

## Matthew 20:29 – 21:46

<sup>20:29</sup> As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him. <sup>30</sup> And two blind men sitting by the road, hearing that Jesus was passing by, cried out, 'Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!' <sup>31</sup> The crowd sternly told them to be quiet, but they cried out all the more, 'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!' <sup>32</sup> And Jesus stopped and called them, and said, 'What do you want me to do for you?' <sup>33</sup> They said to him, 'Lord, we want our eyes to be opened.' <sup>34</sup> Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed him. <sup>21:1</sup> When they had approached Jerusalem and had come to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying to them, 'Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied there and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. <sup>3</sup> If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them.' <sup>4</sup> This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: <sup>5</sup> 'Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold your King is coming to you, gentle and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'" <sup>6</sup> The disciples went and did just as Jesus had instructed them, <sup>7</sup> and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid their coats on them; and he sat on the coats. <sup>8</sup> Most of the crowd spread their coats in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in the road. <sup>9</sup> The crowds going ahead of him, and those who followed, were shouting, 'Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!' <sup>10</sup> When he had entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, 'Who is this?' <sup>11</sup> And the crowds were saying, 'This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee.' <sup>12</sup> And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. <sup>13</sup> And he said to them, 'It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you are making it a robbers' den.' <sup>14</sup> And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. <sup>15</sup> But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple, 'Hosanna to the Son of David,' they became indignant <sup>16</sup> and said to him, 'Do you hear what these children are saying?' And Jesus said to them, 'Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself'?' <sup>17</sup> And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there. <sup>18</sup> Now in the morning, when he was returning to the city, he became hungry. <sup>19</sup> Seeing a lone fig tree by the road, he came to it and found nothing on it except leaves only; and he said to it, 'No longer shall there ever be any fruit from you.' And at once the fig tree withered. <sup>20</sup> Seeing this, the disciples were amazed and asked, 'How did the fig tree wither all at once?' <sup>21</sup> And Jesus answered and said to them, 'Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it will happen. <sup>22</sup> And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.' <sup>23</sup> When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him while he was teaching, and said, 'By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?' <sup>24</sup> Jesus said to them, 'I will also ask you one thing, which if you tell me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. <sup>25</sup> The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?' And they began reasoning among themselves, saying, 'If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Then why did you not believe him?' <sup>26</sup> But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the people; for they all regard John as a prophet.' <sup>27</sup> And answering Jesus, they said, 'We

do not know.’ He also said to them, ‘Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.’<sup>28</sup> But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go work today in the vineyard.’<sup>29</sup> And he answered, ‘I will not’; but afterward he regretted it and went.<sup>30</sup> The man came to the second and said the same thing; and he answered, ‘I will, sir’; but he did not go.<sup>31</sup> Which of the two did the will of his father?’ They said, ‘The first.’ Jesus said to them, ‘Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you.’<sup>32</sup> For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him.<sup>33</sup> Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who ‘planted a vineyard and put a wall around it and dug a wine press in it, and built a tower,’ and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey.<sup>34</sup> When the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce.<sup>35</sup> The vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third.<sup>36</sup> Again he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them.<sup>37</sup> But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’<sup>38</sup> ‘But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.’<sup>39</sup> They took him, and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.<sup>40</sup> Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers?’<sup>41</sup> They said to him, ‘He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons.’<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, ‘Did you never read in the Scriptures, ‘The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief cornerstone’; ‘this came about from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?’<sup>43</sup> Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it.<sup>44</sup> And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust.’<sup>45</sup> When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they understood that he was speaking about them.<sup>46</sup> When they sought to seize him, they feared the people, because they considered him to be a prophet.

### **Historical and Cultural Background**

- *The Return of the Davidic Kingly Line to Jerusalem:* Second Temple Jews longed for the messianic king, great David’s greater son, to one day reclaim Jerusalem as his throne. This was rooted in various Scriptures. For example, Zechariah envisioned the return of king as follows:

<sup>9:9</sup> Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!  
Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem!  
Behold, your king is coming to you;  
He is just and endowed with salvation,  
Humble, and mounted on a donkey,  
Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.  
<sup>10</sup> I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim  
And the horse from Jerusalem;  
And the bow of war will be cut off.  
And He will speak peace to the nations;  
And His dominion will be from sea to sea,  
And from the River to the ends of the earth. (Zechariah 9:9 – 10)

