

21:1 *When they drew near*- This suggests that Matthew was not with them at the time. I suggest he was, but in the analogy of the cameraman, he has as it were shifted his camera to Jerusalem and records the group approaching.

*Bethphage*- 'The house of figs'. There is likely a connection to the incident later in this section when the Lord curses the fig tree (:19). Perhaps we are to assume that He hoped for figs in Bethphage too, and was likewise disappointed. Bethphage has even been given the meaning 'House of unripe figs', which would confirm this impression (1).

*Sent two disciples*- The question arises as to why He didn't simply take the two animals Himself. The practical answer would be that if He had gone further into Jerusalem to get them, then he would as it were have entered Jerusalem but not in the way He intended to, which was to consciously fulfil the prophecy about the humble King entering Jerusalem on a donkey. But that explanation throws the question one stage further back. Why was it specifically a donkey from that village and person which was required? Could He not have found one in Bethphage? The effort required to send two disciples ahead of Him to get the animals and then bring them back to Bethphage seems considerable, when donkeys were common enough. The answer is not clear, but it could be that there was an anonymous person who specifically wanted to give those animals to the Lord in order to fulfil that prophecy. The Lord knew this and had obviously discussed it with the owner previously, because the owner would recognize Him as "the Lord" (:3), and would provide them once he perceived the Lord wanted them. In this little incident we see therefore the extent the Lord will go to, now as well as then, in order to take up the initiative of those who love Him. If we take that initiative in service, the Lord will surely use it, and make every effort to do so.

21:2 *A donkey tied... loose them*- The Greek words translated "tied" and "loose" occur together several times, usually rendered 'bind' and 'loose'. Earlier in Matthew, the idea of binding and loosing has been used about the way that the decisions and actions of believers can have eternal consequence upon others, and our bind and loosing is to some extent reflected in and confirmed by Heaven (16:19; 18:18). This conception of binding and loosing was surely intended by the Lord. Verse 4 makes clear that all this was done in order to fulfil the prophecy of Zech. 9:9 that Messiah would come to Zion riding on a donkey and her foal. But that prophecy had to be consciously fulfilled. Whether or not the Messianic prophecies were fulfilled was therefore left to the initiative of the Lord and His followers. And it's the same in our last days- if, e.g., we choose to fulfil the prophecy that the Gospel must go into all the world before the end comes, then in that sense the actual time of Christ's coming is left in our hands. There are other Messianic associations with a donkey- Abraham took Isaac to be sacrificed on a donkey (Gen. 22:3,5); Solomon rode to his coronation on David's donkey (1 Kings 1:33-44).

The question arises as to why both a donkey and foal were required. He surely didn't straddle both at the same time. He rode on the donkey whilst the colt followed. Perhaps this has reference to the way that the Lord's final entry into His Kingdom would be on the backs of both Jews and Gentiles; the immature foal with no rider would therefore look forward to the Gentiles. Another possibility is that "A donkey, *and* on a colt, the foal of a donkey" is a Semitic parallelism effectively meaning 'A donkey, actually, a foal of a donkey'. If that's the case, then the Lord rode the foal of a donkey, not yet broken in. It would've been hard to ride, probably trying to throw Him; His journey into the city would've been almost comical, because He would nearly have been thrown and would've hardly made a sedate, solemn procession. The parallel records stress that no man had ever sat upon it (Mk. 11:2; Lk. 19:30). This would've spoken clearly of the difficulty of the Lord's entry to His Kingdom whilst riding on Israel. However, :2 speaks in the plural, of loosing the animals and bringing *them* to the Lord. It may simply be that a donkey nursing her foal, distracted by this, was the most unmilitary, non-glorious form upon which the Lord could've entered Jerusalem. Perhaps it was a parody of how triumphal entries require a King to be on a charger pulling a chariot. The Lord had a donkey instead of a charger, and instead of a chariot being pulled by the charger, the foal was in tow behind the donkey.

Mk. 11:4 says that the donkey was tied at a gate, at "a place where two ways met". This translates the word *amphedon* which in the LXX (e.g. Jer. 17:27) is used for a palace. Herod had a palace on the Mount of Olives and maybe this is what is being referenced. It could be that the donkey and foal were provided by Herod's servants, because Joanna was a disciple of Jesus who provided for Jesus from her "substance"- and she was the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward (Lk. 8:3). In this case, the Lord was further parodying a King's triumphant entry by riding upon Herod's donkey.

21:3 *The Lord*- See on 21:1 *Sent two disciples*.

*Has need*- God in a sense is in need of man, just as Jesus was, or allowed Himself to be.

*He shall send them*- "Send" here translates *apostello*, and naturally we think of the apostles, those sent forth with the Gospel. And as so often taught by implication, the Lord is in need of man, the harvest needs workers and without them, in His wisdom, it will not be harvested. We are surely being invited to see these animals as representative of those upon whom the Lord will ride in order to enter Jerusalem in glory. But He rode upon the bucking, difficult colt which had not yet been broken in. This hampered His triumphal entry. And there was the donkey itself with nobody sitting upon it. Just as the Lord consciously tried to fulfil Zech. 9:9 by obtaining these animals, so the hint surely is that His final triumphal entry will be on the basis of us His people carrying Him in.

