

Good morning, its good to see you
we're continuing our series in the book of Matthew –
And today we come to the very familiar Palm Sunday passage about Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem
And the somewhat more troubling passage about Jesus' provocative behaviour as he stages a one man "Action Direct" protest in the temple.

And I'd like us to think about three things this morning,
I'd like us to see the **character** of Jesus displayed in the triumphal entry,
the **power** of Jesus as he overturns the order of the temple; and
finally how that power reproduces his character in us today.

So those three ideas:

The character of Jesus; the power of Jesus; and how that power produces his character in us today.

and it would help me if you were able to follow me in Matthew chapter 21 of your bibles.

So let's begin by looking at this familiar passage which shows

1. The character of Jesus in his triumphal entry

When Jesus rides into Jerusalem,

He is hailed as King,

people lay down their cloaks in front of him, and

they call out in joy ancient words

"Hosanna to the Son of David, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord"

And it is clear that they see Jesus as someone to be honoured.

And of course –

throughout the ancient world this is how you would expect a King to be honoured

This is what kings did!

They would ride into cities and have the crowds cheer over them.

So in one sense there is nothing strange here –

nothing untoward... nothing out of place expect... one thing

If this were "CSI" I'd want to ask you

"what is wrong with this picture?"

"what is wrong with this scene?"

"what doesn't fit here?"

Because Jesus is deliberately doing something that jars...

And if you've been around church for any time,

you already know the answer,

The answer is, that he isn't riding in on a big warhorse, or in a splendid gold-leafed chariot, or even in a stretch camel...

He is riding on a donkey.

Here is this great King,

This long awaited Messiah

This man with proven miraculous powers

This Saviour of the World (no less)

and he is riding in on a mount that is more appropriate *for a child* or that

absurd servant Sancho Panza in Don Quixote

This doesn't fit.

Jesus is deliberately juxtaposing majesty and meekness,
power and weakness, honour and humility in this same scene.

one of the reasons of course, is because Zechariah said (500 years earlier) in
Zechariah chapter 9

“see your king comes to you gentle and riding on a donkey.

The colt foal of a donkey”.

So there is prophecy being fulfilled here.

But there is more going on as well...

Do you remember in Revelation chapter 5 when John has this vision of heaven and
he is looking for someone worthy to open the scroll?

Do you remember one of the Elders saying

*Do not weep! For look The **Lion** of the tribe of Judah who has **triumphed** and he
can open the book?*

And do you remember what John saw?

He says “I looked and behold, in the midst of the throne (in the midst of this
glorious heavenly throne) stood a lamb (in the midst of all this power and honour)
stood a lamb – and the lamb looked as if it had been slain (as if it had been
defeated, killed, crushed!)

Do see that?

This is the character of God!

John looks for a Lion and he sees a Lamb.

He looks for glory and he see humility

He looks for triumph (in the centre of the universes power) and he sees

God as a slaughtered lamb...

A lion excels in strength and in the majesty and in nobility

A lamb excels in meekness, humility and is something sacrificed for human needs
like clothing and food.

Jesus Christ is both!

He is both Lion and Lamb.

No-**where** else, IN no-**one** else do we see these two characteristics coming
together so perfectly

Pure holiness with total accessibility

Complete Authority and absolute Humility

Incredible Glory and tender Grace.

Unbelievable Majesty and quiet Meekness.

Perfect sovereignty, perfect submission.

Jesus is Lion **and** Lamb.

He is Immovable Rock **and** exquisite Pearl

He is the majestic tree of life (capable of holding the whole world) and he is a
fragile rose (easily crushed)

In Jesus is combined such character traits that can never be encountered in any other person.

In him we find beauty, majesty, nobility, glory and also someone who will listen, who will be a friend to all, who will what to serve you and it is immensely attractive.

This is the sort of friend / this is the sort of character that every human being longs to know

Jesus is noble and honourable and yet accessible and kind
He is confident but never arrogant
He is humble but not a coward.
He is God yet he is also our companion.
His glory will stretch our minds – his friendship will touch our hearts;

And when we meet God like this our life changes

We encounter in Jesus a character that can changes our lives

We see this in his triumphal entry.

But we also

2. see his Power in the overturning of the temple

In v12 we read that “*Jesus entered the temple area*”.

The Temple was enormous, and the first area you’d encounter was called the courts of the Gentiles.

This was as far as any non-Jew could go.

This was as close as they could get to the presence of God.

The Court of the Gentiles was a bit like our lobby – except that it was huge. It was massive.

And this was where all the business operations of the temple took place - *and oh my goodness, what an operation !*

Because thousands of people congregated here
thousands of people buying and selling thousands of animals at hundreds of locations.