The motif of the one or two donkeys (a manuscript question between the Masoretic Hebrew and the Greek Septuagint translations of the text) was probably meant to echo King David's sad departure from Jerusalem when he was ousted by his defiant son Absalom. In his day, King David left with two donkeys (2 Sam.16:1). Either the Jewish scholars who translated the Septuagint, or Zechariah himself, probably wanted to evoke the victorious return of David's heir in the same idiom. Of course, Jesus would have wanted to deliberately evoke the prophetic text. The prophets also spoke of the messianic king as 'laying' or even 'being' a new foundation stone (Isa.8:14; 28:16; Ps.118:14 – 23) of a new or renewed Temple.

- *The Return of YHWH to Jerusalem:* Even more weighty in the Hebrew Scriptures was the hope for YHWH to personally return to the Jerusalem Temple. This was also built on a literary theme traced through the biblical narrative. Adam dwelt with God in the garden outside the mountain called Eden (Ezk.28:13 – 14); David started to build the Temple for God's presence to dwell on the mountain called Zion as a new Eden (2 Sam.7). God's presence departed from the Temple just before the Babylonians invaded (Ezk.1 – 10); the Jews rebuilt the Temple, yet longed for God to return. In 165 BC, Judas Maccabeus reclaimed Jerusalem from the Greeks and, in the pattern of the kings, cleansed the Temple for worship. But it stood empty.

<sup>8:1</sup> Then the word of the LORD of hosts came, saying, <sup>2</sup> 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I am exceedingly jealous for Zion, yes, with great wrath I am jealous for her.' <sup>3</sup> Thus says the LORD, 'I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts will be called the Holy Mountain.' (Zechariah 8:1 – 3)

<sup>3:1</sup> 'Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,' says the LORD of hosts. <sup>2</sup> 'But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. <sup>3</sup> He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness. <sup>4</sup> Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years. <sup>5</sup> Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me,' says the LORD of hosts... <sup>4:1</sup> 'For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze,' says the LORD of hosts, 'so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. <sup>2</sup> But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall. <sup>3</sup> You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing,' says the LORD of hosts. <sup>4</sup> Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel. <sup>5</sup> Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. <sup>6</sup> He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.' (Malachi 3:1 – 5; 4:1 – 6)

Most Jews, including the Pharisees, believed that Jerusalem was corrupted by the current leadership. The priests and Sadducees were seen as compromisers with Rome; the Sadducees disavowed bodily resurrection because it stirred up revolutionary hopes; the priests were not of the proper Levitical family; and the Roman military presence in general was insulting to Jews.