21:4 *All this was done*- The Gospels are highly abbreviated accounts, and yet a significant amount of time is spent explaining how the Lord obtained the donkey and foal. This is to show how consciously He tried to fulfil God's word. He consciously tried to make the word become flesh in Him, as we must (Jn. 1:14).

*That it might be fulfilled*- The use of *hina* definitely suggests action *so that* there might be a specific outcome, in this case, the fulfilment of prophecy. This construction is common in the Lord's ministry- something was done *hina*, in order to achieve, the fulfilment of prophecy (Mt. 1:22; 2:15; 4:14; 21:5; 26:56; 27:35; Mk. 14:49; Jn. 12:38; 13:18; 15:25; 17:12; 19:24,36).

21:5 *The daughter of Zion*- A term used in the prophets for the righteous remnant within Jerusalem. The idea was that they would perceive how the Lord was fulfilling the Messianic prophecy of Zech. 9:9. However, the Hebrew text of Zech. 9:9 says that the King comes "having salvation"- but that is omitted in this quotation. The ultimate 'triumphal entry' was yet to come. The Lord entered Jerusalem to obtain salvation through death on the cross, not to bring the immediate salvation from Rome which the people were so fixated upon.

*Humble*- Kings were supposed to enter their new capital on a charger, a war horse, beaming in proud triumph. The idea of a humble king was an oxymoron to the first century mindset. But the Lord was a King like no other- a humble king, who entered Zion not on a charger but on a donkey with a colt wandering insecurely behind them. Zech. 9:9 goes on to say that by doing this, He will bring deliverance from the war horse / charger: "Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, *humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey*. He will *cut off the chariot* from Ephraim *and the war horse* from Jerusalem; and the *battle bow shall be cut off*, and he shall *command peace* to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River [Euphrates] to the ends of the earth". In this we see the principle of non-violent victory over violence; the King who comes riding on a donkey will thereby "cut off... the war horse" which was threatening Jerusalem. That war horse was initially a reference to Rome, from whom the Jews thought Messiah would violently deliver them. The Lord went to great efforts to fulfil this prophecy of Zech. 9:9- in order to demonstrate that it was by humility and non-violence that deliverance from violence would finally come. The other accounts say the Lord rode upon the foal of the donkey (e.g. Jn. 12:15). If He sat upon this animal rather than the mother donkey, the Lord was showing how He chose to ride in the 'chariot' rather than on the donkey pulling it. But the donkey and foal were the humblest and weakest imitation possible of a charger and chariot. But this was exactly His point. The glorious victory procession came from Bethphage "and Bethany" (Mk. 11:1), which can mean 'house of the poor'. It was here that the Lord sat upon the humble donkey- again reinforcing the idea that He came as a humble King.

21:6 The record emphasizes the disciples' obedience and solidarity with the Lord, placing their personal clothes as His saddle (:7). It must've all seemed rather bizarre, for they too nursed hopes of an immediate salvation and Kingdom, but they were commendably willing to go along with His insistence of teaching the lesson of 'the humble King'. Jn. 12:16 adds the information that the disciples didn't understand at the time, nor did they see the connection with Zech. 9:9: "These things his disciples did not understand at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about him, and that they had done these things to him". And yet they went along with it all. It is an essay in loyalty and obedience, although not in perception and faith.

21:7 *Put on them their clothes*- As saddles. The fact both animals were saddled was to make the point that one rider was missing. For according to the other Gospels, the Lord sat upon the colt. The mother donkey was saddled, but without a rider. This added to the strangeness of the spectacle. The missing rider was perhaps a reference to how Israel had not as a whole responded in bringing Messiah to Zion. Maybe it referred to the Gentiles who had yet to be converted. Or perhaps to the fact that Israel had rejected John the Baptist and he had been killed- and therefore there was no Elijah prophet bringing Messiah into Zion. Elijah was the great horseman of the Divine chariot (2 Kings 2:12; 13:14; he is called the "horsemen" plural, but this is an intensive plural for 'the one great horseman'). Elijah was the chariot horseman, the one who was to ride on the horse which pulled the chariot in which there was Messiah [this was a Rabbinic understanding of the Elijah prophet]. But he was strangely absent in this acted parable. The saddle was there for him, provided by the few disciples who had responded to John / Elijah; but he wasn't there. This absence of the Elijah prophet was surely indicative of the fact that John had not been the Elijah prophet for most of Israel- they hadn't responded properly to his message. Therefore the true triumphant entry of Messiah was yet future. This is why the phrase "bringing salvation" is excluded from the quotation of Zech. 9:9. It was not so much a 'triumphant entry', but a *parody* of a triumphant entry.

