

Jesus *in* Jerusalem



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Zech. 9:9, Matt. 21:1–46, Rom. 4:13–16, Rev. 14:7–12, Acts 6:7, Matt. 22:1–15.*

Memory Text: “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?’ ” (*Matthew 21:42, NKJV*).

In Matthew 20:27, 28, Jesus said, “ ‘And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.’ ” (*NKJV*). Here’s Jesus, the eternal God, the One who created all things, who lived the life of a servant here on earth, ministering to the needs of the lost, the sick, the needy, many of whom still scorned Him. Such self-denial, self-abnegation—we can hardly begin to grasp it!

But as incomprehensible as His servanthood is, the marvel goes even deeper, for He, the eternal God, is now facing the whole purpose of His coming here: to “ ‘give His life a ransom for many.’ ” This self-denial, this self-abnegation, will soon climax in a mystery that even “angels desire to look into” (*1 Pet. 1:12, NKJV*)—and that is the Cross.

This week’s lesson looks at some of the major events and teachings of Jesus as He came to Jerusalem, 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 of God in Him” (*2 Cor. 5:21, NKJV*).

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 4.

A Prophesied Coming

Following their 70-year captivity in Babylon, the Jews began to return to Jerusalem. They were excited to be rebuilding their temple, but as the foundation was laid, those who remembered Solomon's magnificent temple realized that this second temple wasn't going to be nearly as nice. Thus, they "wept aloud" (*Ezra 3:12, NIV*).

The people received some unexpected encouragement from two men standing among them: an old prophet named Haggai and a young prophet named Zechariah. Haggai reminded the people that the true glory of Solomon's temple didn't come from what Solomon or anyone else brought to it. It wasn't Solomon's temple. It was *God's* temple. Haggai said: "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,'" says the LORD Almighty. "The silver is mine and the gold is mine," declares the LORD Almighty. "The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house," says the LORD Almighty'" (*Hag. 2:6-9, NIV*).

Things got even more hopeful when the young prophet Zechariah spoke: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey" (*Zech. 9:9, NKJV*).

How do these amazing prophecies apply to Matthew 21:1-11—Jesus' entry into Jerusalem?

"Christ was following the Jewish custom for a royal entry. The animal on which He rode was that ridden by the kings of Israel, and prophecy had foretold that thus the Messiah should come to His kingdom. No sooner was He seated upon the colt than a loud shout of triumph rent the air. The multitude hailed Him as Messiah, their King. Jesus now accepted the homage which He had never before permitted, and the disciples received this as proof that their glad hopes were to be realized by seeing Him established on the throne. The multitude were convinced that the hour of their emancipation was at hand. In imagination they saw the Roman armies driven from Jerusalem, and Israel once more an independent nation."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 570.

Again and again, we see how Scripture was fulfilled, and yet at the time, the people didn't understand it. What lessons might we take away for ourselves about how preconceived notions could distort truth?

Jesus in the Temple

From the earliest days of fallen humanity, animal sacrifices were God's chosen means to teach the world the plan of salvation, salvation by grace through faith in the coming Messiah (*see Rom. 4:13–16*). A powerful example of this truth can be found in Genesis 4, the story of Cain and Abel and the tragedy that ensued over worship, among other things (*see also Rev. 14:7–12*). Thus, when God called Israel as His chosen people, “‘a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’” (*Exod. 19:6, NKJV*), He also established the sanctuary service as a fuller and more complete explanation of salvation. From the tabernacle in the wilderness, through Solomon's temple, and through the temple built after the return from Babylon, the gospel was revealed in the symbols and types of the sanctuary service.

However, despite its divine origins, the temple and its rituals were conducted by fallen human beings and, as with pretty much everything people get involved in, corruption ensued, even here with the sacred service that God had instituted to reveal His love and grace to a fallen world. By the time of Jesus, things had become so terribly perverted by the greed and avarice of the priests (the very ones who were entrusted with administering the services!) that “in the eyes of the people the sacredness of the sacrificial service had been in a great measure destroyed.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 590.

