

Expository Thoughts On Matthew - Matthew

21:1-11

by J.C. Ryle

Transcript

These verses contain a very remarkable passage in our Lord Jesus Christ's life. They describe his public entry into Jerusalem when he came there for the last time, before he was crucified. There is something peculiarly striking in this incident in our Lord's history. The narrative reads like the account of some royal conqueror's return to his own city: "A very great multitude accompanies him in a kind of triumphal procession. Loud cries and expressions of praise are heard around him: 'All the city was moved.' The whole transaction is singularly at variance with the past tenor of our Lord's life; it is curiously unlike the ways of him who did not cry nor strive nor let his voice be heard in the streets; who withdrew himself from the multitude on other occasions, and sometimes said to those he healed, 'See thou say nothing to any man.' (i.e. Mark 1:44). And yet the whole transaction admits of explanation. The reasons of this public entry are not hard to find out. Let us see what they were. The plain truth is that our Lord knew well that the time of his earthly ministry was drawing to a close; he knew that the hour was approaching when he must finish the mighty work he came to do, by dying for our sins upon the cross. He knew that his last journey had been accomplished, and that there remained nothing now in his earthly ministry but to be offered as a sacrifice on Calvary. Knowing all this, he no longer, as in times past, sought secrecy; knowing all this, he thought it good to enter the place where he was to be delivered to death, with peculiar solemnity and publicity. It was not fitting that the Lamb of God should come to be slain on Calvary privately and silently. Before the great sacrifice for the sin of the world was offered up, it was right that every eye should be fixed on the victim. It was suitable that the crowning act of our Lord's life should be done with as much notoriety as possible. Therefore it was that he made this public entry; therefore it was that he attracted to himself the eyes of the wondering multitude; therefore it was that all Jerusalem was moved. The atoning blood of the Lamb of God was about to be shed; this deed was not to be done in a corner (i.e. Acts 26:26). It is good to remember these things. The real meaning of our Lord's conduct at this period of his history is not sufficiently considered by many readers of this passage. It remains for us to consider the practical lessons which these verses appear to point out. In the first place let us notice in these verses an example of our Lord Jesus Christ's perfect knowledge. He sends his two disciples into a village; he tells them that they will there find the ass on which he was to ride; he provides them with an answer to the inquiry of those to whom the ass belonged; he tells them that on giving that answer the ass will be sent. All happens exactly as he foretells. There is nothing hid from the Lord's eyes; there are no secrets with him. Alone or in company, by night or by day, in private or in public, he is acquainted with all our ways. He that saw Nathaniel under the fig-tree, is unchanged. Go

where we will, and retire from the world as we may, we are never out of sight of Christ. This is a thought that ought to exercise a restraining and sanctifying effect on our souls. We all know the influence which the presence of the rulers of this world has upon their subjects: nature itself teaches us to put a check on our tongues, demeanor and behavior when we are under the eye of a King. The sense of our Lord's Jesus Christ's perfect knowledge of all our ways ought to have the same effect upon our hearts. Let us do nothing we would not like Christ to see, and say nothing we would not like Christ to hear; let us seek to live and move and have our being under a continual recollection of Christ's presence; let us behave as we would have done had we walked beside him in the company of James and John, by the sea of Galilee. This is the way to be trained for heaven. In heaven, we shall ever be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:17). In the second place, let us notice in these verses an example of the manner in which prophecies concerning our Lord's first coming were fulfilled. We are told that his public entry fulfilled the words of Zechariah: Thy king cometh unto thee, meek and sitting upon an ass. It appears that this prediction was literally and exactly fulfilled. The words which the prophet spake by the Holy Ghost received no figurative accomplishment: as he said, so it came to pass; as he foretold, so it was done. Five hundred and fifty years had passed away since the prediction was made and then, when the appointed time arrived, the long-promised Messiah did literally ride into Zion on an ass. No doubt the vast majority of the inhabitants of Jerusalem saw nothing in the circumstance; the veil was upon their hearts. But we are not left in doubt as to the fulfillment of the prophecy. We are told plainly, All this was done that it might be fulfilled. From the fulfillment of God's word in time past we are surely intended to gather something as to the manner of its fulfillment in time to come. We have a right to expect that prophecies respecting the second advent of Christ will be as literally fulfilled as those respecting his first advent. He came to this earth literally in person the first time; he will come to this earth literally in person the second time; he came in humiliation once literally to suffer; he will come again in glory literally to reign. Every prediction respecting things accompanying his first advent was literally accomplished: it will be just the same when he returns. All that is foretold about the restoration of the Jews, the judgments on the ungodly, the unbelief of the world, the gathering of the elect shall be made good to the letter. Let us not forget this. In the study of unfulfilled prophecy, a fixed principle of interpretation is of the first importance. Finally, let us notice in these verses a striking example of the worthlessness of man's favor. Of all the admiring crowds who thronged round our Lord as he entered Jerusalem, none stood by him when he was delivered into the hands of wicked men. Many cried, Hosanna! who four days after cried, Away with him! Crucify him! But this is a faithful picture of human nature: this is a proof of the utter folly of thinking more of the praise of man than the praise of God. Nothing in truth is so fickle and uncertain as popularity: it is here today and gone tomorrow; it is a sandy foundation, and sure to fail those who build upon it. Let us not care for it. Let us seek the favor of him who is the same yesterday today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). Christ never changes: those whom he loves, he loves to the end. His favor endures forever.

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