21:8 *Cut down branches*- Paul speaks of how Israel were cut off branches because of their rejection of Jesus (Rom. 11:17,19). The crowds who accepted Him in the wrong way very soon rejected Him; so in a sense, they cut themselves off. And they did this because they misunderstood Him, expecting Him to give immediate deliverance.

*Branches*- Jn. 12:13 says they were palm branches. But palms and the shout of "Hosanna" are associated with the feast of Tabernacles. And this was Passover, not Tabernacles. All the way through this brilliant visual stunt by the Lord, there was the message that He was not as they had

imagined, He had come to die as the Passover Lamb, not to immediately give them the Tabernacles celebration which they wanted to see there and then.

The behaviour in this verse was exactly that associated with the triumphant entry of a victorious king. The much laboured account of the Lord's obtaining a donkey and her foal and thus riding into the city was really a studied parody of that whole conception of Messianic victory. For Him, the victory would be to hang lifeless upon a cross. True greatness was in humility. And instead of beaming with pride, Lk. 19:41 adds the detail that He wept over the city, knowing how they had rejected Him. According to Harry Whittaker, *Studies in the Gospels*, "The rabbis had a saying: "If Israel be worthy, Messiah comes with the clouds of heaven (Dan. 7:13); if unworthy, riding upon an ass" (Zech. 9:9)". So the entire triumphant entry was indeed a parody which sooner or later the Jews came to grasp. Hence their anger- for the whole incident declared them unworthy.

Whilst what the Lord arranged was indeed a parody of a triumphant entry, designed to highlight the importance of humility and sacrifice, He was surely conscious that He was acting out, however dimly, the prophesied future and ultimate triumphal entry of Messiah into Jerusalem and the temple, coming from the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4; Is. 62:11).

21:9 *Hosanna*- 'Save now'. This obsession with 'Salvation now' was their equivalent of today's prosperity Gospel, which is a similarly false understanding of the Lord.

Matthew records here that the people cried 'Hosanna' at Christ's entry into Jerusalem. Seeing that first century Israel spoke Aramaic, this is doubtless what did actually come out of their lips. But Luke says that the same group of people shouted "Glory" (Lk. 19:38). Luke's Gospel seems to be designed for the Greek speaking world, and so he uses the Greek equivalent of 'Hosanna', even though they did not actually say that word. The way the New Testament quotes the Old with slight changes without pointing this out is another example of how God's word mixes interpretation with direct transmission of facts (e.g. Ps. 32:1-2 cp. Rom. 4:6-7). God has inspired His word in order to interpret certain facts to us. This is further proof that we are not intended to insist on a strictly literal meaning to everything we read (for example, that the sun literally rises). This fact is not irrelevant to the issue of demons. The accounts of demons being cast out are framed in such a way as to show the supremacy of God's power over the vain traditions of the first century world.

*He that comes*- A clearly Messianic title. They accepted Jesus as Messiah, but their understanding of Messiah was so wrong. They assumed He would bring 'salvation now', and immediate freedom from the Romans and economic hardship.

*Hosanna in the highest*- Because the people wanted 'Save now' and immediate deliverance from Rome, they assumed that God shared their view. Thus they assumed that their cry of 'Salvation now!' was being uttered in Heaven too. This assumption that God is of course in tune with our wishes is very dangerous- the dashing of this expectation was what unleashed the fury and gross misjudgement in these people which lead to their very soon screaming for the death of God's Son.

The other records add that the Pharisees asked the Lord to restrain His supporters. His response was "I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out". There's a strong similarity between the Aramaic and Hebrew words for "sons" and "stones"; and the Lord's 'sons' were the disciples, His spiritual children. It was the disciples who were enthusiastic for His triumphant entry- the crowds soon lost their enthusiasm.

21:10 *When He was entered into Jerusalem*- See on :11 *The prophet of Nazareth of Galilee*.

*Was moved*- This is the word for a quake or tremor, the crowd were shocked deeply- by the idea of a humble King.

*Who is this?*- The Lord was well known in Jerusalem, His miracles and previous visits had hardly gone unnoticed. The question was rather 'What kind of person is this?'. His careful effort to obtain a donkey and colt, and ride the bucking colt in imitation of a charger and chariot... had worked. It had achieved the desired effect of stunning people by the new paradigm of humility which He was exemplifying. The "daughter of Zion" (:5) was singularly unimpressed by the coming of their King. Doubtless there was a connected element of sarcasm in Pilate's question: "Shall I crucify your King?" (Jn. 19:15). And they stated beyond question that they would rather have Caesar as their King than this humble man from Nazareth.