Thousands of people exchanging tens of thousands of denarii at hundreds of foreign currency exchanges.

*The historian Josephus tells us that in one Passover week,
250,000 lambs would have been bought and sold and sacrificed –
250,000 lambs alone in one week!*

This was a massive operation!

I used to work in the city and

I know the frenzy of the Stock Exchange and that had nothing on this!

And **this** was the place where the Gentiles were supposed to find God!

This was the place where they were supposed to pray and worship.

What a scandal!

So Jesus starts to throw the furniture about and to tip the tables up on end and to drive out the sacrifices.

Now this is not Jesus losing his rag!
He IS angry – but he is not out of control
He Is angry but he is making two points:

Firstly, He is reaffirming something that the Jews had completely forgotten.

He is saying

Don't you know that the promises of God to the Jews are for the blessing of the Nations.

God's promise to Abraham back in GENESIS 12v3 was that all nations will be blessed through him.

In other words, God blessed the Jews so that they might be a blessing to others.

God didn't bless them, or choose them, or make them special so that they might say

“look at us aren't we special”

“look at us aren't we great!”

“look at us aren't we blessed”

No, God blessed them, because it was and ALWAYS has been his intention that they point to, serve and bless the nations.

And here they are, extorting money, running a racket that fleeces the Nations (so to speak) rather than bless them.

It is ironic, they expected the Messiah to cleanse the Temple of the Gentiles!

And what shocked them was that he was affirming their place.

For the nationalist Jews this is shocking!

And here is how it applies.

God wants you, he has always wanted you.

He wants **you** to know him, to encounter him, to meet him

and if he has to turn over a few things in your life that are getting in the way – he is absolutely up for it!

Any idols, any distractions, any money making operations...

The gospel is for you and it always has been

and he will turn your life upside down if he needs to, to get you find him.

That's the first thing he is saying.

The second is even more profound.

He is saying – you don't need these sacrifices anymore because the ultimate sacrifice has arrived.

He is turning over the old sacrificial system and

He is saying he has the power to fulfil – what all these 100s of thousands of sacrifices could merely hint at.

“he has the power to get us into the sanctuary / the presence of God”

The history of the Presence of God with man starts back in Eden,

Because Eden was Sanctuary.

Eden was where the presence of God dwelt, and it was a paradise.

It was the place where God was with man

and if you had an accident – God would be there

and if you made a mistake – God would be there

if you got confused - God would be there

if you got lost – God would be there.

In the Garden there was Sanctuary – God’s presence

and it changed everything

- no more death or crying or pain –

- perfect Sanctuary, absolute Peace, total flourishing.

But when human beings decided to do their own thing and not God’s

when they decided to trust their own judgement and not God’s

when they decided to build their life on what they wanted to do and not God

We lost sanctuary.

We lost God’s presence

We became cut off and shut out.

When human beings, decided to leave God out of their decision making they

found ourselves alone.

And as Adam and Eve were driven from the sanctuary, as they were expelled from

God’s presence

they turned back to see what they had left behind and they saw,

in Genesis Chapter 3v24:

a flaming sword, turning every way, moving back and forth, barring their way.

In other words, to get back to God they would have to get past the sword?

So what is that all about?

Well throughout our civilization Justice has been represented holding a sword.

Some scales to weight people’s actions – a sword to carry out justice.

That is what is going on in Genesis...

To get back into the presence of God human beings needed to face Justice.

No listen,

We are no different to any other human being

We are no different to Adam and Eve

We are no different to anyone who makes mistakes, lives for themselves and sometimes hurts others

We are no different.

People are responsible for wars and conflicts, for jealousies and gossip, for injustice and poverty, for separating themselves from God;

And we are no different!.,

and I guess if we were in their place we would do the same as them or (God forbid) even worse.

Each of us has turned to our own way and done our thing and made our own gods.

So we find ourselves cut off from the presence of God.

And here is the punch-line – and why all these sacrifices are in the Temple

“Sorry” is not enough to get us back.

If someone has deeply wronged us – really hurt us –sorry is not enough

If someone has stolen something precious to us, caused us devastation to us and

destroyed our life – sorry is not enough.

If someone has hurt someone we love, abused them and discarded them – sorry is not enough.

And in the same we can't say to God!

sorry ☺, will you forget all those wrong things that I have done, would you let me off all those good things that should have done,
sorry, about hurting others and disobeying you and being selfish”
sorry is not enough

We can't say to God “sorry, let's forget it”.

It's not enough

For people to get away with injustice with a simple “sorry” is monstrous,

We're not talking about vindictiveness or vengeance here.

We are talking about basic Justice

When we do wrong,

something more is required, restitution, repayment needs to be made.

This is basic justice

And this is what the flaming sword is all about.

