—or even three billion years—after the fact. Today’s scientists guess that sooner or later the entire universe will fold up and die in what has been called “The Cosmic Heat Death.” But what the Cross tells us is that this view is wrong. Instead of an eternal wipe-out, we can have the promise of eternal life in a new heaven and a new earth. With such a great, wonderful future ahead of us, how can we learn not to let anyone or anything stand in the way of our getting what we have been offered in Jesus?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Think about how final and powerful death is. Think about how useless all human efforts over thousands of years have been to defeat it. The best we can do is to try to save our corpses. But this act no more defeats death than a new coat of paint makes a car with a burned-out engine ready for the road again. No wonder that it took something as wonderful as the death and the return to life of the Son of God to conquer death for our sake. What should this tell us about how important the Cross must be to all our hopes and to all that we believe?
- ② Think more deeply about what it means to be covered in the righteousness of Jesus. How can a balanced understanding of this important idea keep us from falling into either cheap grace⁵ or legalism?⁶ And why is it important that we do not fall into either trap?

DEFINITIONS

5. cheap grace—the belief that Christ saves us in our sins, not from them.

6. legalism—the belief that obeying the law can save you.