21:11 *The prophet of Nazareth of Galilee*- I think we can conclude that this answer was not given in proud introduction of their Messiah, but rather agreeing with the sceptical question 'What kind of person is *this*?'. For Nazareth and Galilee were despised and hardly seen as the origin of Messiah nor of any half decent prophet. "Out of Galilee arises no prophet" was the Jewish position (Jn. 7:52). It was to them an oxymoron to say that a prophet, let alone Messiah, could come from there. And Nazareth, with its Gentile connotations and a reputation for siding

with the Roman occupants, was likewise despised. Nathanael struggled with the idea that Messiah could come from Nazareth: "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (Jn. 1:46). We can feel the mockery in the recorded words of the girl in the courtyard concerning Peter: "This fellow was also with Jesus *of Nazareth*", and the subsequent comment that Peter shared the Galilean accent of Jesus (Mt. 26:71). This sceptical answer to the Jerusalem crowds was given by the "multitude" that welcomed the Lord into Jerusalem. In the hour or so which His parody of a 'triumphal entry' took, their enthusiasm turned to bitter disillusion. This was not the Messiah they had expected. And their enthusiasm turned to bitter cynicism and disappointment. This is the significance of the information that they said this "When He was entered into Jerusalem" (:10). The crowd greeted Him as their Saviour King, throwing their garments in the street before Him, but as He rode the bucking colt with the dawdling, unenthusiastic donkey before Him, their views changed over that 30 to 60 minutes. Lk. 19:41-44 adds that He burst into tears of desperation and predicted that the enemies of Israel [clearly He had the Romans in view] would soon destroy the city and temple. This was so unpatriotic, and the exact opposite of what the crowds expected from Him: "When he drew near, he saw the city and wept over it, saying: If you had known in this day, even you, the things which belong to your peace! But now they are hid from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you, when your enemies shall set up a barricade around you, and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and shall dash you to the ground, and your children within you; and they shall not leave in you one stone upon another. All this will happen because you did not perceive the time of your visitation". The Lord implies that their rejection and destruction was precisely because they turned away from perceiving His entry into the city as their "visitation". They didn't think this was the "time" because they weren't seeing immediate salvation. Or rather, they didn't wish to see it. All they could think was that this was not their man, not at all the Messiah they had expected. Their cry of 'Save now!' ['Hosanna'] produced no dramatic action on His part. He just kept on riding that awkward beast, wandering probably in a zig-zag through the streets.

21:12 *Went into the temple*- This again was a conscious parody of Judaism's Messianic hopes. Their idea was that Messiah would enter Jerusalem in triumph against their Gentile enemies, and enter the temple. This was based upon their reading of Mal. 3:1: "The Lord whom you seek shall suddenly come to His temple". But the context of Malachi 3 required a positive response by Israel to the herald of Messiah, i.e. John the Baptist. And this had not been forthcoming. And the next verse goes on to suggest that this coming of Messiah will not be of much blessing to Israel- "But who may abide the day of His coming [i.e., "to His temple"]? And who shall stand when He appears?" (Mal. 3:2).

Mark's record appears to state that the Lord first entered the temple, looked around and walked out (Mk. 11:11) and the next day returned to cleanse the temple of traders. It could be that He

cleansed the temple twice. Or it could be that this silent looking around and walking away, returning to Bethany, 'the house of the poor', was another intentional creation of an anti-climax. The Jews expected Him to do something dramatic- and He simply looked around in sadness and left for 'the house of the poor'- to return and cast out the traders and thus make the performance of sacrifice impossible there.

*Cast out-* A verb elsewhere used by the Lord about condemnation (8:12 and soon after this incident, in 21:39; 22:13; 25:30). Instead of bringing salvation to Israel's temple, He entered it and condemned the orthodox, casting them out of God's house and forbidding them to enter it to carry things through it (Mk., Lk.). Instead of them, the Lord in their place welcomed children and the handicapped into God's house. Sacred space was a major concept in Judaism; the Lord's expulsion of the Orthodox from it and replacing them with those considered unworthy of entry was a highly significant thing to do.

*Them that sold and bought-* This is the context of Zech. 9:8: "And I will encamp for the sake of thine house as a garrison that none pass through or return; and no exactor shall pass through them any more: for now I have seen with mine eyes". This would allude to the Lord's looking around the temple and walking out of it; He banned carrying things through the temple (Mk. 11:16), and all exaction of money. The Lord had not long earlier described Sodom as the place where the wrong kind of buying and selling went on, and He had likened His generation to Sodom (Lk. 17:28). This, again, was hardly what the crowds expected to hear- a likening of their most sacred place to Sodom, and a prophecy of its destruction at the hands of the Gentiles. The ban on carrying things through the temple referred to the practice of taking a short cut through the court of the Gentiles rather than having to walk all around the temple complex. The Lord was thereby proclaiming the court of the Gentiles as holy as the rest of the temple building. Note that the Lord also expelled those who were *buying* the animals for sacrifice- ordinary Jews wanting to offer sacrifice. This surely hinted at an ending of the Mosaic law in view of the Lord's upcoming sacrifice. This was all so much what the Jewish masses did *not* want to hear.