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

As in so many other places, Jesus quoted Scripture to justify His actions, more evidence that as followers of the Lord we must make the Bible central to our whole worldview and moral system. Besides His quoting Scripture, there were the miraculous healings of the blind and the lame. All this gave even more powerful and convincing evidence of His divine nature and calling. How tragic that those who should have been the most sensitive and open to all this evidence were the ones who fought the hardest against Him. Fearing for their own earthly treasure and status as the “stewards” 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 or maintain *anything* here, even something good, jeopardize what really matters: eternal life in Jesus?

No Fruit

Jesus' cleansing of the temple was an act of compassion. It was the Gentile courts where the buying and selling were taking place, and Jesus intended His house to be a place of prayer and worship for all peoples.

But the cleansing was an act of judgment also. The priests who ran the temple had ruined their chance to bless all peoples; their day of judgment was near. If, after all that Jesus had done to reveal His divine calling, these men still refused to accept Him, what else could happen but that they reap the results of their doleful choices?

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 as an acted parable about many of the leaders of the Jewish nation who were finally and irrevocably reaping what they had sown. We must remember, though, that this parable wasn't referring to all the religious leaders. Many did, indeed, 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, which was soon to be made void.

This action and Jesus' harsh words must have come as a powerful shock to the disciples, who were still trying to learn the lessons of compassion and inclusion that Jesus revealed throughout His ministry. This was the same Jesus who declared that He had come, not to condemn the world but to redeem it; the same Jesus who claimed that "the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them" (*Luke 9:56, NKJV*). Every word and deed in His ministry were devoted to restoring fallen humanity, to point people toward the hope and promise of a new life in Him. So, for Him to act and speak so harshly, with such finality, surprised them, which is why Matthew wrote that they had "marveled" at what He had done.

No question, sooner or later people totally reject God's mercy and grace (see Gen. 6:13, 15:16, 19:24, Rev. 22:11). Why, though, is it so important that we leave those kinds of judgments to God and never make them ourselves, either about others or even our own selves?

The Stone

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 impact 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 referred to an occurrence in the history of Israel. The incident was connected with the building of the first temple. When the temple of Solomon was erected, the immense stones for the walls and the foundation were entirely prepared at the quarry. After they were brought to the building itself, not an instrument was to be used upon them, and no sound of chiseling and hammering was to be heard. The workmen had only to place them in position. For use in the foundation, one stone of unusual size and peculiar shape had been brought. But the workmen could find no place for it, and they would not accept it. It was an annoyance to them as it lay unused in their way. Long it remained a rejected stone.

“But when the builders came to the laying of the corner, they searched for a long time to find a stone of sufficient size and strength, and of the proper shape, to take that particular place, and bear the great weight which would rest upon it. . . . But at last attention was called to the stone so long rejected. . . . The stone was accepted, brought to its assigned position, and found to be an exact fit.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 598.

Read Matthew 21:44 again. Two different ways of relating to the rock are represented: one is falling on the rock and being broken; the other is to have the rock fall on you and you being crushed by it. What is the crucial difference between the two? See also Ps. 51:7 and Dan. 2:34.

The Cost of Grace

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

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

However harsh this parable might seem, it's important to remember that crucial issues are at stake: eternal life or eternal destruction for every human being. In contrast, what else really matters?

When we look at the Cross, at what it cost God in order to make a provision for the salvation of humanity, we should be able to see just how vast and deep and incomprehensibly profound the issues are. We are talking about One Person of the eternal Godhead bearing upon Himself the full brunt of God's own wrath against sin. It doesn't get more serious than that. If this is a theme that we will be studying throughout eternity, it's no surprise that we can barely get our minds around it now.