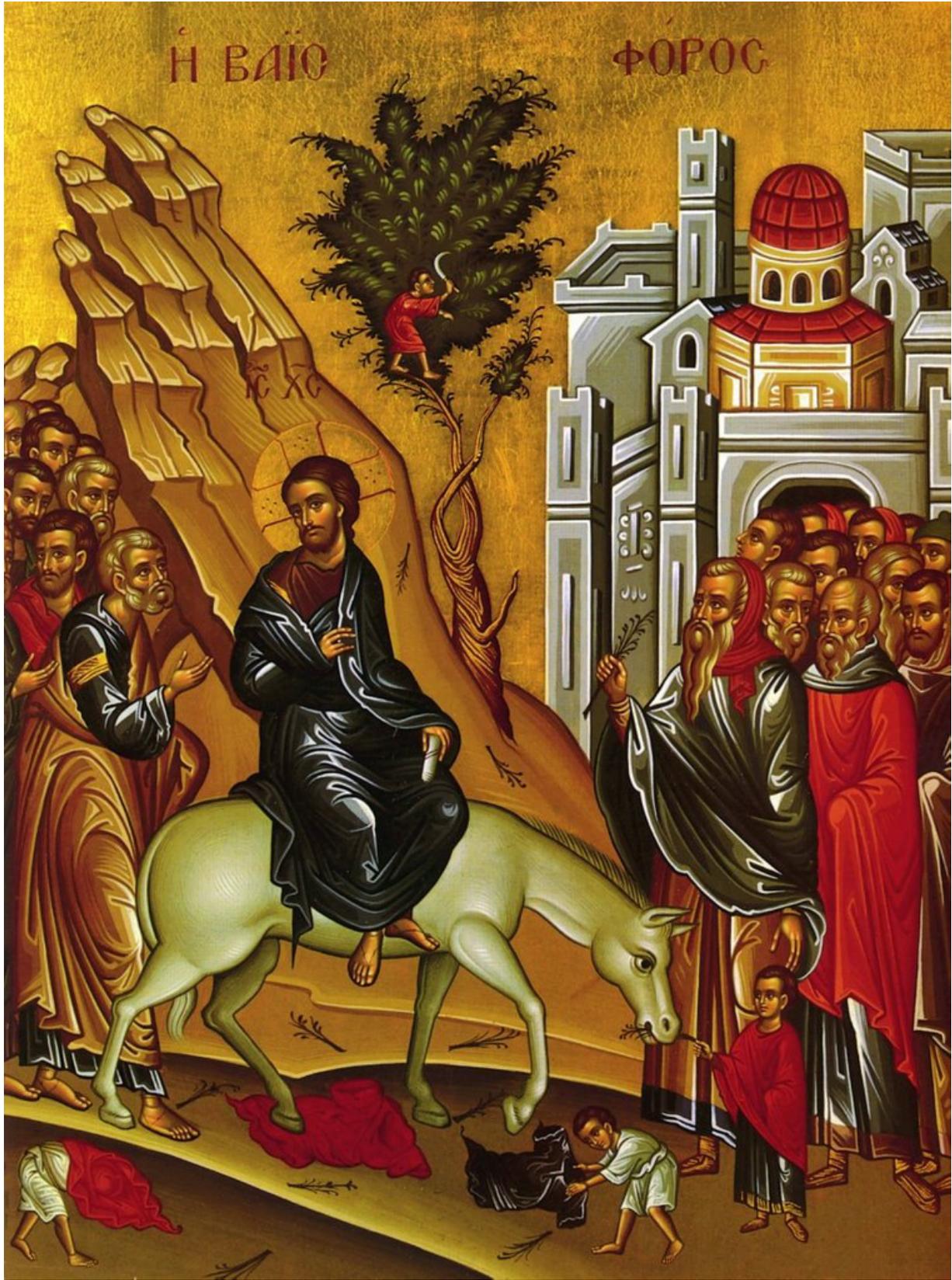
## Questions

1. Does Matthew want us to compare what happened in Jericho and Jerusalem? What happened in Jericho in 20:29 – 34?
  - a. The two blind men in Jericho wanted to see truly, and be healed of their blindness. That contrasts with the Jerusalem leaders, who were blind and didn't want to be healed and see truly.
  - b. People called Jesus the title 'Son of David' which was very relevant here! It's like the title 'Heir of Isildur' for Aragorn in *Lord of the Rings*. King David was not perfect, but he loved God and God made a covenant with him to ensure a king on the throne from his line, and to dwell in the true Temple at David's request (although David meant the physical building, and God always wanted to dwell within people).
  - c. State: Jesus is clearly the Son of David, the Jewish Messiah. His Jewishness is not just something that we can put aside or ignore, even for a moment. We have to see Jesus as the climax of what God was doing with Israel, calling for a voluntary human partner and in so doing, crafting a role for Himself to fill. When we see how Adam and Eve tried to make themselves into gods, and so rejected God and cast Him out of the garden, this is ultimately how God returns into our midst. He returns humbly, in the midst of people He had been committed to for centuries, and fulfills the very role that He had marked out for them, on their behalf. Yes, that put Jesus into conflict with the leaders at Jerusalem, not least about their hawkishness towards Rome which would only put them on a collision course militarily with the Roman Empire. But Jesus was also clearly for the people, and giving the leaders warning and indications that he was who he said he was.
2. If you were here on the day when Jesus entered Jerusalem like this, claiming to be king and embodying YHWH's personal return to the Temple, how would you have felt? Knowing all the hopes and buzz in the air, and seeing it all happen?
  - a. Somehow with all the conflict, it seems sweaty, dusty, hot, and tense. It also makes me think of the smell of animals, since we have donkeys and the animals in the Temple. It would have been packed with people trying to see it all happen, crowding around, looking over each others' shoulders.
  - b. Also, there are a lot of titles thrown around for Jesus.
    - i. Son of David (20:30 and 31, and a third time in 21:9)
    - ii. Lord (20:30, 31, 33; 21:3)
    - iii. Prophet (21:11, 46)
    - iv. King (21:5)
3. Let's take Jesus' entry in 21:1 – 10. Any thoughts about that?
  - a. Yes, Jesus was deliberately triggering the prophecy from Zechariah 9:9 – 10, as well as others. You might have thought that Jesus fulfilled prophecy in a kind of passive way, like being born in Bethlehem to fulfill Micah 5:2, or being laid in a rich man's tomb to fulfill Isaiah 53:9. Sometimes that did happen 'passively' in that sense. But mostly Jesus did actively step into those prophecies. [For those who have read Josh McDowell's apologetics, and believe that you could assign probabilities to Jesus fulfilling prophecies, tell them that McDowell had the wrong idea.]
  - b. Seeing Jesus with the two donkeys would have triggered the people's hopes for the greater Son of great King David to ride in.
  - c. Also, it's possible that just on the other side of the city, Pontius Pilate was riding into the city on a war horse! We can't be sure of that, but it is a provocative picture! The donkey was a symbol of peace. The war horse of course was a symbol of Rome's power and oppression.
4. Then when Jesus strides into the Temple in 21:11 – 17, what do you think of what he does there?
  - a. It matches up with Malachi's vision of turning things upside down, and healing people. He's refining and purifying the place.
  - b. This has to do with God's intention for the Temple to be a place of prayer for all nations – not just the Jews. God was always interested in drawing people to Himself. And He worked with Israel and shaped them not to be a nation unto itself, but a people as a microcosm of the whole world, for the sake of the world.
  - c. On the morning of the second day, why does he wither the fig tree? Doesn't that seem harsh? The fig tree does not represent people. It represents the institution of the Temple. So Jesus is removing the Temple. He is not condemning specific people, although he was challenging them to disassociate from it.

