



Part 1: "Riding In and Cleaning House"

Matt 21:1-13

This morning we're kicking off the Easter Season and I am SOOOO excited! For Christians this is the pinnacle for all of us who know and follow Jesus Christ as our Savior.

Along with Christmas, at no other time of the year is the spotlight of the attention of our culture and the world focused more on Jesus than it is during the Easter Season.

And because of that, it provides us a great opportunity to speak up about who Jesus is, what He means to us, and to be bolder than ever in reaching out to others with the gospel and invitations to come to Fellowship and learn more about who Jesus is!

I hope we'll all begin to get our minds and hearts ready to take advantage of this great opportunity. That's why our Easter Services are so much more than us getting dressed up and showing off our new duds.

It's so much more than coming for an Easter Sunday breakfast and service going home to have a special lunch with family. It's so much more than Easter bunnies and candy and egg hunts – in fact it has nothing to do with those things at all!

It has everything to do with what the Bible calls the gospel. It has everything to do with our celebration of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

It has everything to do with our proclamation of this gospel to as many people as we can – in our spheres of influence and to anyone and everyone around us whether we know them or not.

So as we ignite the launch sequence of the Easter Season this morning, we are kicking off this 4 week series entitled, "Jesus' Last Days".

Combined with the release of The Chosen in theatres right now, it is our desire to not only teach you what Jesus did during the last days of His life but to also assist us all in experiencing the biblical record visually and vibrantly.

So both the season five of The Chosen, as well as this message series are focused on the events of the last week of Jesus' life, what is known as "Holy Week".

Now obviously The Chosen isn't yet going to take it all the way to the last day of Holy Week when we celebrate Jesus' resurrection – they still have 3 more seasons to make in the future to get that done.

But with Easter just around the corner, we ARE going to take it all the way through the entire biblical record of Holy Week when we'll celebrate Jesus' resurrection just 4 weeks from now.

So here's our plan: This morning we're going to overview the events of Sunday and Monday of Holy Week. Next Sunday, we'll overview the events of Tuesday and Wednesday of Holy Week...

2 weeks from today – Palm Sunday – we'll cover what's called Maundy Thursday – by the way I'll tell you that day why it's called Maundy Thursday. The focus of Maundy Thursday is The Last Supper and we're going to have a very special Last Supper-style communion on Palm Sunday.

Then Easter weekend we'll overview Jesus' death, burial, resurrection and promised return. I want to encourage you not to miss any Sundays between now and Easter weekend if at all possible.

Now it seems like a lot of Christians today are rather fuzzy on what happened during Holy Week and its implications for us today and I don't want it to be that way for us here at Fellowship.

In fact, I want us to not only have a head knowledge of what took place the last week of Jesus' life, I want it to transform our hearts and empower us to fulfill our commission that Jesus gave us, to make disciples of Jesus right here where we live and among the unreached peoples of the world.

So let's take a look at your Notes at the timeline of what occurred and when, in the life of Jesus during Holy Week.

First, please be aware that I couldn't fit everything that the Gospels included on these days, but these are the highlights and below are the Scriptures you can look up on your own to see what happened on those days.

THE TIMELINE:

On the first day of Holy Week – Palm Sunday, Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey and he was welcomed by large crowds of people waving palm branches and shouting,

“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest”! We'll look at this in more depth in a moment.

He also took a little time at the end of the day to scope out the temple area and make mental notes of how he could expose the godlessness of everything that was going on in what was supposed to be the holiest place on earth!

On Monday of Holy Week, Jesus came across a fig tree that had no figs on it and he cursed that tree. Later when they came across it again, it was withered and dying.

Jesus' cursing of the tree seemed to have been a metaphor for the religious leaders of Israel who were more religious than anyone else, but they couldn't have been further from God – in fact they were spiritually dead!!!

Then Jesus headed to the temple where in a fit of righteous anger he clears out the money-changers and the greedy vendors and exposes their corruption and declares that the real purpose of the temple was that it was intended by God to be a house of prayer.

You'll see the activities of both Sunday and Monday of Holy Week very clearly portrayed in the first release of The Chosen out in theatres right now. Those of you going tomorrow night and this week have a lot to look forward to.

On Tuesday of Holy Week, extremely threatened and fed up with Jesus' words and actions, the religious leaders question Jesus hoping to catch him in a verbal misstep so that they have the ammunition to arrest and kill him. Of course since Jesus is God, He never misspeaks or says anything not guided by the Spirit.

