



Who Is Jesus?

LESSON THREE

A Series of Five
Bible Studies Exploring
*"The Gospel According
to Matthew"*

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LESSON THREE

Introduction

In our previous lessons we have looked at some of the questions people asked about who Jesus was. We have also studied the answers that He gave in word and deed. In Lesson Three we will take a close look at the final days of His earthly ministry and the work that was the focus of His life—the salvation of the world.

Read Matthew, chapters 17–25 before proceeding.

Jesus Enters Jerusalem

(Chapter 21:1-11)

Jesus knew He would soon be betrayed by one of His disciples. He would only be on earth a short time before He was put to death. He knew all of this before it happened (His teachings in Matthew 20:17-19 show this) and He chose to follow this path because it was for this purpose He came to earth.

The city of Jerusalem was filled with people who came to celebrate the Passover. It was one of the times Jewish males were required to appear at the temple. Of course, many Jewish men

traveled with their whole families and the city of Jerusalem was nearly bursting at the seams with this joyful crowd.

As Jesus approached the city, He sent two disciples to a nearby village to find a donkey and a colt. They were to untie them and bring them to Jesus. Some people say that Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah; He never claimed to be God. Matthew tells us very clearly why Jesus wanted to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey: *“This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet ... ”* (Matthew 21:4). Why not turn back to the Old Testament and read Zechariah 9:9 and Isaiah 62:11 and see what these prophecies actually say?

As Jesus rode into Jerusalem, the people saw Him and began to worship Him calling out: *“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”* (Matthew 21:9). Their words tell us what these people believed about Jesus. They said, *“Hosanna to the Son of David!”* In Matthew 22:41-42, Jesus had posed a question to the Jewish religious leaders about the identity of the Christ. He asked, *“What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?”* The Pharisees replied, *“The Son of David.”* So when these people came to Jesus and said, *“Hosanna to the Son of David,”* they were confessing their faith

in Him as their Savior—the Messiah or Christ!

The people inside the city gates and those who had not yet heard of Jesus were naturally puzzled by what the pilgrim crowd was saying. And so all of Jerusalem buzzed with excitement and people strained to follow, watch, and listen to what this Man had to say. They also probably wondered what their religious leaders would say in response!

Review and Apply:

Choose the best answer:

1. The way Jesus entered Jerusalem was:
 - a. Not very pleasant.
 - b. Noisy, but necessary.
 - c. Foretold by prophets many years before.
2. Based on this section, how did the crowd receive Jesus?
 - a. Many of them did not know who He was and couldn't care less.
 - b. Many recognized Him as the Messiah—who was promised by God.
 - c. They began shouting that He should be put to death.

3. The question churning among the Passover crowd was:
 - a. When do we eat?
 - b. Who is this? Who is He?
 - c. What is Passover anyway?

Things to Consider...

1. What different impression would Jesus have made if He had ridden into Jerusalem on a spirited white stallion instead of a donkey?
2. Why do you think the Gospel writers (like Matthew) point out that Jesus knew and taught His disciples beforehand that He was going to be betrayed and killed in Jerusalem, and that after three days He would rise again? Why is it important to us that He knew this was going to happen?

By What Authority Do You Do These Things?

(Chapters 21–23)

The religious leaders were stunned. They were offended by the words of the cheering crowd (look up Luke 19:39-40, too), and they had suffered a humiliating blow when Jesus cast out those who had set up their shops in the temple area (the religious leaders had obviously approved of them being there in the past). They were also dumbfounded by His ability to heal the sick that came to Him.

The next day, when Jesus returned to the temple, the religious leaders were waiting for Him. It seems they did not want a repeat of the embarrassing events of the day before! They waited until a crowd gathered to hear Him speak and then sought to discredit Him in public. They asked, *“By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority”* (Matthew 21:23)? In other words they were saying, *“We are in charge here! We say what’s right and what’s wrong! If God wants to speak, He goes through US!”*

Instead of answering them directly, Jesus put a question back to them. If the religious leaders could not answer the

question—or WOULD not—about John the Baptist, Jesus knew that they would not accept His answer about Himself either.

Then Jesus told a story (Matthew 21:28-32). His main point was that some people say they will do God's work, but they don't! They don't really want to do the work. They only want the glory associated with "working for God." Other people may turn God down at first, but then they are sorry and do what God would have them do. Jesus applied this to the religious leaders of that day—many of them said they wanted to do God's work, but they refused to do it. They felt that they were better than others because of their "position," but Jesus said, "*the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you*" (v. 31).

The people that were considered great sinners often admitted their sinfulness, were sorry, and followed Jesus. Those who thought they were great religious people refused Jesus.

To further drive home this point, Jesus told another parable making direct application to Himself and His work. Why not review this parable right now (Matthew 21:33-43)?

Jesus pictures God the heavenly Father as a householder or landowner who sends His prophets to the people to help direct their eyes and hearts toward Him, and to remind them to put Him first in their lives. However, the people whom God loved rebelled against Him and killed His prophets. Finally, God sends His own Son to His people. They took Him, too, knowing who He was, and put Him to death. (Again note how Jesus describes the events that were soon to happen!) Jesus finished His story by saying that the unique “position” that the Jews had as God’s people, and their rich heritage as the people of the Messiah, would be taken away from them and given to the “Gentiles.” (That’s a term used in the Bible to describe all non-Jews.)