Hence, we have these powerfully uncompromising words in the parable. God had made full provision for everyone to be part of the wedding feast (*see Rev. 19:7*); everything that was needed had been graciously provided at a cost so deep that no parable could even justly reveal it. So, it was bad enough that the people who had been invited to the wedding actually "made light of it" and went about their own business. *But some even attacked those who came to give them the gracious invitation.* No wonder the uncompromising response.

What is the meaning of the "wedding garment"? *See also Rev. 19:8.*

The garment represents the righteousness of Christ, a righteousness that is revealed in the life and acts of the saints. The man without the garment represented professed Christians who claim the privileges of grace and salvation but haven't let the gospel transform their lives and characters. At a great cost, every provision had been made for those who heed the invitation. As this parable then shows, there's more to entering the kingdom of God than merely showing up at the door.

Further Thought: The London newspaper headline read: “Woman dead in flat for three years: skeleton of Joyce found on sofa with telly 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 in an era of almost limitless communication? When the story first broke, it made international news, though people in London were especially stunned. How could she have been dead for so long and no one knew about it? Yet, without the hope and promise of the gospel, and of the salvation that was so costly to provide for us, we are all doomed to the same oblivion as the poor London woman. But this situation is worse, because there will be no one to find us and even lament over our demise three years or even three billion years after the fact. The current scientific consensus is that sooner or later the entire cosmos will peter out and die in what has been called “The Cosmic Heat Death” or some happy appellation like that. What the Cross tells us, however, is that this view is wrong; instead of eternal oblivion we can have the promise of eternal life in a new heaven and a new earth. With such an incredibly wonderful prospect ever before us, how can we learn not to allow anyone or anything to stand in the way of our getting what we have been offered in Jesus?

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Think about just how final and powerful death is and how futile all human endeavors over the millennia have been to defeat it. The best we can do is, to some degree, preserve our corpses, which no more defeats death than a new coat of paint on a car with a burned-out engine makes it ready for the road again. No wonder, then, that it took something as intense and as dramatic as the death and the resurrection of the Son of God to conquer death in our behalf. What should this tell us about how central the Cross must be to all our hopes and to all that we believe?
- 2 Dwell more on what it means to be covered in the righteousness of Jesus. How can a proper and balanced understanding of this important concept keep us from falling into either cheap grace or legalism, and why is it crucial that we avoid either extreme?

Coming Home: Part 2

I returned to the church I had grown up in, hoping to find it lively, as it had been when I was younger—but I was disappointed. I felt like a stranger. Those believers who used to come visit us if we missed two Sabbaths, now did not even know who I was!

About that time I met a girl who really attracted me. Sara was different from other girls. She was simple and humble. She didn't care that I was well-known for being a good athlete. I decided to see if she was for real, so I asked her out and took her to my cousin's house—a very simple home with no electricity. I wanted to see what she would say if she thought this was my home. Later she told me, "I didn't come to see what kind of house you live in. I came to see you." I was impressed.

Sara and I lived on opposite sides of Fiji, but I managed to visit her every weekend. Eventually, I asked her to marry me. As we discussed such things as family and religion, I told her that one day I would return to the Seventh-day Adventist Church and that I wanted my children to grow up in the Adventist faith.

We got married, but my worldly habits came into our new home. Some, such as alcohol, even threatened to break up our marriage. After tasting the bitterness of divorce as a child, I was determined to not let my marriage fail. So I gave up all the things that were keeping me from being a good husband. I stopped drinking and partying. I returned to church, the same church I had attended as a teen. I found it boring, but this time I decided to do something about it.

I served as a deacon and later became the assistant youth leader. The time I had spent in sports I now spent working for God. I found great satisfaction in seeing people walk away from harmful lifestyles and come to God.

The balcony of the church had always been the youth's. After the pastor I had loved left that church, the balcony eventually emptied. My goal was to fill the balcony again. I loved working with the young people. I had been blessed by the pastor who mentored me, and now I wanted to mentor other young people. I am thrilled to look at that church balcony today and see it filled with young people!

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