*Overthrew-* This was not done in simple anger. The Lord's motive was still their reformation. He had entered the temple in allusion to their expectation that Messiah would triumphantly enter Jerusalem and proceed into the temple. They had based that idea upon Malachi 3. But that prophecy continued: "Behold, I send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple . . . *and he shall purify the sons of Levi*" (Mal. 3:1,3). This 'cleansing' of the temple was His attempt to purify the sons of Levi. His hopefulness was simply amazing. And it is a strong pattern for we who give up so easily with people.

*The moneychangers-* These were the sons of Annas, the High Priest. This deepened the anticlimax- the Lord entered Jerusalem and the temple- and cast out the sons of the High Priest.

Instead of entering the temple in glory, fulfilling the hope of Ezekiel's vision of the temple where Messiah enters the temple from the East, instead the Lord entered the temple- and in a huge anti-climax, castigates the Jewish religious leadership, throwing them out of the temple, and being acclaimed only by those excluded from Judaism: children, the lame and blind. See on :17 *Went out of the city into Bethany.*

21:13 The Lord several times quoted an OT passage which if quoted further would have made a telling point. Thus He quoted Is. 56:7: "My house shall be called an house of prayer", leaving His hearers to continue: "...for *all* people". He recited Ps. 8:2: "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise", leaving them to complete: "...that thou mightest still [through their witness] the enemy and the avenger". For the Bible minded, these things ought to have taught them. There is reason to think, in the subsequent response of a Jewish minority after Pentecost, that at least some did make these connections. They made use of the spiritual potential they had been given.

*It is written-* The Lord quotes from Is. 56:7, but the surrounding context of the quotation is relevant to the Jewish leadership who were present and deeply critical of the Lord's actions (:15). Is. 56:10,11 condemns Israel's elders as "blind watchmen... dumb dogs... greedy dogs which can never have enough, shepherds that cannot understand, every one looking for gain". "Dogs" was understood as a reference to the Gentiles- and the Lord is saying that they are effectively Gentiles. Significantly, Is. 56:6 has spoken of "the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord... taking hold of His covenant". This is often how God works- for those who are sensitive to His word, the quotations given speak far more deeply. The potential for greater understanding is thereby given to those familiar with His word. This is one reason why I encourage perseverance in reading the Bible even if at the point of reading we feel we are not understanding much and simply building up a familiarity with the text. That familiarity can be a basis for later revelation to us.

*My house-* Just as the "feasts of the Lord" are described as "feasts of the Jews", *God's* house becomes "your house" (23:38). They had hijacked God's religion for their own ends, just as so many do today.

*Shall be called-* Luke uses the present tense, "is called". The Lord surely said both, His point being that prophecies of the future Kingdom are to be lived out by us in essence today.

*Den of thieves-* The Kingdom prophecy of Zech. 14:21 that there will no longer be a trafficker in the Lord's house was fulfilled by the Lord's casting out the traders from the temple. Many of the Kingdom prophecies of healing were it seems consciously fulfilled in the Lord's healings: Is. 35:6 LXX the stammerer healed = Mk. 7:32-35; Is. 35:3 = Mk. 2:3-12; 3:1-6; Is. 35:8,10 = Mk. 11:1 Bartimaeus following on the Jerusalem road. This doesn't mean that these passages will not have a glorious future fulfillment. But in the person of Jesus and in the record of His life we see the "Kingdom come nigh", as He Himself said it did. We can so focus on the future fulfillment that we can forget that He was the Kingdom in the midst of men; the essence of our eternal future, of the coming political Kingdom of God, was and is to seen in Him. Satan fell from Heaven during His ministry ((Lk. 10:18), as it will at the second coming (Rev. 12).

*Thieves-* This invites us to see the thieves who robbed the man in the Samaritan parable as the Jewish leadership, whose priests and Levites refused to help people after the damage they themselves had caused (Lk. 10:30). The thieves "stripped him of His clothing" just as they later did to the Lord Jesus. The Lord uses the same figure of thieves for the Jewish leadership in Jn. 10:1,8. The Lord quotes here from Jer. 7:11, which speaks of the temple being profaned by adultery and Baal worship, resulting in the Babylonian invasion. He is saying that Israel's hypocritical piety in His day was none less than Baal worship, and therefore the Gentiles would come and destroy that place.

21:14 *The blind and the lame-* Previously banned from the temple on the basis of 2 Sam. 5:8 LXX. Those rejected from the sacred space now came in to replace those whom the Lord had ejected from it. Clearly His view was that kids and cripples were to replace the pious religious Jews.