The religious leaders were very angry! They knew exactly what Jesus was saying and they knew that they had been humiliated again in front of the crowds. Angry as they were, though, they could not make a move against Jesus at that time because the crowds accepted Him as a prophet from God.

They looked for other opportunities to turn the crowds against Jesus. They sent other people to try to trick Jesus into saying something that they could charge was against the Law. Time after time Jesus thwarted their efforts. In

Matthew 22:46 we read that they finally had enough. They could not trap Jesus or do anything to Him while He was among the crowds. They needed a plan to get Jesus alone ...

Review and Apply:

Choose either “Y” or “N” for each of the following:

1. Jesus did not tell the religious leaders by what authority He was teaching because He didn't have any authority. Y or N
2. It is OK to look happy and agree to do the Lord's work, even if you don't follow through and do it. Y or N
3. Jesus is my cornerstone or capstone because He is the One who holds my life together. Y or N

Things to Consider...

So many of Jesus' stories and parables seem to indicate that those who reject Him do so with full knowledge of who He is. It is not so much a matter of not knowing—as not wanting Him. Do you think this is true today also? Why or why not?

Tribulations and Judgment

(Chapters 24–25)

This was a very strange time for Jesus' disciples. They were overwhelmed by the popular reaction to Jesus and His teaching. Every time a religious leader came up to throw a monkey wrench into the celebration, Jesus sent them away in disgrace. And, it was the great feast of Passover—the celebration of God's deliverance of His people from slavery—a perfect time for the Messiah to take over and begin His reign as King!

They were feeling great and proud and could not help sharing their pride with Jesus as they walked among the magnificent buildings surrounding the temple. In Mark 13:1 you can almost hear the awe in their voices, *“Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!”* Can you imagine the stunned look on the disciples' faces when Jesus replied, *“Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down”* (v. 2).

It must have been a quiet walk out of Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives after that! The disciples had been thinking of glory and a kingdom centered in Jerusalem with Jesus on the throne in the temple and, of course, each of them would be in charge of something. But

now Jesus was saying that Jerusalem would be DESTROYED, and the temple DISMANTLED! They were utterly confused. And so are many Christians when the realization hits that life with Jesus does NOT mean earthly glory and freedom from trouble. Difficult times are still coming upon the earth, as Jesus points out to the disciples when they share their concern.

The end of Matthew chapter 24 and all of chapter 25 deal with the reality of Christian life as we near the end. Instead of being frightened, though, our Lord calls on His followers to use this information as a call to greater faith in the One that will come to judge all mankind on the Last Day.

In chapter 25:31-46, Jesus uses a vivid picture to describe the judgment at the Last Day. All nations will be gathered before Him as a shepherd gathers the flock at the end of the day. Then He will separate the sheep from the goats. The sheep (those who believe in Him) will be placed at His right hand, and will be blessed with the inheritance of the Kingdom. Jesus will commend the selfless acts done in His Name for others. (By doing these things—by serving and putting others first—a person shows that he is Jesus' disciple.) On His left hand, we will find the goats—those

who rejected Jesus and never gave a thought to helping others in time of need. There would be NO kingdom inheritance for them.

Some people look with dread on that Last Day and the moment of truth when they stand before their Lord and Master. What a joy for Christians though, recognizing the honor Jesus places on those small deeds done for others in His Name. Just a cup of water to a child; a coat for a homeless person; a card for a sick friend; all of these elicit that wonderful word of blessing from Him: *“Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me”* (v. 40).

Review and Apply:

Choose the best answer:

1. When we become followers of Jesus we can be sure that:
 - a. We shall inherit eternal life.
 - b. We will get to boss everyone else around.
 - c. Life will be free from pain and suffering.
2. The sheep were separated from the goats because:
 - a. Their good works had earned them eternal life.
 - b. The sheep were female and the goats were male.
 - c. They represented believers who by faith inherited the kingdom and showed this with their lives.

Things to Consider...

What must you do so that on the Last Day you will hear the Lord's words, *"Come, you who are blessed by My Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world"* (Matthew 25:34)? (Think about the significance of the word "inherit," and the fact that this "inheritance" has been prepared for you from the beginning of time!)

Conclusion

When the Holy Spirit empowers you to believe in Jesus as your Savior, He also gives you eternal life. If you believe in Jesus as the Son of God, your Savior from sin, it is yours right now. Perhaps you would like to pray the following prayer or one like it in your own words:

My Father in heaven, I realize that I am a sinner and fall far short of what You want for my life. I cannot by my own power or works save myself or earn eternal life with You in heaven. Thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus, to die for me and for bringing me to new life in Him. In His Name I pray. Amen.

Answers to Questions

Jesus Enters Jerusalem

1. *The way Jesus entered Jerusalem was:*
 - c. *Foretold by prophets many years before.*
2. *Based on this section, how did the crowd receive Jesus?*
 - b. *Many recognized Him as the Messiah—who was promised by God.*
3. *The question churning among the Passover crowd was:*
 - b. *Who is this? Who is He?*

By What Authority Do You Do These Things?

1. *Jesus did not tell the religious leaders by what authority He was teaching because He didn't have any authority.* NO
2. *It is OK to look happy and agree to do the Lord's work, even if you don't follow through and do it.* NO
3. *Jesus is my cornerstone or capstone because He is the One who holds my life together.* YES

Tribulations and Judgment

1. *When we become followers of Jesus we can be sure that:*
 - a. *We shall inherit eternal life.*
2. *The sheep were separated from the goats because:*
 - c. *They represented believers who by faith inherited the kingdom and showed this with their lives.*