

Jesus Moves Mountains

Matthew 21:12-22

Dr. Dan Doriani

March 24, 2024

Our children may go to those who care for them in the present and in the future. And the rest of you may have a seat and we will continue to read through the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 21 while you're settling in. If you like to know what's coming, we're going to look today at Jesus as he manifests himself as Prophet, Priest and King when he enters the city. They call him the Son of David. That's King. And when they ask who he is, they say he's a Prophet, but he's also a Priest because he's caring for the work of worship in the temple precincts. He is a gentle King. We see that first. We see he is a Priest protecting God's house. And he is a Prophet who gives us symbols about his power to move mountains. That's the last thing we'll see.

So if you would continue the reading with me - Matthew 21: 12 – 22. And may I just say I'm glad to read the Bible to you. It's a great privilege. I see your smiling, anticipating faces. It's just a joy to me to be with you. This is God's Word.

¹² And Jesus entered the temple^(a) and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. ¹³ He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."

¹⁴ And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. ¹⁵ But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant, ¹⁶ and they said to him, "Do you hear what these 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?"*

¹⁸ In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he became hungry. ¹⁹ And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he went to it and found nothing on it but only leaves. And he said to it, "May no fruit ever come from you again!" And the fig tree withered at once.

²⁰ When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, "How did the fig tree wither at once?" ²¹ And Jesus answered them, "Truly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this

mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' it will happen. ²² And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith."

Amen. May God bless the reading of his word to us.

So Jesus entered Jerusalem on a day probably a lot like today, a spring day, beautiful day, most likely around this time of the year. The Passover season is right around our Easter season. People came from miles around. In fact, they came from all over the Roman Empire, some of them hundreds of miles on boats for weeks to come and celebrate in the temple the Passover day. People also came from the north and came streaming up from Jericho. And this could be in the tens, even hundreds of thousands of people that would make that journey in that one day. And word passed. Jesus is among us. In fact, he had healed two blind men as he was walking out of Jericho, 17 miles to Jerusalem. And so people began to celebrate spontaneously, and they said, Hosanna blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord? And they got a donkey, and they had him enter into Jerusalem on a donkey to fulfill a prophecy in Zachariah 9. Now, I don't know if you noticed this when you read it together, but there about six verses about riding on a donkey, which is, you know, definitely a lot of verses about riding on a donkey. And so we're supposed to draw a conclusion from it and we draw conclusions about people based on their transportation. Would you agree with me? You can tell a lot about somebody by their transportation? Would you play along with me now? Number 1, What would you say if someone drives up in a 24 year old Toyota Corolla that has multiple colors and a trunk that's kind of dinged up and it doesn't sit right? Who is it who just pulled up in their car? Most likely it is a student. Very good. Number 2, somebody pulls up in a car that has multiple car seats, melted crayons on the dashboard, semi decapitated action figures on one side, dolls with missing hair on the other side, we conclude that the woman who drove up is a??? Mother. Right – Number 3, a 57 year old man with black and white hair leaps out of a very low slung orange car with black trim we decide he is having a midlife crisis. You're very good at this.

Now, if we know these things, I have to tell you that people understood what it meant when Jesus came on a donkey. Because if you're coming as a conqueror you come on a war horse - on a stallion - after you've crushed your adversaries, but if you ride up on a donkey -- let's just put it this way. Have you ever seen anyone raining down blows upon their adversaries from a donkey? You have not. They're unreliable and recalcitrant and not very mighty steeds. So, when Jesus comes on a donkey, he is saying, I'm not coming with a sword. I'm not coming in violence. And particularly picking up on what Zacharias says - Jesus is a king of peace, a humble king of peace. Here's what Zachariah 9:8-9 says.

Then I will encamp at my house as a guard,
so that none shall march to and fro;
no oppressor shall again march over them,
for now I see with my own eyes.

