



Ambition

Matthew 20:20 – 28

Peter, James and John were always competing to be better than each other. Peter tried to negotiate with Jesus, by showing how much he had left behind (Matthew 19:27). James and John got their mum to come and talk to Jesus to make them his right and left hand men in the age to come.

- It was only days before crucifixion and the petty bids for power must have broken Jesus' heart → given he had already said that only the humble and the guileless will inherit the Kingdom.
- The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard – Matthew 20:1-16 – rebukes anyone who demands a reward for his sacrifice on behalf of the Kingdom → salvation alone is enough!

Jesus responds to his ambitious twelve with patience and reminds them of his own humility, how he entered the world as the Suffering Servant to lay down his life that others might live.

- Matthew 10 vs. 24 – 25 *“The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master. ²⁵ It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their masters.”*
- True greatness in the Kingdom of God comes from being more like Jesus, therefore not walking a path of selfish ambition.
- Christians, whether leading in a church or leading a business, must not do so in the self-serving manner of unbelieving bosses. Not being ambitious to be stars but slaves.
- Those who have embraced Jesus' Revolution know that the only way up is down and the only way to greatness is smallness.
- Jesus' rebuke convicted his twelve disciples and worked an amazing transformation in their proud hearts, Act 3:12, 16.

“It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit”.

H.S. Truman

- The twelve renounced all claim to hold center stage, taking eagerly, rolls as extras in drama which belongs to Jesus alone.
- Three times Scripture warns that *“God opposes the proud but gives grace to humble.”* (Proverbs 3:34, James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5)

The church only burns brightly, distinctively, and successfully when her members follow the lead of their Servant-Master. Let your dreams of greatness die at his nail-pierced feet, and pursue the true greatness of his Kingdom.

Whoever wants to be great must become the servant of all.

Ransom
Matthew 20: 28

- Jesus used the word '*ransom*' as it casts us as helpless prisoners and him as Saviour and redeemer → only role we play in our salvation is our humble cry for help.
- There is nothing respectable of a person who needs a ransom; he is a slave, a hostage, a prisoner of war, or a convicted criminal.

The word ransom is very dramatic but also very confusing. The twelve were confused because they knew the Old Testament.

- Daniel wrote about the 'Son of Man' who would be all-powerful ruler and be worshiped and served.
- Jesus rocked this by reminding them that Daniel's 'Son of Man' would also be Isaiah's Suffering Servant.
- The Messiah would be the greatest man in history but he would also be the least.
- Jesus would be served by all nations once he himself had served them himself.
- The Messiah had not come to be served, but to serve.

- Tendency for confusion because we don't know the Old Testament well enough.
 - # If Jesus paid a ransom to whom did he pay it?

- Exodus 15 – the Israelites were not merely freed from slavery in Egypt but the Lord ransomed and purchased them by the shedding of the blood of the Passover Lamb, freeing them from the curse of slavery and death.
- Paul's application to the cross of Christ (1 Corinthians 5:7; 10:1-4):-
 - Passover Lamb = Jesus
 - Red Sea waters = Christian baptism
- Pharaoh was not rewarded but destroyed; similarly Satan was not rewarded at cross but also destroyed.
- God the Father paid his Son's blood as a ransom-price to his own justice – Romans 3:24, 26.
- God could have saved us by force but he is so committed to justice that he paid his Son's blood to be just even as he declares the guilty innocent, i.e. legal transaction satisfying his justice.
- Therefore, we are totally free from Satan's claim on our lives and can never be re-enslaved.

Jesus' death was more than an example to the proud disciples but a free ticket to freedom.

The King Enters the Capital
Matthew 21:1 – 17

In April 46BC, Julius Caesar entered the city of Rome to celebrate a mighty triumph. His chariot was followed by a long chain of captives and more than 2,000 of silver and gold was distributed to the delighted crowds.

The Jews expected a no less impressive triumphant entry of their Messiah, but Jesus had other plans.

- Not a mighty charger but a donkey.
 - Not to distribute gold but pour out his blood.
 - Not from the battlefield but into the battlefield.
 - Not with a train of captives but to seize one from the cross.
 - Recreating Israel not from the ashes of Rome but through the ashes of repentance.
- Jesus' entry sent out a call to voluntarily surrender (the laying down of cloaks and palms hailed a royal visitor).
 - The crowd gathered of their own accord, recognizing Jesus as the Messiah.
 - Jesus came in meekness as he gathers a people who freely choose his rule.
 - When Day of Judgment comes every rebel will be forced to bow before Christ's second coming.