It is justice.

The only way back to God, to get back into the sanctuary, to enter into the presence of God is to go under the judgement of the sword.

That's fair, that's right, that's just.

So the first lesson humanity ever learns in Genesis 3 is

If we do something wrong, we are accountable and WE have to make atonement for it, to pay for it.

The second lesson is seen here in Matthew

the only way to defeat evil is if someone makes a sacrifice

the only way to defeat evil is for someone to sacrifice **themselves**.

CS Lewis saw this and said in the Narnia novels said "when a willing victim, who has committed no treachery is killed in a traitors stead then the table will crack and death itself will start working backwards"

The temple sacrifices were a picture, a lesson

To come into my presence

To enter into the Temple

To defeat evil

You need to pay, atonement needs to be made, a sacrifice presented...

But the 250,000 lambs in a week were only a picture.

The only sacrifice that will work –

is if God himself pays the price,

is if God himself makes the sacrifice,

is if He is the willing victim to be killed in a sinners stead.

This is why in Revelation John sees God as a slain lamb.

This is why Jesus overturns the animal sacrifices

They are not needed anymore...
Because HE has arrived, THE sacrifice has arrived
He alone has the power to bring us back into the presence of God

And this (thirdly)

3. Has the power to change us.

It changes us when we take this action of Jesus, this overturning of the tables, and apply it to ourselves.

you see

in v14 - the blind and lame came to Jesus and he healed them

in v15 - the children came to Jesus and he accepted them

*But v16 when the Chief Priests and the Teachers of the Law came to Jesus **they** were indignant.*

They were offended, for two reasons:

Firstly,

They felt that “sorry” and “their own goodness” WAS good enough for God

They had invested themselves in Honour and Titles, in Education and Moral Standing and

they felt they WERE good enough to enter the presence of God with a “sorry and a sacrifice”

They thought they were OK people –
nothing much wrong with them, they thought

They said –

We don't see ourselves as sinners

We don't think that God would ever reject us

We don't really believe we are all that bad

So “saying sorry” and being good must be enough.

So why would you Jesus over turn the tables???

They were indignant because they thought they were OK.

And secondly, they were indignant

because they looked at the blind and the lame and they felt **they** weren't good enough

You see

The blind and lame would have been barred from sacrificing in the Temple because their disability would have made them ceremonially unclean, unworthy.

Their disability made them ceremonially unclean.

So the Teachers of the Law and the High Priest would have looked down on them.

The children would have been banned from offering any sacrifice, because they were religiously irrelevant, unimportant “the little people”.

They would have been looked down on too.

So these Teachers of the Law are indignant because

they thought good people like them were OK; and

sinners like the lame and the blind, and these other non-entities weren't.

Listen...

Anyone who thinks good people get to heaven, because they are good, is by implication saying that bad people don't.

Anyone who thinks good people get to heaven is saying that bad people don't. And you can bet your bottom dollar that when push comes to shove they are hoping that "they are in the good" category – which obviously implies that they think others are NOT!

They are in danger of being spiritual snobs.

They are saying "I reckon" my "sorry" and my goodness, "the sacrifices I make, my prayers, my deeds, my offerings, my morality" is good enough for God

And "there are others", the 'morally deficient, the nobodies' who need something more.

Jesus' entry into **Jerusalem** shows us we need to change our attitude – we need his humility; and

Jesus' entry into the **Temple** where he overturns the sacrificial system shows us that

there is no sacrifice that **we can make** that will atone of our mistakes, the only the sacrifice is God himself.

Only then when we apply this to our lives do we realise that our relationship with God is not dependent upon our righteousness but his, not on our past but his, not on our life but his, not on our goodness but his, not on our sacrifices but his.

Only then do we become simultaneously aware of how honoured we are by God (that he should die for us) **and** simultaneously humbled by God (because we need him) simultaneously lifted up by God (because we are that precious) **and** brought low by God (**because we are no different to anyone else in this world**) simultaneously Royalty (a child of God) and a servant (a sinner before God) And this is powerfully attractive.

This doesn't look down on others
This sees others as God sees them
This develops the same character of Jesus in us
Meekness and Majesty
Triumph and Humility
flawed yet exalted.
confident yet gracious
we become balanced as Christ was balanced

This is the power that begins to happen in our life when we apply to ourselves the power of Jesus in the Temple.

When we take for ourselves his sacrifice for us

So as we hold in our hands this morning the symbols of the body and blood of Jesus
if you say

without you God I am lost
without you “my sorry and my goodness” is not enough

But thank you that you have done it all
Then God will both
exalt you and humble you
give you confidence to stand before him and humility that you can
equip you with glory enough to serve others.
And you will know the Character of God.