⁹ Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;
righteous and having salvation is he,
humble and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

So Jesus comes as a King of peace into the city as the prophet Zacheriah foretold -- other people, many people knew the prophecies of a coming Messiah. And so they began to do what was anticipated, and that is they began to spread their cloaks on the ground, giving them the royal treatment. The royal animal not even touch the dust, and they put palm branches which are a symbol or a sign of Israel, and they said, Hosanna to the son of David, the King who comes in the name of the Lord. It was very exciting that everybody knew what was going on. Some people asked, Who is this? What's going on? And the crowds answered, this is Jesus the Prophet from Nazareth in Galilee. That's not a false statement. It's not enough. He's more than a Prophet. He's also a King. And we'll see that he's also a Priest.

Now, in his priestly role, he looks at the temple and he looked around the temple that day and came back the next day to visit or inspect or to judge it. We call it the cleansing, the temple, but really it's the judgment of the temple. We read in 21:12 that Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who are buying and selling the tables of the moneychangers and those who were selling pigeons, which would be the cheapest sacrifice for people who were poor. Now, we're a little bit surprised here because Jesus, we're familiar with him showing his power and his strength and his energy emotions always in positive ways. And we think, what is Jesus doing? Why is he doing this? The problem is not commerce. There's nothing wrong with commerce. We're all pro-business. The problem is not commerce. It's not money changing. It's not selling animals. People traveled, as I said, hundreds of miles. They're not going to carry goats with them for hundreds of miles on boats. No goats on boats! And they're not going to have the right currency so they have money changers. You know, when you go to other countries, you need it. The problem is not the commercial activity. The problem is that in recent years, the commercial activity had been moved right into the temple precincts. Now, if you know your Bible pictures and Bible lessons and I know some of you do, the temple is a pretty big area and there were colonnades on the outside where anybody could gather and teach and have conversations about spiritual things. Teachers were there and then there was the court of the Gentiles next, and the court of women, the court of men, a place for priests and then the holy of holies. You've seen the pictures. The commerce at this point was in the court of the Gentiles.

So that if a Gentile from all the world wanted to come according to God's purpose, to call the nations to himself, you couldn't do it. And so Jesus says, You have taken my house, which is a house of prayer for the nations - that's prophecy from Isaiah - and turned it into a house of or a den of robbers. You've made it impossible for them to worship.

Let me just make sure you understand what's going on here. Imagine for a minute the last eight rows of the lower level here were set aside for a couple of things. They were set aside for tall people because everybody hates trying to look over tall people. So all people over 6-1/2" have to sit in the last eight rows. Furthermore, all people with a child want to have the child in a worship service. A child under the age of four also has to sit in that area. But furthermore, that's also the place where you can buy and sell coffee, hot chocolate, hot cider, jujubes and popcorn, whatever your heart desires because you know it was out in the fourth year, but people just found it too inconvenient. They petitioned the elders. The elders said, Sure, go ahead, bring the popcorn in the last eight rows. Now, if you were tall or had a child, you would say, These people don't care about me. There's no place for tall people in this church or people who want to have their child with them. And so Jesus says, this is wrong. He cleanses us or judges the temple as the priest, but also with his kingly authority overseeing the temple. And furthermore, he casts out these commercial artists. He welcomes the blind and the lame, the people who were by the eyes of the day, the least beautiful, the least favored, the least blessed by God. He says, You, I want you to come to me. I want room to be there for you so I can care for you there. The blind and the lame came to him because Isaiah says this -- He says the Lord speaks to those who are weak and those who are needy and says, the Lord will excuse exclude me. They say to themselves, The Lord will exclude me from his people. And Isaiah answers, If anyone will hold fast to my covenant, I will give them an everlasting name. I will give them joy in my house, my house of prayer, because my house will be called a house of prayer for the nations, for all the people, all the nations and also even for the people within Israel who might feel they are excluded because many people thought they're blind, they're lame God obviously doesn't favor them. This is a house for the world. Now, I know that in America we have this tradition, and I'm not criticizing. I'm just describing it, that we're a Christian nation and we debate to what extent we're Christian nation, to what extent we're not. But we have an idea that, you know, Christianity is for us and it is. But please remember that, you know, unless you're Jewish, you're the nations that Isaiah was talking about. And furthermore, if you're from Asia, you're also the nations that God was talking about. If you're from South America, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, you're also the nations that God was talking about. If you're from Africa, if you're from Indonesia, these are all the nations. The gospel is for the nations. Jesus cleans out the temple so the people can receive the blessing that the Lord has for the nations. Israel forgot this.