Most take this as a message of grace, but Matthew aims it to the Jewish readers as a warning of God's judgment;-

1. Jesus brought judgment upon the leaders of Israel.
 - Chief priests, scribes and elders failed to see in Jesus what was obvious to the children.
 - Mathew 21 vs. 25 exposes them as hypocrites and rebels.
2. Jesus brought judgment upon the Temple of Israel.
 - Had warned two years earlier not to make it a *'market'*, but this time with a sterner warning saying they had made it *'den of robbers'*.
 - Jesus warns as in Isaiah 56 vs. 7 that unless his Temple is a *'house of prayer'* he will destroy those people as before.
3. Jesus brought judgment upon the nation of Israel.
 - Like the fig tree which looked promising but bears no fruit and so is withered by Jesus.
 - Jesus arrived in meekness but his call to submission was more powerful than all the Caesars put together.

All this applies to the church today → if we box God and have self-serving agenda, we too will face the same fate as Jerusalem. Jesus comes in meekness, calling us to submit voluntarily to his Kingdom Revolution, but don't mistaken his meekness for weakness! Look at the withered fig tree and quickly bow the knee.

Blessing and Cursing Matthew 21:18 – 22

Words carry great power but this is dependent upon the one in whose name we speak.

Jacob understood this very clearly → when one of God's servants speaks a blessing or curse in his name, the universe lines up to enforce it.

Jesus of Nazareth understood this too because when he spoke, all heaven's power rushed to back up what he said.

→ 'Get up' or 'Stretch out your hand' = dysfunctional body fell into line (Matthew 9:6; 12:13)

→ Invoked a blessing on 5 loaves and 2 fish = multiplied and fed five thousand

'Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.' Matthew 18 vs. 18

He has commissioned us to speak commands in his name which assert his great victory.

Jesus wants you to use your tongue to advance his Kingdom:

'If you have faith and do not doubt... it will be done!'

Israel's Ultimatum Matthew 21: 23 – 22:46

God loves the Jewish nation, therefore uses three great parables to issue an ultimatum in an attempt to change their hearts.

1. Parable of the Two Sons
 - ❖ Throughout history, God used those not in line to inherit e.g. Shem instead of Japheth, Isaac instead of Ishmael, Jacob instead of Esau.
 - ❖ Israel immediately identifies with second son yet he is not the hero of the story, unless he did what he promised he would.
 - Jesus shows that Jews have no excuse to decline/ignore message – Matthew 21:23-27.

2. Parable of Tenants

- ❖ Jewish nation likened to a beautiful vineyard called to bear fruit.
- ❖ In the Old Testament prophecy, Isaiah 5:1-7, he had promised to destroy the vineyard but the new parable promises instead to give it to other nations who would produce fruit he deserved.
- ❖ God gave prophesy to Israel to fill the earth with fruit but has fulfilled it through church.

3. Parable of the Wedding Banquet

- ❖ The Jews invited to take their place at God's great wedding but they had refused to come.
- ❖ Jews were not saved by privilege but by accepting in the heart.

These three parables issued the Jews a final ultimatum to receive Christ as King and do what he said. Their leaders ignored Jesus' ultimatum and tried to trick him into endorsing their earthly campaigns. They still wanted him to be;-

- A Warrior-Messiah who would rebel against Rome.
- A Philosopher-Messiah who would side with their logic.
- A Pharisee-Messiah who would debate their rules and forsake his Revolution.

Matthew urges us that whether we are Jews or Gentiles, we cannot ignore the Messiah of Israel.

The Greatest Commandment

Matthew 22:34 – 40

Love isn't just a part of the Christian life; it is a lifestyle.

The Old Testament is a very long book it has 929 chapters, 23,145 verses, and 593,493 words, so when Jesus tells us that 23,143 of those verses "*hang on*" only two headline verses we need to sit up and listen. They are his God-given executive summary of 1500 years worth of scripture and they help us to check that we haven't missed the heart of his message.

- "Law and Prophets" = Old Testament.

1. Deuteronomy 6 vs. 5

- Love involves feelings as well as thinking, planning and actions

2. Leviticus 19 vs. 18

- Not a separate command but like the first as those who love God will love others
 - 1 John 4 vs. 7 -8, 20

Love is at the heart of Jesus' Kingdom Revolution → 1Cor 13

The Good Samaritan in Luke 10 as told by Jesus

- The Priest and Levite religious but loveless.
- The Samaritan loves and helps even though considered a loser by listeners.

God is looking for people who love him and others as much as themselves, which is the heart of the Old and New Testaments → the heart of God's Kingdom Revolution.

- Jesus calls us to love the unlovable, even those who bitterly oppose us.

God is love, and when filled with the Holy Spirit, God himself dwells inside us. We find ourselves filled with the love of Christ so that we naturally love as the world cannot love → making the church so refreshingly different.

'God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.' Roman 5 vs. 5

'all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.' John 13 vs. 35