Then Jesus gives his second most famous sermon in his 3-year ministry, The Olivet Discourse. It's his last chance to give a prophetic sermon about what will happen to Israel and Jerusalem in the future – something no one else would know except Him because He's God and He know everything.

On Wednesday of Holy Week there are no recorded words in the Bible of anything that Jesus said that day. But while on the surface, everything seems cool and calm in Jerusalem, it couldn't be further from the truth.

Things are boiling behind the scenes as the body of Jewish religious leaders called The Sanhedrin are plotting how to capture Jesus and kill him.

By now Judas has been stewing a very long time convinced that Jesus is going to lead a political and military coup in Jerusalem and lead God's people to freedom from the iron clutches of the Romans.

But by the time the middle of Holy Week came around, he finally realized that's not what Jesus was going to do.

So disillusioned and fed up with Jesus, he agrees to betray Jesus as soon as he can – to the delight of the Jewish leaders who pay him off under the table.

On Thursday, Jesus and the disciples prepare for the Jewish Passover. No one but Jesus knows that this will be the very last Passover ever held that has the stamp of approval of God on it.

Once Jesus died on the cross, the Passover took on an all new meaning which we will look at on Palm Sunday. Unbeknownst to the other disciples, Judas left the Upper Room to go get ready to betray Jesus.

Afterward they all head to the Garden of Gethsemane where they fall asleep while Jesus prays so earnestly that he sweats great drops of blood. Judas with the religious leaders then showed up and arrested Jesus and the long night of trial after trial began for Jesus.

On what we call “Good Friday”, Jesus’ last trial ends early in the morning with the judgment of death by crucifixion decreed for Him in spite of the lack of any evidence.

Jesus carries his cross to Golgotha where he is crucified. Six hours later he dies and is buried in a borrowed tomb by a sympathetic supporter named Joseph of Arimathea.

On Saturday of Holy Week it was the Sabbath so no one was allowed to do any work per the laws given to Moses. Jesus' body lay in the tomb while the Roman guards kept watch over the entrance.

And on Easter Sunday morning, several of Jesus' closest followers came to the tomb and found the stone already rolled away. An angel showed up and told them not to be afraid because Jesus wasn't there anymore, He had risen from the dead just as He said He would!!!

Those women who were there went and told the disciples that Jesus was alive. These women were the first to believe in the resurrection of Jesus while most of the disciples were still in disbelief.

So the overview of Holy Week, let's go back now and examine the two big events that took place on Sunday and Monday, starting with Palm Sunday.

SUNDAY: THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

READ Matthew 21:1-5.

The thing we need to always remember about Jesus is that there was always a reason behind his actions. He never did anything on a whim or for self-glory or just because.

His actions were the result of two motivations and this is key to understanding all the activities of Jesus life and ministry: first of all...

(Slide) The Motivations for all of Jesus' Life and Ministry Activities:

1. He was intent on doing the will of God the Father – Matt. 26:39; John 4:34; 5:30

Jesus said,

“My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish his work.”
John 4:34

Jesus was intent on doing the will of the Father. That's why He got up early to spend time with the Father in prayer so He would know the Father's will every day. And in like fashion, it should be our desire as followers of Christ, to do the will of God every day. How we do know what God's will is you may ask?

God's will is spelled out very clearly right here in the Word of God. That's why we need to spend time in the Word and in prayer every day, so we'll have God's guidance on doing His will.

Secondly,

(Slide) 2. He acted to fulfill the prophecies made about Him in the Old Testament – Matt. 5:17; Luke 13:33; 24:25-27

In Matthew Jesus says,

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”
Matthew 5:17

Jesus carefully crafted the activities of each day of His life guided by the Holy Spirit to fulfill the hundreds of prophecies made about Him in the Old Testament.

If a situation arose that wouldn't allow Him to do that, He would use the power of His deity to make sure He stayed in line with those prophecies so that by the time He had died and risen again, all the prophecies spoken about him were fulfilled.

Now Verses 4 and 5 reveal that what Jesus did here was in fulfillment of a prophecy made by Zechariah 500 years before Christ was on the earth...

(Slide)

“Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout in triumph, Daughter Jerusalem! Look, your King is coming to you; he is righteous and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” Zechariah 9:9

READ Matt. 21:6-8.