There's so many things that people do that that seem right at the moment. It seem right to just kind of press the Gentiles out because, you know, there aren't all that many coming. They're not really the people of God. It's okay if we push them away. There's so many things we do that are that seem right at the time, but they're misguided. Can I give you a kind of an odd example that the people the first service didn't hear this, so you can feel better than the people at the first service. It goes like this -- in the Roman Catholic Church, a tradition arose. And if you're a Catholic, I'm very glad you're here. I'm talking about 500 years ago, a tradition arose that said, if you pay money to a certain priest -- by paying the right amount of money, you can get your relatives out of purgatory. Just pay the money. That's a pretty good deal because purgatory is a

place of punishment for sins. You think to yourself, Well, how did that happen? Well, it happened this way. People said, you know, if you're sorry for your sins, you should show it. You should prove to God that you're really sorry by doing something exciting and big like go on a pilgrimage and that'll demonstrate your sorry, then God will certainly forgive your sins. And then somebody said, Well, I really want to go on a pilgrimage, but my knee is hurting me and my hip is hurting me. How about if I hire a young man to go for me? And they said, Well, that's awesome. That's good, because the young man could use the money and you can't go. You can pay young man to go for you. And then they said, Well, what's really so great about a young man? I mean, this is the whole idea that he's going to be praying for my dead relative as he goes. Yes, it is. So. So why don't you just give money to a priest to pray for your dead relative and it's a good idea. We'll get the priest to pray for the dead relative. And then they said, Well, why don't you give the money to the priest? And so then eventually, through one tiny step after another, you come to this terrible idea. You can pay money to get people out of purgatory. And that's what was happening in Israel. And I'm just going to say, you know, that's what a lot of people do in life. They have they get a bad idea in their head and then they just keep on extrapolating from it. And then one day you say, wake up, where have I been? What have I done? The people of Israel were excluding the Gentiles from the temple, and they thought it was a great idea. And Jesus says it's a terrible idea. I don't know why you're doing it, but my house is a house of prayer, worship, knowledge study for the nations, make it so.

Now part of what was happening with them was they were becoming a little bit nationalistic. That is to say they thought God was for them and their nation, their people, their land to a degree that was false. In fact, Jeremiah spoke to them about this in Jeremiah 7. He said, you know, you rob and you steal and you follow idols and you say, the temple, the Lord, the temple, the Lord, the temple, the Lord, because we have the temple Lord and we go to the temple, we're fine. And Jeremiah says, you are not fine just because you go to the temple any more than anybody's fine because they go to church regularly. I want you to come to church. Don't misunderstand. Come to church. But please do not think that you are right with God because you show up at church and you're You should be baptized, your children should be baptized. But please don't think that baptism is magic to get your right with God. The people of Israel said Going to the temple is magic. God could never judge me if I go to his temple because it's his holy place. And God says, I most definitely can test you and judge you if you sin and think that you can hold on to the temple and think you're fine. Not just make a little quick distinction here. It's good to be patriotic. It's good to give thanks for the country God put you in. And if you're in America, you probably feel that our country has various problems, which it does, and you pray that our country turns around. But probably most of you are fundamentally grateful to be born and to live in America. And that's a good thing. You should pray for a nation, care about your nation. And I would say the same thing if I were in Austria or Switzerland or Norway or Niger or Australia. It's good. It's good to love your nation, but it can become and "ism." It can become a nationalism which says that my supreme loyalty is to my land, my blood, my Norwegian blood, my Indonesian blood, my Brazilian blood, my supreme loyalty is to my Germanic people. And I

put everything else in a second rank or third rank. Now, we probably know that, but it's also true that we have our own ways of excluding people.