- d. What does Jesus mean by 'this mountain' being taken up and cast into the sea?
  - i. Note that in American culture, we tend to think of 'mountain' as 'obstacle.' But to a Jew, standing next to Mount Zion, it's not an obstacle, it's awesomeness! It's God's presence. 'This mountain' refers to Mount Zion, where the Temple is, and where the presence of God was.
  - ii. 'The sea' is both a physical allusion to 'the Sea of Galilee,' which is where Gentiles lived, and a literary reference in Scripture to 'the Gentiles.' Daniel saw the sea as representing the Gentiles, from which beastly kingdoms came (Dan.7:2 – 3).
  - iii. At the end of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus meets with his disciples on a mountain near the Sea of Galilee (Mt.28:16 – 20)!
5. How does Jesus challenge the leaders there in the Temple, on both days?
  - a. He challenged the money system! The money changers made a profit off the Temple sacrifice trade. The priests made money off that.
  - b. He challenges them about the baptism of John the Baptist. Part of his critique is why didn't they honor John or agree with the crowds that he was from God.
  - c. But part of his critique is: why they didn't get baptized by John?
    - i. Those who obey and then disobey = priests and elders didn't go to John the Baptist
    - ii. Those who refuse and then obey = tax collectors and prostitutes initially disobeyed and then went to John
    - iii. In a guilt and merit culture like ours, we tend to see the 'good guy' of the story as the son who first said no, and then later did the work.
    - iv. But in an honor and shame perspective, both are hard for the father. The son who publicly agreed to work is 'better' than the son who publicly shamed his father by refusing to work and telling him to his face. Even though the one who refused to work later changed his mind and worked while the former never actually obeyed the father, the public shaming of the father is still a greater sin than not performing the task. The first son may have eventually obeyed the father, but the father lost face. The second son may have not obeyed the father, and protected the father's public honor at first, but the fact that he didn't show up for work later was a public rejection as well. Jesus is therefore saying that the father bears the shame and dishonor for both. God the Father is the true hero of the story.
  - d. Why does Jesus add the parable in v.33 – 44?
    - i. Retell Israel's story: God had wanted Israel to be a vineyard bearing fruit (e.g. Isa.5), and set up stewards in leadership.
    - ii. Expose their rejection of God, and Jesus: beat one, killed another, stoned a third (v.35), then killed the son (v.36 – 39)
    - iii. Describe the emotion of the master (v.40 – 41)
    - iv. Allude to a new Temple being built by Jesus and how loyalty to the old Temple will result in defeat (v.42 – 44)
    - v. That ties into the 'this mountain' be cast up into the sea – he is building a new Temple which will encompass the Gentile world
  - e. Is Jesus saying that they are just condemned eternally and can't be saved?
    - i. It can sound like that when he withers the fig tree in 21:18 – 19 and when he says that the stone will fall on them in 21:44.
    - ii. But really Jesus is condemning their course of action as leaders as they reject him and will pursue a military messiah and military option as they try to liberate Jerusalem (Mt.24). Not only are they scorning the poor and weak at present. They will lead many others to war in what will become the Roman-Jewish War in 66 – 70 AD. That is what Jesus is warning against and condemning. They can still be spiritually saved, though, and come to him.
6. How does Jesus welcome the children and their faith? (21:15 – 16)
  - a. The children contrast to the adults.
  - b. The children's response is part of a prophetic hope: 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself' from Psalm 8:2.
  - c. This may suggest a 'generational divide' in Jesus' generation. This is parallel to the 'generational divide' of Moses' generation: the first generation of Israelites whom God delivered out of Egypt

