

November 11

Matthew 21 and 22

Today we read Matthew chapters 21 and 22. Since all three of the synoptic Gospels devote a tremendous amount of space to the events of the last week of Jesus' life, it should not surprise us that there is a tremendous amount of overlap in what they record. Perhaps the best way for me to assist you this morning will be to try once again to set the events of each day into our consciousness, and also to try to point out the things that are unique to Matthew's account.

Sunday -- the first day of Passion Week -- was the day of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Did you notice that Matthew adds one detail that neither Mark nor Luke includes? Matthew says "This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: 'Say to the Daughter of Zion, See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'" This is a direct quote from Zechariah 9:9, and unlike some of the "Messianic" prophecies that Matthew "finds" in the Old Testament, this one is taken from a passage that clearly is Messianic in nature, no one could miss it. There is little doubt, then, that in choosing to enter the city of Jerusalem in this manner, Jesus was boldly choosing to make His Messianic claim in the most public of ways. The cries of the crowds indicate that they understood both the Old Testament prophecy and the claim being made. They were receiving Him as the Messiah. Jesus claims, were not lost on the religionists who opposed Him. This entry into Jerusalem, Christ's self-conscious acceptance of the Messianic praise, and the actions of Christ on Monday morning in "cleansing" the temple, drove them to the conclusion that it was now or never. Jesus had to be destroyed! The time had come for action and they were ready now to move -- but it could not be in public, in front of crowds who had decided He was the Messiah. That would be too dangerous. At the very least, it would mean a riot, and that would in turn lead to Roman intervention, and at worst it could cost them their positions, and even their very lives, to try to take Christ in front of the people.

Tuesday of Holy week was a day of controversy; Jesus squares off in the temple with his critics and handles all their trick questions. In Matthew's account it does give us some information especially in regards to Jesus teachings during that discourse that we don't find anywhere else. In the chapters we read this morning, the parable of the two sons in the wedding banquet those are unique to Matthew alone. It could not have been easy for the Pharisees and the religious leaders who took so much pride and in their external religiosity to hear that Jesus was now saying that the tax collector and the prostitute are going to enter the kingdom of heaven a head of them; they're not going to be very happy about this. It does mean that God is much more interested in the people that actually respond to his will than the people who are well aware of it and pay it only lip service.

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet is the other item here that is unique to Matthew's account. The first portion of it is pretty straightforward and easy enough to interpret. Jesus, in the words of the Gospel of John "Came unto his own but his own received him not." The Jews were invited, the religious leaders first of all, to come to the wedding -- but they refused to accept the invitation. So it was extended: first to the common people of Israel --and then to the Gentiles!! There is a not-so-veiled threat here, too -- a prophecy -- even that because of

their disobedience and the hardness of their hearts, their city -- the city of Jerusalem -- will be judged and destroyed.

In other words he came to the Jews, and he came to the religious leader, and they rejected him. Rather than having an empty banquet hall the gospel was then afforded to the common people of Israel and then to the gentile. This invitation to the banquet is gone out. There is a prophesy even that because of their disobedience and the hardness of hearts, their city, the city of Jerusalem it's going to be judged and destroyed. Up to the point of the warning this tracks right along with Luke 14. The threat of judgment upon the city is added as is the part about the man that came to the banquet without his wedding clothes. Now I want to be certain you don't miss this second point of the parable and I want to share some things with you that I have learned. There is one piece of information that you don't have and it's not given to you by the text. The custom of the time would have dictated that in addition to the provision of the food at the wedding feast, the guests upon arrival would also be given a robe by the host to wear for the festival. That would mean that the poor person would not need to be ashamed of their clothing, it also mean that the rich person would probably be dissuaded from being ostentation or showing off. For a guest to be present at the wedding without wedding clothes could only mean that he refused the garment provided by the host in order to appear in his better clothes. You can see why Jesus added this addendum to the original parable; he was speaking again to those proud religionist who would insist on attempting to appear before the presence of God dressed in their own righteousness. It would be like going to a wedding and refusing to wear the garment provided by the host.

I want to be very certain that you do not miss the point of the second part of the parable, and I believe that it might be possible to do so. There is one piece of information that you have not been given by the text and it is an important one. The custom of the times would have dictated that in addition to the provision of the food itself for the wedding feast, the guests, upon arrival, would also be given a robe by the host to wear. That would mean that the poor person would not need to be ashamed that their clothes were not nice enough, and the rich would have no reason or opportunity to be ostentatious. For a guest to be present at the wedding without the wedding clothes could only mean that he had refused the garment provided by the host in order to appear in his own "better" clothes. Now, perhaps, you can see why Jesus added this addendum to the original parable. He was speaking again to these proud religionists who would insist on attempting to appear before the presence of God dressed in their own righteousness. That will never do. It would be like going to a wedding and refusing to wear the garment provided by the host!

The religionists of Jesus' day (and of ours) were in great danger of not even responding to God's invitation to the great wedding feast, and even if they did condescend to come, it was likely, because of their spiritual blindness, that they might believe that their own righteousness was sufficient for admittance into the presence of the King. The Old Testament prophet said it well. "All of our righteousness is as filthy rags." If we do not come dressed in the righteousness of Christ, then we will be excluded from the presence of the King -- thrown out into the outer darkness. A tax collector or a prostitute would not be likely to make that mistake. They would never dream of depending on the works of righteousness -- but a Pharisee? They might! And that's the point of the parable is accept the invitation,

show up! Drop your filthy rags, drop your righteousness, and drop our garments at the door. Adorn yourself with the robe from the host, adorn yourself in Christ's righteousness and enter the party. Wear only the robe given to you, drop your works - self-righteousness at the door, exchange his righteousness for yours and enter the party.

Because of the death and resurrection...because of the fulfillment of Passion Week, we have this available to us. That is very, very good news. CCC it's good news to this man and I know its good news to you also. I enjoyed our time together. Once again this is Pastor Mike Goett, I'll be seeing you around the Atrium.