*Came to Him in the temple-* The time scale couldn't have been more than a few hours. It presumably took Him some time to eject the Jews from the temple and to stop people carrying burdens through it. The marginalized had heard that the others had been ejected- and came to Him naturally. They would've walked or looked around with glee at the sacred space previously denied to them. Quite why the temple guard didn't arrest the Lord is a significant question. They were surely there, and the Jews would've wanted them to intervene. I suggest the Lord stopped them in their tracks by supernatural power, just as He had earlier been able to walk through the midst of those seeking to kill Him (Jn. 8:59). The Lord demonstrated clearly that He could restrain the power of civil authority, guards and soldiers- if and when He wished. His submission to them in the process of arrest and crucifixion was therefore the more remarkable. It was His submission, not their power. Those same leaders and soldiers would surely have realized that He had the power to restrain them- for He had done so here in the temple, so shortly before His arrest and death. We see here an essay in how the process of His death was a result of His wilfully giving His life; it was not taken from Him, He laid it down (Jn. 10:17,18).

21:15 *When... saw-* Presumably they too had been cast out of the temple. This conversation

likely took place after the Lord had finished in the temple.

*They were sore displeased-* Their eye was evil because He was good. The welcoming of the previously marginalized into sacred space produces a similar reaction today. If such categories are allowed to break bread, some get angry to the point of white hot hatred, which in God's eyes is murder. Their eye became evil because He was good. The same Greek word for "displeased" is used regarding how the ruler of the synagogue was indignant because the Lord had healed on the Sabbath (Lk. 13:14).

21:16 *Never read-* He was speaking to the educated who could read. "Never read" would've jarred with them- they spent their lives poring over the Scriptures. But we can read and yet never really read as God intends.

*The mouth of babes-* A strange grammatical construction, the plural "babes" have a singular "mouth", so united are they in devotion to the Lord. Hence we find that the word translated "perfected" is elsewhere rendered "perfectly joined together". The quotation from Ps. 8:2 is from a Psalm often alluded to in the New Testament. It was first written as David reflected upon his victory over Goliath, an incident clearly typical of the Lord's victory on the cross. The young people rejoiced in David's victory and joined Him in triumphing over his enemies in praise to God for the victory. This indicates that the Lord considered His victory as in a sense already accomplished; He saw those youngsters' praise of Him and acceptance of their place in God's house as being effectively their praise for His victory over the Goliath of sin. The quotation also associates the angry, intellectually defeated Jewish leaders with the Philistines- another one in a series of suggestions that they are effectively Gentiles and no longer God's people (see on :13). Let's pause to give all this teaching its due weight- that legalism and exclusiveness are no better than Baal worship, and such orthodoxy is only a faithfulness to human tradition rather than to God.

21:17 *Went out of the city-* His 'going out of the city' is allusive to the language of Ezekiel, in that the glory begins within the city but progressively lifts up and goes out of it.

*Went out of the city into Bethany-* This continues the radical subversion of Jewish Messianic expectations. They had expected a glorious entry into Jerusalem by Messiah, and His entering the temple in order to fulfil the hopes of Ezekiel's temple visions- that Messiah in glory would enter the temple. Instead, the Lord enters Jerusalem on a rider-less donkey, Himself sitting awkwardly on a wayward foal, enters the temple and castigates the Jews, throwing them out of it. And now He leaves the city and goes to Bethany, "the house of the poor". Rather like a pretender to the Presidency mounting a not very serious coup attempt, and going to spend the night in a low cost housing area, perhaps in an apartment in a run down tenement block known as 'the house of the poor'. Or perhaps a night shelter would be the most dynamic equivalent. That is not to say that the home in Bethany was actually poor, my comment is on the meaning of 'Bethany'

as 'house of the poor'. The use of *eis*, "into", rather than a word carrying the sense of *unto*, serves to heighten the sense of anti-climax. He ended this parody of a triumphal entry by entering into 'the house of the poor'.

The Lord being the psychologist *extraordinaire* that He was, it could almost seem that He was engineering a situation which would turn public opinion against Him and lead to His betrayal to the Romans. And yet on the other hand, He had made all these points multiple times in His teaching, beginning in the Sermon on the Mount. He had explained as clearly as could be that His Kingdom was not at that time a political one, rather was it about service of others and internal transformation. He had so often elevated humility above anything else. But all His teaching had been skim listened to; people had taken what they wanted from Him, and decided that He was who they wanted and needed Him to be, rather than who He said He was. And so through this parody of a triumphal entry, He was visually and very publically explaining what He really stood for. And thereby very powerfully exposing their hopes as mere selfishness, their ideals as misplaced, their understandings as faulty. I wouldn't say that He did this with the express intention of bringing about His death, but rather motivated by the hope that His one last appeal might still trigger response amongst the true "daughter of Zion". His predictions of His death, however, indicate that He knew what would happen. A psychologist weighing up the situation as it stood at the triumphant entry, even if he didn't know how the story would end, would likely be able to predict accurately what would've happened. The Jews would become deeply angry with Jesus, their hopes in Him would have turned to hatred and anger, they would desire to kill Him, and being unable to legally do so, would hand Him over to the Romans to execute. Indeed, Judas had already trodden this road one step ahead of the masses.

21:18 *As He returned*- A hint that His final return in the morning of Zion's new day will require at least some fruit on the fig tree, the beginnings of repentance and spiritual fruit in Israel.