These actions by Jesus have been called “The Triumphal Entry” - Almost giving the idea that this was some sort of military victory march or in our day, a Ticker Tape Parade in New York City.

But that could not be farther from the truth. There were no soldiers ushering Jesus into Jerusalem. He was not riding in a motorcade or coming into Jerusalem on a big white horse like military victors of his day.

No. Jesus came into Jerusalem humbly, riding the most lowly of animals, a donkey.

Donkeys are the lowest of the low. They are beasts of burden. That's all they're good for. What kind of King would enter a city riding a beast of burden? Certainly, no ordinary king.

But then again, Jesus WAS no ordinary King. Jesus didn't come to conquer on the battlefield. Jesus didn't come to sit on a throne and live in palaces. Jesus didn't come to have people serve Him, but rather He came to serve others.

In short, nothing could have been more appropriate than what we see here, and that's Jesus, the bearer of the world's sin, coming into Jerusalem riding on a beast of burden. How appropriate.

And we see in these verses that the crowds praised him. Some laid their coats on the road (verse 8), some cut branches from the trees.

In John's gospel we're told that these were "Palm Branches". That's why this event is called "Palm Sunday" - in remembrance of what the people of Jerusalem did when Jesus came riding into the city.

Look at verse 9-12. (READ).

We see that they shouted "Hosanna to the Son of David." The word "hosanna" means "save now". This was a mixed crowd. Some believed Jesus to be the Messiah and yearned for the spiritual freedom He would give.

But many in the crowd wanted Jesus to save Jerusalem and all of Israel politically and militarily from the tyranny of the Romans who occupied their land.

But these people were mistaken. Jesus didn't come to the earth to be a political or military Savior. He came to conquer sin and death. He came so that all people could have peace with God through His sacrificial death on the cross.

The people knew who Jesus was, but they didn't understand His mission and why He came to earth. And because Jesus would not and did not meet the expectations of the people of His day, less than a week after this event, they crucified him.

And in dying on the cross, He fulfilled what He came to do in the first place, and that was to provide the payment for the sins of everyone in the world.

Jesus is our salvation from sin and spiritual death. Because of His sacrifice - which we will celebrate on Easter - every one of us can have our sins forgiven and receive eternal life in heaven if we will place our faith in Jesus Christ.

The question for each of us today is, Have you done that? Do you believe who Jesus claimed to be – the perfect, sinless Son of God who paid for the sins of the world by His death on the cross and then rose from the dead and is alive today, and have you placed your faith in Him for salvation of your sins and eternal life? If not, I hope you'll do that today!!!

“THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY CLIP (3:07)”

That clip is from the first release of the Chosen that you're going to see in theatres this week. You're going to love it!

MONDAY: THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE

Now the Triumphant entry of Jesus recorded in all 4 gospels of the New Testament is a pivotal and major event that kicked off what we call Holy Week. It set in motion the rest of the events of the week ending with His resurrection one week later.

Most importantly it pointed to the reality that everyone needs to be saved. Everyone is lost in sin without Jesus Christ and He's the only One who can save us. He can save anyone right now, in response to us when we believe and put our faith in Him.

So at the end of this first day, Sunday, Jesus returned to Bethany where he was staying with his friend Lazarus just a couple miles outside of town. On Monday morning Jerusalem he headed to the temple.

It was time to set the record straight with everyone on the REAL purpose of the temple, and it wasn't to see how much money you can make off people who were in town to worship the Lord.

READ Matthew 21:12-13.

These striking actions by Jesus are what sped up the actions of the Jewish religious leaders to arrest Him and kill Him.

You see, The Temple was not just the center of worship in Jerusalem, it was the center of EVERYTHING in all of Israel.

The national identity of Israel was tied directly to the Temple and everything that happened there. As such, it at all costs HAD to be protected.

That's why workers in the temple complex spent weeks cleaning and preparing the Temple for the arrival of somewhere in the neighborhood of 2 million people who came to Jerusalem from all over Israel and well beyond.

And because of the long journey many took to get there, they couldn't bring their own animals for the sacrifices that had to be made once they got there. Their animals would have died along the way.

So animal herders came from all over to ensure that hundreds of thousands of animals were present and available for purchase by the worshipers – sheep, goats, cattle, and pigeons – to be sacrificed for the sins of the people.