So, I had an odd conversation with a young man this week about fingernail polish. He works with teenagers. And he kind of looked at me and he said, you know, some people in their sixties, I think he was thinking to me, some people in their sixties get all bent out of shape when teenagers wear black nail polish. And I thought, well, I think I do get bent out of shape when teenagers wear black nail polish a little bit. And now that he says it, maybe I shouldn't, he says and you know, sometimes boys will put black fingernail polish on and that really upsets people. And they're just doing it. And we need to accept it. We need to accept them. We need to love them. And I thought, well, that's probably a good point. Let me ask you a question. Who here would be glad to have teenage boys coming to church next week wearing black fingernail polish? You're not sure you like me anymore, are you? We should be thrilled if people wearing black fingernail polish -- at the age of seventy we might not like it -- but we should be thrilled. They're here, right? Because this is a house of prayer for the nations, too. And it's a place where all people should be welcome if they have bad hair, bad teeth, bad cars, bad tattoos, which is one of my favorite prejudice points, watching the NCAA teams, I think it's one thing to have a tattoo. It's another thing to have a bad tattoo. Can you at least have a good tattoo that says something meaningful and has clear art instead of just smudges all over your arms? These are my prejudices. I invite you to find your own prejudices, to find out why you might possibly participate against your better instincts, against your better faith in excluding people. It's a house of Prayer for the Nation. This is God's house -- we should welcome everybody.

The danger, of course, is we get attached to the wrong things in the wrong way. We get attached to propriety and clothing in our nation and things of that nature. And if I may say, I'll just give one about my own city. I come from Saint Louis, and unlike places like Birmingham, which offer choice -- you can either love the Crimson Tide or the Auburn Tigers, you can choose. In Saint Louis you have to love the Cardinals baseball team (in case you don't know they are a baseball team) and if you don't love them, you have to pretend that you love them. That's required if you want to be acceptable in Saint Louis. And some years ago, they had a fantastic player playing for them, one of the greatest hitters of all time. His name is Albert Pujols. If you're a baseball fan at any level, you've heard of him. And he was up to bat in the playoffs one round from the World Series against another team and the Cardinals are down 3 to 2 with two outs and two on two strikes in the ninth inning. One more strike one, we're out and it's over and he was batting against the best major league reliever at the time and he swung and hit about a 475 foot home run and won the game. And the next day, everybody in Saint Louis was crowing. And some people said, I actually heard somebody say these words. I'm going to quote it to you because I wrote it down. *Now the world will see the greatness of the Saint Louis Cardinals and the greatness of Saint Louis. Now, the world will know how great we are.* Unfortunately, the Cardinals lost 12 hours later and were eliminated from the playoffs. They did win the World Series the next year, but that's not our topic.

People put their faith in the wrong things. They put their faith in the nation. They put their faith in social propriety. They put their faith in politicians and sports heroes and entertainers and all the rest. They put their faith in science and their career and their degrees and their hard work and their connections and all the rest. Can I tell you the common theme? The common theme is strength.

People love Albert Pujols because he hit 600 home runs. That's a lot of home runs, in case you don't know. And they love politicians who get elected, then they don't love politicians who don't get elected, and they love entertainers who have millions of followers. And they love scientists who get good results. Everybody loves strength.

Jesus says, I love the blind and the lame. That's who I welcome into the temple. And I receive the nations who think what interest is God have in me? And the answer is God has interest in youth. Let me just tell you all of us something real quick. In case you didn't know you were born in sin and you have a propensity to sin and to rebel against God and God loves you despite that - that's the whole point of Easter week. The God receive sinners, the blind, the crippled, the lame, the outsider, and all the rest. That's what Jesus was presenting when he judges, cleanses the temple as the priest. Now, the priests, the high priests say, Hey, Jesus, by what authority are you doing this? Who gave you the right to do this? That question, who gave you the right is the wrong question. The question is what is right now? Who give you the right to do it? But why did you do it? That's what they should have asked. But when people are stuck on themselves, they start talking about procedures. You violated my procedure. That's what they're saying. Instead of asking, why did you judge the temple? That's what people do when they're wrong. Often they ask about procedures instead of right and wrong. And Jesus says, I have cleansed the temple -- He doesn't say these words, but it's the idea of the whole week -- because it needs to be done. And because I am not afraid of your authority. I'm resolute and fearless. I know that you have the authority to put me to death. And he knew that they would put him to death. But Jesus did not fall away because of a little pressure. He was willing to go to the cross. He knew he had to go to the cross. They also question him. They say to him, Do you hear what the children are saying? Do you hear the children praising you? They're implying, you know, they're not doing it right. It's too much. They're false words, they're too much praise, whatever it is. I don't know about you if you've hung around children who are believers, they often get their theology a little bit garbled. You know, if you ask a three year old what God is like to get some things right and some things wrong, you know what I mean? I mean, they can be put up on heresy trials if they were preaching age of four, they're going to make mistakes. But God says, Jesus says the lips of babies, you Lord have ordained praise.

