
Day 314 - November 10

Jesus the Christ (5 BCE-30 CE)

The Triumphant Entry – Sunday

The Final Week – Monday

Readings: *Matthew 21:1-19; Mark 11:1-19; Luke 19:29-48; John 12:12-16, 20-36*

Reflections:

- The final week of Jesus' ministry is the most detailed record of his earthly ministry and life. Although there are some questions about the timing of the events of this week, the actual events of the week are captured with great care. Due to the close parallelism of all four biographies, most scholars believe that the earliest version of the "Story of Jesus" was simply the last week of his life. This part of his life was what the early Christians shared over and over again as they spread his message.
- SUNDAY, crowd goes to meet Jesus: The momentum is growing and Jesus is welcomed into Jerusalem as a king.
- Jesus sends for a colt: The story of the colt reinforces Jesus' divine knowledge of all things as well as his decision at this point to intentionally present himself as a conquering king.
- Jesus enters Jerusalem: This is described as the "whole crowd of his disciples." Many wonder how the crowds can be praising Jesus at the beginning of the week and at the end calling for his death. The answer is simple. It was two different crowds. This was the crowd of his loyal supporters, disciples and most likely a number of the poor who lived just outside Jerusalem. Later in the week it will be those people and workers of the temple who are loyal to the religious institution and leaders of Jerusalem. Some Pharisees rebuke Jesus as we would expect at this point but Jesus responds that even creation itself (stones) would cry out at this moment if praise was not expressed.
- Jesus foresees destruction: Jesus is not an angry judge who hates people. Here we see him weeping over the very people who in a few short days will crucify him. Jesus predicts the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE and mourns the fact that this nation did not embrace the way of peace but in their rebellion, closed their eyes to God's salvation. They rejected God's way because they could not comprehend he would be so gracious in setting aside all of their religion and attempts to hold power and control.

- Jesus popularity recognized: The city is buzzing with the arrival of Jesus and even his enemies unwittingly speak the prophetic: “Look how the whole world has gone after him!”
- Return to Bethany: Jesus sizes up the temple but then returns home. You can see the showdown that is about to take place.
- MONDAY, Unfruitful fig tree: The fig tree, a fruit tree, is one of the Old Testament images of Israel. The tree of life in the garden and the trees of life on the banks of the river in Ezekiel’s vision were all images that God used to portray how he wanted to offer life to people. Israel was supposed to be like a fruitful tree but when Jesus came he found that it was barren with no fruit. His cursing of the tree is a symbolic pronouncement of the spiritual reality of religious Israel. The specific declaration, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again” indicates that Jesus is saying this religious system and way of connecting with God is ended. Jesus was symbolically saying, “This is the end of religion.”
- Jesus cleanses temple: The religious leaders had set up shop in the court of the Gentiles to sell the animals and birds for the sacrificial system. Instead of the Gentiles being given space and freedom to worship God, they were forced out by the religious leaders. Jesus takes a whip and drives out the animals, not the people. Jesus does not use violence against the people but he does effectively shut down the sacrificial system for a day. Why? Jesus quotes Isaiah 56:7 about God’s vision of the temple being a place for all nations, not just Israel. But they have made it a den of revolutionaries or robbers. The phrase “A den of robbers” comes from Jeremiah 7:11 where in the Hebrew it explicitly means “A den of thieves”. In the Greek, the writers record Jesus using the term that can also mean “revolutionaries.” In fact, this word is used commonly throughout this final week. It seems they are implying something more than just that the religious leaders were overcharging and being secretive about it. “A den of thieves” is where robbers go to plan their crimes and stash their loot. “A den of revolutionaries” is the place revolutionaries go to plot their attacks. The religious leaders wanted to kill their Roman oppressors. Rather than welcoming them into the temple to learn about God, they were using the temple as a hold out for their own private dreams of one day killing and overthrowing the Romans. It was their den for plotting their revolution against the Romans rather than a place to welcome the Romans to seek God.
- Children praise Jesus: Jesus continues to heal the sick and marginalized. Children continue to get special mention and honor as they affirm Jesus and keep the spirit of celebration going. The religious leaders are offended and Jesus continues to defend the children and their declaration of truth. Again we see that children are not on the periphery but in the center of community.
- Purpose of Christ’s death: Some Gentile Greeks want to see Jesus, no doubt because of his popularity as a miracle worker and great teacher. Rather than going along with his own celebrity status and seeing these people, Jesus again makes his mission very clear. He has come to die. His death will bring exponential life. Anyone who wants to follow Jesus will

need to also lay their life down in service and God will honor those who do. Jesus could not have been more clear at this point.

- Foretelling crucifixion: John records a final encounter between Jesus and God the Father. Jesus ministry begins with the Father's declaration of love for Jesus. It ends with the Father's declaration of the glory that will be revealed through Jesus. Jesus' whole life vision was to glorify his Father through his obedience to his will. Jesus now summarizes what will happen: "Now is the time of judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." At the cross, judgment for sin and the defeat of Satan were both accomplished. As Jesus sacrificially laid his life down, he at the same time also opened up a whole new way for people to enter into friendship with God. Jesus was opening up a new path to God and in fact has drawn all people to God, unlike anyone else in history.
- Call for walking in light: His listeners are confused because again they were expecting a triumphant Messiah who would establish an eternal kingdom. Jesus does not correct them but rather uses the somewhat cryptic language of walking in the light and a time of darkness about to fall. The key insight here is when Jesus says, "Walk in the light ...that you might become children of light." This is an important truth to grasp. Living Jesus' truth of love and grace, not Law and judgment, will result in our inner transformation to actually become children of love and grace. As we will see in Ephesians 4, you must live truth as the first step to internalize it. Our character is shaped by not just what we believe but more truly, what we believe enough to put into action.
- Return to Bethany: Jesus again leaves the city at the end of the day for obvious safety reasons. His time is coming but still not here.