On top of that, spice vendors were needed to provide hundreds of pounds of spices that accompanied the sacrifices. And to top it off, once the worshipers arrived, they had to exchange whatever money they used where they were from, into the money especially minted for use at the temple.

So currency vendors were set up around the temple grounds because that was the first stopping place for all the people.

They first had to exchange their money for temple money, then go, purchase their animals, then stand in line and wait while a priest examined their animals to make sure they were worthy for sacrifice, then they could finally offer them as a sacrifice.

The process was long, tedious, hot, smelly and most of all expensive. The money- vendors used this as an opportunity to charge exorbitant exchange rates and they could care less what it cost the worshipers who had come from so far.

The area where this all took place on the temple grounds was massive. It is estimated that the area could hold 10,000 people at a time in addition to literally hundreds of thousands of animals.

Into this vast courtyard, on Monday morning of Holy Week, Jesus entered, took out a whip and with righteous anger began throwing over the tables of the money changers, the vendors of the pigeon and animal handlers and herding them out.

Why did Jesus do this? Surely He knew that such activity would bring the ire of the religious leaders who already wanted him dead? He did it, because God is the one who led Israel to create this place of worship so that people could have their sins atoned for.

And this wasn't just a place for Jewish worshipers of God. God wanted this to be a place where non-Jewish people could come – Gentiles – and see and hear the testimony of God's people worshiping Him, and be compelled to reach out to God in prayer and humbly repent of their sin and turn to Him.

This area on the temple grounds – called The Court of the Gentiles – was in fact created intentionally by God to be a place of prayer for people who weren't Jews, a place where they could seek the God of heaven.

But instead, the Jews had turned it into as Jesus called it, “a den of thieves” where instead of the aroma and atmosphere of prayer, everyone was greedy – including the High Priest - people were being ripped off, stolen from and robbed.

God had told His people long ago in the days of Isaiah...

(Slide)

“As for the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord and to become his servants – all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold firmly to my covenant – I will bring them to my holy mountain and let them rejoice in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be acceptable on my alter, for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.’ This is the declaration of the Lord God...”

Isaiah 56:6

God's "house of prayer" had become a place where no one would even consider stopping and praying for God's help. And this hurt the heart of Jesus and that's why in His righteous anger, He made sure the religious leaders understood what the temple was truly meant to be and what the heart of God was really all about.

Here in Isaiah God makes clear His heart in these words to Isaiah and here's what they tell us about God...

(Slide) 1. God loves spiritually lost people – John 3:16.

(Slide) 2. God wants the unreached of the world to find salvation through him by the testimony of His people

(Slide) 3. God wants His people to be people of prayer because prayer is the pathway to Him for everyone.

The only way to be in relationship with God is to talk to Him and that's what prayer is, it's talking to God just like you would a friend. No one is saved from their sins, until they respond to God's work in their heart, through prayer, asking Him to forgive them and save them.

And after that, the only way we can be in regular fellowship with God on a daily basis is to learn to spend time with Him in prayer, again, talking with him just like you would a friend. Prayer is the pathway to both a relationship with God and to ongoing fellowship with God.

Fellowship, let me ask you, how's your prayer life today? How's your fellowship with God this morning? They both are intricately linked together. If you want a good relationship with God you have to be in good fellowship with Him through prayer. It's as plain and simple as that!

WRAP-UP

Well, as we close, Holy Week began Jesus rode into town on Sunday and on Monday, he cleaned house. The day after Jesus was hailed as a conquering hero by the masses of people in Jerusalem, on Monday, by the time Jesus was finished turning over the tables...

Insulting everyone around him especially the religious leaders calling them a den of thieves and getting the point across as to what the temple's true purpose was all about...

Mark tells us in his gospel...

(Slide)

"The chief priests and the scribes heard it and started looking for a way to kill him."

Mark 11:18a

When Jesus returned to Bethany on Monday night, there is no doubt that he knew it was only a matter of time before the Jewish leaders would be ready to pull the trigger on snuffing out the life of their Messiah.

We'll pick this up next Sunday as we take a close look at Tuesday and Wednesday of Holy Week in the last days of Jesus.

Let's stand and say this week's memory verse together out loud...

(Slide)

THIS WEEK'S MEMORY VERSE:

"He said to them, 'It is written, my house will be called a house of prayer...'"

Matthew 21:13