I'm going to read you a little story that an eight year old wrote. This is actually word for word what an eight year old wrote in answer to the question, Who is Jesus? It's a little bit sentimental, so you may not like it all that much, but it's what a kid wrote. So here it is.

Who is Jesus? Jesus, his God's son. He did all the hard work, like walking on water and performing miracles and teaching people about God. They finally got tired of him preaching

and they crucified him. But he was good and kind like his father. And he told his father they didn't know what they were doing and to forgive them. And he did. If you don't believe in God besides being an atheist, you'll be very lonely because it is good to know that Jesus is around when you're scared in the dark or when you can't swim and you get thrown into deep water by the big kids.

That's the end of what he wrote. It's pretty good. It's an eight year old saying, I'm really glad God is with me. An eight year old can praise God sometimes better than adults can.

Well, Jesus kind of temple. And then he left and he spent a day outside of Jerusalem in a place called Bethpage and came back the next morning. He was hungry. He saw a fig tree, a fig tree in full leaf, which would mean at that time, not that it would have full fruit. Fig trees don't bear full figs at that time yet -- Mark points that explicitly, but there would be little semi edible fruits kind of, you know, enough to take care of your hunger a little bit like maybe, you know like maybe a couple of almonds or something like that. Not a full meal. And he looks at the tree, which looks perfect and there's no fruit there at all. It's only leaves. And he curses the tree and it withers at once.

Now, this is a symbolic, prophetic act because prophets did things like this in Israel. They would do things like chop all their hair off and burn it up and then explain what it meant. And they would do things like Jeremiah one time took a pot. He grabbed it all the leaders of Israel and he took a pot and a smash it. And he said, So Israel will be smashed if you don't repent. Prophets did these big, bold, symbolic things. Why would Jesus curse a fig tree? Answer Because the fig tree is a symbol of Israel in the Old Testament. And just as the temple has all these magnificent songs and sacrifices, the building itself was beautiful. Considered one of the most magnificent buildings of the world at the time. It was all beautiful on the outside, all the rituals are correct, but inside there was no fruit. It was a fruitless temple. And so Jesus is judging the temple to warn Israel that judgment is coming. It comes, you know, the fig tree, for example. Micah says it this way in chapter seven. God says through Micah, what misery is mine. I'm like one who gathers summer fruit at the gleaning of the vineyard. There are no grapes to eat and no early figs. So God judges Israel symbolically, especially the leaders who are intent on killing their King. They need to know judgment is coming unless they repent. There's hypocrisy in the temple. Hypocrisy is a serious problem, and it's certainly serious to have religious hypocrisy.

A while ago, somebody told me about a pastor who got into the habit of cursing in private, sometimes happens not much once in a while, and he kept it clean, you know, separate life, a curse in my office, my home, curse of my friends. I keep it clean out in public when I'm out and about. And then one day after he gave the benediction, somehow or other he tripped as he went down the stairs and went headlong. And as he fell to the ground with the microphone still on, he did not say Sugar plum fairies and fiddlesticks. He said other things. And his hypocrisy was revealed that he lived a double life with his tongue.

Now, not all inconsistency is hypocrisy. You know, there are dieticians who say you shouldn't eat cookies and they eat cookies because cookies are delicious and it's hard to resist and so forth. Inconsistency is not the same thing as hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is deliberately, in a sustained way, living a double life -- inconsistency actually is a very human thing, and there's a sense in which inconsistency can do a person good.