*He hungered*- Hungry in the morning, having spent the night at Mary and Martha's home? Had Martha failed in providing food for some reason? More likely the Lord had been fasting for Israel's repentance. And His hunger spoke of His desire to see even the beginnings of spiritual fruit on the fig tree of Israel. His fast was for fruit on Israel; if He had found it, He would have eaten it and thus broken His fast.

21:19 *A fig tree*- Symbolic of Israel (Jer. 24:1-8; Hos. 9:10,16; Is. 28:4 RV; 34:2,4,8; Rev. 6:13; Lk. 13:6-9; 17:6; 19:6; Mic. 7:1 RV). Israel were seen by the Lord as the tree by the roadside, whose fruit should have been for all that passed by (Dt. 23:24). But because there was not even the glimmer of this kind of giving of fruit, they were condemned by the Lord.

*Found nothing*- His disappointment was great because of His earlier parable about Himself and the fig tree, in which He had put these words in His own mouth: "Lord, let it alone this year also,

till I shall dig about it and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well; but if not, after that thou shalt cut it down". He looked over and around the tree, desperate to see at least some signs of fruit. He realized that the tree of Israel had to be cut down.

*Only leaves-* The inadequate covering for sin with which human history began in Eden.

*May no fruit grow-* If the fruit on the fig tree represents spiritual fruit, does this suggest that now the possibility of repentance was taken away from them? It was as if judgment day had really arrived for them even in this life; for there will be no possibility of repentance then. Or it could be that the Lord was annulling the prophecies about *Israel* filling the face of the earth with fruit. His emphasis then would have been on "May no fruit grow *on you*". The tree of Israel was to be cut down, and the fruit was to come from the fig tree "and all the trees" of the Gentile nations. This is the connection with the Lord's later sign of the fig tree and all the trees (Lk. 21:29); when spiritual fruit is seen on all of them, when the Gospel has gone into all the world, to all the trees / nations, then shall the end come (Mt. 24:14).

*For ever-* For the *aion*, the age. He could mean throughout the new age which was to start, for Israel are prophesied as finally blossoming and filling the face of the earth with fruit (Is. 27:6). Or it could be that that prophecy about Israel was conditional, and the Lord is accepting that their rejection of Him meant that it and other such prophecies were now disallowed from fulfilment in themselves by what they were going to do to Him.

*Withered away-* "From the roots", Mark adds. This meant the ground was cursed- the land of Israel. And the roots may refer to the ending of the Mosaic law. "Ephraim ['fruitful'] is smitten, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit... My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him: and they shall be wanderers among the nations" (Hos. 9:10,16,17).

21:20 *They marvelled-* Their amazement is presented in Mk. 11:21,22 as a lack of faith, calling forth from the Lord the rebuke: "Have faith in God". After all the miracles they had seen, it's pathetic that they doubted as to the Lord's ability to dry up a fig tree. Yet again, the initial Gospel writers and preachers draw attention to their own weakness of faith. Seeing that the fig tree was such a well known symbol of Israel (see on :19), the disciples may have perceived the incident as an acted parable. Their comment "How soon is the fig tree withered" (Mk.) could be seen as a criticism of how quickly the Lord had withered it. But this would in turn indicate that they had totally failed to understand His earlier teaching of how He had asked the Father for more time for Israel than He had intended to give it, and had personally done the servile work of digging and dunging it in the hope that fruit would come. Their struggle to believe what the Lord had done reflected the wider struggle they and we have to accept that humility, the humble entry rather than the triumphal one, is the way of God. They struggled to believe that the entire system of

formal religious worship was being done away and replaced by kids and cripples, literally and spiritually, in the sacred space. The Lord's subsequent exhortations to faith must be seen in this context- the faith to believe this. I recall a brother once at the heart of a community of believers being disfellowshipped over a false accusation. I urged him to break bread alone. He told me that he didn't have the faith... to sit and break bread alone, with no hymns, no president, no surrounding church. We sat in a fast food joint in a London suburb and I had to lead him in the breaking of bread service- he was so used to standing there on Sunday mornings, either presiding or giving the lesson... He has often recalled that there in McDonalds, he found his faith. Faith in God and Jesus, and not in any organization or human church.

*How soon-* The Lord had said that it would happen immediately (:19). According to the other records, the disciples made this comment the next day. They somehow doubted the Lord could work with such immediate effect. And this strange lack of faith was surely because they perceived that the fig tree represented Israel and all they had once held dear in their culture. The disciples asked how the fig tree [cp. Israel] withered away so quickly. The answer, of course, was in that Jesus had faith that it would. He goes on to tell them that if *they* had faith, the mountain of Zion, the hope of Israel, would be cast into the sea of nations (:20,21). The Lord Jesus is surely saying that *His* faith should not be seen as separate from *our* faith. According to the faith of the disciples, the Hope of Israel, rejected by the withered fig tree of Israel, could be spread to the Gentiles. But the spread of the Gospel world-wide was and is conditional upon our faith, modelled as it must be upon His example.