lacked faith to enter the new garden land (Num.14:2 – 3). So God took their children into the garden land instead. If Matthew is intentionally developing that parallel, it means that God's judgment on Israel for rejecting Jesus was not intrinsically perpetual from that point on. Symbolically, God welcomed the entirety of the second generation, the children, and Jesus received their praise. From a literary-theological and missiological standpoint, this is indicative of hope. And this also means something very important for the history of Jewish-Christian relations, and for Christian ethics in relation to Judaism. Gentile Christians should not have treated Jews henceforth as 'Christ-killers' as if they were of the same posture as the Jewish temple leaders of Jesus' day. There was hope already embedded in the narrative! Matthew as the author of the Gospel must have Matthew's Gospel itself may have been anti-temple, but it was not anti-Judaic and certainly not anti-Semitic.

- d. The Greek Orthodox icon of Palm Sunday indicates the role of children hopefully. The children are closest to Jesus. The children are at Jesus' feet. The children are laying down coats to honor Jesus. One child is even taking his coat off to lay it down. A child is in a palm tree cutting palm branches with which to honor Jesus. While one adult in the temple is waving a palm branch, all the others are not, suggesting the recognition that the adults who cried 'Hosanna' will soon be crying for Jesus to be crucified. So the icon recognizes the role of the children.



7. Application: This is how Jesus came to be king – king of Israel and king of the world.

- a. Illus: In J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, the last book of the trilogy is called *The Return of the King*. In it, Aragorn steps forward into the role of the king of Gondor to unite the tribes of men. He does this by fulfilling prophecies, like the one about the hands of the king will be the hands of a healer. But he also does this by filling to the full a larger storyline. He is the heir of Isildur who is greater than Isildur himself. For Aragorn, unlike Isildur, withstood the temptation to seize the Ring and use it. How did people recognize Aragorn as king? Because the role was shaped and filled with hopes before he came.
- b. Similarly, Jesus stepped into a role that was shaped and filled with hopes before he came. Jesus ties two main threads together, from Scripture, in himself. He ties together the thread about being both the human Messiah coming into Jerusalem, and the thread of YHWH returning to the Temple. N.T. Wright wrote a book called *When God Became King* if you want to know more about this. Jesus is the Son of David, the Jewish Messiah, the heir of David who is greater than King David himself, because Jesus never sinned. And Jesus is the embodiment of God's long and loving pursuit of His people, shaped to be not an ethnic group but a microcosm of the world for the sake of the world.
- c. So when we say that 'Jesus is Lord,' or 'Jesus is God' or 'Jesus reveals God' or 'this is how God became king', we're not talking about a deist 'god' who just set up the dominoes and pushed the first one, who therefore can be said to be 'in control.' We are not talking about Aristotle's Prime Mover, or a big judge with a big gavel in the sky. We are talking about Jesus, who came in humility as a king to his own people to warn them against their own violence and ethnocentrism and nationalism. It happened in the midst of a particular story and a people. This particular story is about how Jesus was rejected, and how the one true God was rejected, by the very people who were supposed to receive him. Jesus came to bring peace and cleansing and renewal. But the leaders in Jerusalem wanted power, and money, and stability in a form of life that God never meant to be final.
- d. Isn't that like us? Jesus into our lives to be king. He comes into every space in us, every room. If each one of us was a house, there might be rooms that we don't open up to him.