The truth of the matter is I'm partly urging you to invite your unbelieving friends to church over the next week or weeks, because even in atheist, there's a yearning for God. Sometimes I don't believe in God, they say. But I wish I could believe in God. You've probably all heard that from somebody. Benjamin Franklin was not a Christian -- very publicly not a Christian -- but he had loved and admired a man named George Whitfield is possibly the greatest evangelist the world's ever known, certainly the greatest evangelist that ever lived in America. And Franklin loved him. And every time Whitfield would come through Philadelphia to preach, which he did from time to time, Benjamin Franklin would run to hear him. And one day Franklin was hurrying to hear Whitfield and a friend of his said, Hey, where are you going, Ben, so fast? So I got to go hear George Whitfield. And his friend said, Why would you want to hear George Whitfield? You don't you don't believe a word he says. And Franklin replied, Yeah, but **he** does. That is, there's something that attracts me to a man with real faith. By the way, Franklin became a Christian, but there were other people like him, like the governor of Massachusetts, who had a very similar attitude and completely disbelieved but loved Whitfield and few years later became a Christian. And consistency can be a good thing, especially if you're an atheist. So talk to your inconsistent friends.

The disciples didn't quite get what Jesus was up to. The fig tree withered and they said, How did the fig tree wither so quickly? The question they should have asked was Why did it wither? Why did you do that? But they instead asked, How did you do that? Because you know, it could be useful to blast things from time to time. It could be, you know, kind of like the emperor and Star Wars zapping things from time to time. Jesus took their bad question and made it useful. He said to them, If you have faith and do not doubt, you can say to this mountain, Go throw yourself into the sea. Now that little phrase *say to this mountain for yourself in the sea* is misquoted. What people say is faith can move mountains. It's not what Jesus said. Jesus said, Say to this mountain, be cast into the sea. It will happen if you believe. *This mountain*, the phrase it appears three or four times in New Testament. Every time it appears, it refers to a particular mountain, i.e. in John it refers to Mt. Gerizim at the Transfiguration. It refers to the mount of the Transfiguration. Here, beyond doubt, it refers to the Mount of Zion, the Temple Mount. And what he's saying is - what I was doing was describing symbolically that there is judgment on this Temple Mount. And if you believe you can move this mountain, this mountain of unbelief, this mountain of hypocrisy, this mountain of religiosity, substance and friends, that's what's happened over the last 2000 years. Within a few years, an enormous number of Israelites are Jews became Christians. And then the faith has gone throughout the world. This church supports that. We're a missional church. And you need to know that the gospel is in North America and South America. You know, there's more evangelical Presbyterians in Brazil

than there are in America. That's not even close. And also in Chile, lots of them and tens of millions of Christians in India and probably over 100 million Christians in China and about 40 million Christians in Indonesia, which we think of as a Muslim country. And it mostly is, but there's many Christians there. The gospel is going out and the mountain that moves unbelief is faith --going out and presenting Christ believing in Christ and then presenting Christ to others. Believe and ask in prayer and it'll be done.

What's the core? To know who Jesus is. He's the King. He comes gently on a donkey into Jerusalem, not smiting – but peacefully. He cleanses the temple because he cares about the Temple. He wants to use the Temple correctly. He is the great high Priest who's going to offer the perfect sacrifice. He's more than a Prophet, but he is a Prophet, and he gives the symbols and teachings to bring us to himself so we will know him. And I hope you do. And if you don't, I'm happy you're here -- please talk to somebody. We want to know him and trust him and believe in him as Prophet, Priest, King, Redeemer and Risen Lord

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for marvelous events of this coming week. I thank you for Jesus, your surpassing wisdom and the way you know the word and know how to apply it. The way you upset flawed foolish expectations, the way you're so fearlessly and willingly died. Heavenly Father, thank you for raising Him from the dead because death cannot hold him and did not hold him. And our resurrection is in you -- Lord give us faith. Give us rich faith, true faith and strong faith in you, our Lord, our Prophet, our Priest, our King, our Redeemer.

We pray in Jesus name, Amen.