21:21 *If you have faith-* See on :20. The faith in view was faith in the Lord's new way of doing things, a religion of kids and cripples outside of organized religion.

*And doubt not-* The 'faith' was faith in the passing of the Jewish system. "Doubt not" translates *diakrino* which can better be translated to make a difference, to discriminate. It was as if the Lord was saying: 'I know you believe. But to believe in *this* will be hard. Don't make a difference, believing in some things and not others. Believe in this too'.

*You shall not only do this-* They too were to play a part in the withering of the fig tree- by preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles.

*This mountain-* There is a clear semantic connection between the cursing of the fig tree and the moving of the mountain into the sea. The mountain in view was the temple mount. The Lord is comforting them that not only would the tree of Israel be withered, but the whole mount Zion, the most sacred space in Judaism, would be cast to the Gentiles [the "sea"]. This kind of thing was what His parody of a triumphal entry had been all about, and His casting out of the religious Jews from the temple and replacing them with kids and cripples, those formerly excluded from

the sacred space. The faith to move the temple mount to the Gentiles was the very faith which Peter was later required to have in preaching to the Gentiles represented by Cornelius. The Lord recognized that this paradigm shift was a matter of faith, and He urged the disciples to realize their psychological problem and accept it needed special help from God to get over. This incident obviously had huge relevance for the first century communities of believers who were baptized as a result of Matthew's Gospel; for acceptance of the end of the Jewish system and the acceptance of the Gentiles was the live issue for the early churches. Mk. 11:25 adds: "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses". The motivation in accepting others into fellowship, in accepting the casting of the sacred space of Mount Zion to the Gentiles, was to be from realizing their own urgent need for forgiveness and their moral frailty. Those faced with similar struggles about accepting others, or allowing previously rejected categories into Christian fellowship, need to take this advice.

*Removed-* To be removed and cast into the sea was a word picture of condemnation. And yet *airo*, to remove or take away, surely reflects the Hebraism of 'taking away' with reference to taking away sin (s.w. Jn. 1:29; 1 Jn. 3:5 "takes away the sin of the [Jewish] world"). This was a phrase with two possible meanings. The disciples could achieve this in that their preaching would give mount Zion both the possibility of sin being taken away [if they responded] and of condemnation, being cast into the sea like Gentile Babylon [if they rejected their message]. The same words and ideas are found in Rev. 18:21, where Babylon is 'taken up' [s.w. "removed"] and cast into the sea. However, the Lord soon uses the same word in telling the Jews that the Kingdom was to be "taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits [of the Kingdom]" (:43). This reference to fruit connects with the Lord's teaching about the fig tree which was cursed for not bearing fruit. The rejected servant was likewise to be 'taken away' in condemnation (22:13), just as the flood "took them all away" (24:39), the talent was 'taken away' from the rejected (25:28,29). Significantly, the Lord had used this same word for 'remove' or 'take away' in the first cleansing of the temple, when He commanded the traders to "Take these things away" (Jn. 2:16); and likewise it is used about the 'taking away' of the branches of the tree of Israel (Jn. 15:2). The Lord is telling the disciples that they too will be able to make such a removing of the unclean from the system of Judaism, and likewise cause the withering of Israel's tree. In fact it was the Romans who "took away our place and nation" (Jn. 11:48 s.w.) but this was on account of Israel's rejection of the disciples' preaching. In that sense, therefore, it was they who had caused the temple Mount to be taken away and cast into the sea of Gentiles. This too is the power of our preaching. We are not merely discharging a responsibility to evangelize so that we feel better, let alone doing a PR exercise for our local church or denomination. Our presentation of the message to others has eternal consequence for them- to their salvation or condemnation. Significantly, the same word is used for how on the cross, the Lord 'took away' the Mosaic Law (Col. 2:14).

*Cast into the sea*- The very words used by the Lord in describing the fate of the Jews who made the little ones stumble (Mk. 9:42). The little ones had been brought into the temple to replace the Jewish religious leaders. Those leaders had previously refused to accept those little ones. Their judgment was to be cast into the sea as Babylon (Rev. 18:21 same words). But this would only happen once the disciples had preached to them after the resurrection- they were given chance after chance, despite the Lord's cursing of the fig tree with immediate effect.

Mt. 21:21 = Rom. 4:20. Paul saw Abraham as being like the man in the parable who had the faith to throw mountains into the sea.

21:22 *All things*- This evidently has some context and limitations, because there is no reason to think that we literally receive whatever we ask. Even the Lord didn't. The context is the ability to change, the ability to accept paradigm shifts, to have the courage to preach; the mindset which can cope with a previous worldview coming to an end. This is exactly why people are so unwilling to change cherished beliefs and practices- because their conservatism is more powerful in their own minds than God's word. We need to accept we have this problem, and rejoice that whatever we ask for in this psychological and at times practical battle will indeed be granted to us.