

Jesus' Last Week – 1

R. David Pogge
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Jesus gave these last messages to the unconverted.

Part 1

What would you do if you knew you had only one week to live? It is an important question to consider; but it is one you can only guess the answer to.

A more important question is, “What would Jesus do if He knew He had only one more week to live?” Jesus did know when He had only one more week to live, and Matthew tells us what He did during that last week. Knowing how little time He had left, Jesus spent it wisely.

This week we are going to focus on what Jesus did in His public ministry during his final days. Next week, we will examine how He privately prepared His disciples for His betrayal, execution, and resurrection.

The story of Jesus' last week in mortal flesh begins in Matthew, Chapter 21, as Jesus arrives in Jerusalem on the day that we now call Palm Sunday.

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

**“Say to the Daughter of Zion,
‘See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”**

The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Hosanna in the highest!”

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.” (Matthew 21:1-11)

Jesus entered the Holy City to great fanfare because the people knew He was sent from God. Let's try to capture some of that emotion as Steve Fleischer and JoAn Witzel play, "The Holy City."

[music – Steve Fleischer and JoAn Witzel, "The Holy City"]

Part 2

Jesus arrived in Jerusalem with the full support of the people and went straight to the temple. We will pick up the story where we left off, in Matthew 21:12.

Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. "It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'"

The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant.

"Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him.

"Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read,

**"From the lips of children and infants
you have ordained praise'?"**

And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night. (Matthew 21:12-17)

Monday morning, Jesus went back to the temple to teach. The story continues in verse 18 of Matthew 21.

Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, "May you never bear fruit again!" Immediately the tree withered.

When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. "How did the fig tree wither so quickly?" they asked.

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer." (Matthew 21:18-22)

Jesus used this fig tree to teach two lessons—one about pretension and the other about faith. The fig tree had many leaves on it. Leaves on a fig tree indicate that the tree is bearing fruit. But although the tree pretended to be bearing fruit, it had none. In the same way, the scribes and Pharisees pretended to be faithful followers of God, but did not bear the fruit God intended. Jesus demonstrated dramatically the judgment that falls upon those who pretend to be God's children, but aren't.

The second lesson had to do with the power of prayer. If you truly believe in God, God will answer your prayers. Both of these lessons were taught visually by cursing the fig tree.

Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?”

Jesus replied, “I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John’s baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?”

They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ But if we say, ‘From men’—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.”

So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.”

Then he said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things. (Matthew 21:23-27)

Although Jesus would not tell them directly by what authority He was doing these things, and by what authority John the Baptist was preaching, it should have been obvious to them. One can’t command a fig tree to wither by merely human authority. They could not see the authority of Jesus because they did not want to see.

Then Jesus began teaching them about their hypocrisy in parables. Let’s continue from where we left off, at Matthew 21:28.

“What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’

“‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

“Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.

“Which of the two did what his father wanted?”

“The first,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him. (Matthew 21:28-32)

This parable explains the curse of the fig tree. The son who said he would work in the vineyard is just like the fig tree that pretended to have figs. The Pharisees claimed to be obedient servants working for God in the vineyard, but their religion consisted merely of showy pretension. They weren’t really righteous. So Jesus immediately told them another parable pointing out exactly where they went wrong.

“Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

“The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said.

“But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

“Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?”

“He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.”

Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:

**“‘The stone the builders rejected
has become the capstone;
the Lord has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes’?**

“Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.”

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet. (Matthew 21:33-46)

We tend to read these parables in isolation, but Jesus presented them as a group, with a unity of symbolism. The fruit theme is common to all of them. The chief priests and the Pharisees weren’t producing fruit. They weren’t working in the vineyard as God intended. Jesus was condemning them for not fulfilling their responsibility. But Jesus wasn’t done.

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come.

“Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’

“But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

“Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ The man was speechless.

“Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

“For many are invited, but few are chosen.” (Matthew 22:1-14)

Here Jesus is telling the Jews that they have failed to live up to the responsibility of being the chosen people who should represent God to the world. Because they have failed to produce the fruit He desired, He will choose the Gentiles to do it instead. However, if the Gentiles fail to carry out the mission, they too will be kicked out of the kingdom.

The Pharisees knew perfectly well what Jesus meant, so they tried to trap him with a question about paying taxes to Caesar. They hoped He would either say that it was wrong to pay taxes, which would make Him guilty of treason, or say that it was right to pay taxes, which would make Him unpopular with the crowd. Jesus didn't fall into their trap.

So then they tried to trick Him with a question about marriage after the resurrection. He didn't fall into that trap.

Then, they tried to trick Him with a question about the greatest commandment in an attempt to get him to say some of the commandments aren't important. But Jesus didn't abolish any of the commandments, so that trick failed, too.

Jesus then asked the Pharisees a difficult theological question about the relationship between King David and Christ. They could not answer it, and it effectively shut them up.

Following these rude interruptions at the end of Matthew 22, Jesus returned to his discussion of the failure of the teachers and Pharisees in Mathew chapter 23, no longer veiling His meaning in parables.

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

“Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them ‘Rabbi.’

“But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called ‘teacher,’ for you have one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.

“Woe to you, blind guides! You say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.’ You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.’ You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven swears by God’s throne and by the one who sits on it.

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. And you say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers!

“You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’” (Matthew 23:1-38)

With this scathing condemnation, Jesus left the temple.

Since He had just pronounced judgment on them, it naturally led the disciples to ask about when this judgment would occur. He responded by telling them the signs that would precede the destruction of Jerusalem and the signs that would precede His second coming. These are found in Matthew Chapter 24, which we don’t have time to read this week.

In Matthew Chapter 25, Jesus told three parables about the importance of being ready for His second coming. The first, about ten virgins, makes the point that not everyone who wants to go to heaven will be able to go. Only those who are ready will be allowed to enter.

The second parable tells how to be ready. It involves three servants who were entrusted with different amounts of money by their master. Two of them used the money to make more money. They were both rewarded. But the third did not put the resources that he had been given to good use, and was punished by being thrown out into outer darkness, just like man who did not wear the wedding garment in a previous parable.

Here is the third parable in this set. It begins at Matthew 25:21.

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

“They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

“He will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

“Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” (Matthew 25:31-46)

All three parables make the point that God expects obedience. Those aren't living up to God's standard will be left out of the kingdom. It isn't enough to want to be saved. It isn't enough to claim you are saved. You must actually be living an obedient life, fulfilling the responsibility God has given you, to be saved.

When Jesus had finished saying all these things, he said to his disciples, “As you know, the Passover is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.”

Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him. “But not during the Feast,” they said, “or there may be a riot among the people.” (Matthew 26:1-5)

The feast they were talking about was the Passover. It was their intention not to kill Jesus during the Passover. But they did kill him on Passover, just as predicted. Jesus was the Passover Lamb, whose blood saves us. God caused Jesus to be sacrificed at just the right time, in fulfillment of the Passover symbolism. But let's not get ahead of ourselves. Next week we will hear about the Last Supper, and Jesus' private message to His apostles.

This week we focused on what Jesus taught publicly when He knew He had only one week left on Earth. In particular, He tried to get the religious leaders to see that, although they thought they were righteous, they had fallen far short. They were planning to murder their Messiah. Jesus told them in parables, and quite directly, that they needed to re-evaluate their faith. So we will close this week's broadcast as the Ridgecrest United Methodist Church Choir asks the question, “Was I Faithful?”

[music – Ridgecrest United Methodist Church Choir, “Was I Faithful?”]