

Home Church Study Guide—June 20, 2010
A Misunderstood Arrival (Luke 19:28-48)

As you can tell, the story of Jesus' ministry is coming to an end. However, roughly half of the content of the gospels concerns the week in Jesus' life that we have just entered in our study. It is clear by the amount of time and focus these days receive, that we are in the heart of the "Christ event." There is more to say about these happenings than can be covered in a year, much less in a few lessons. Here is the difficulty—you most likely know these events very well. It will be hard to encounter them with an open mind and heart. That is certainly true for me. But let's allow the Spirit of God to do His work in us as we study these events. We have focused our study on authentic discipleship. We have learned much at the feet of Jesus. Now we must learn more from the bleeding feet of the Lamb of God.

Jerusalem is now on the horizon. The band of disciples and spiritual pilgrims with Jesus will soon be breaking the crest of the Mount of Olives, and the holy city will rise into view. Jesus is fully aware of what is to happen. That is the purpose of Luke's telling of the colt or donkey that has never been ridden that will be made available at His request (by sending two disciples the account is thereby verified as true) is to both fulfill Zechariah 9:9 and to show that Jesus knows exactly what is about to happen. No surprises here. Jesus is willingly walking to His death.

The crowd is almost delirious with joy. For them, the moment has surely come—THE moment. Messiah is coming to receive His glory, just as the prophets had said. He was indeed the miracle worker, the authoritative spokesperson of God. He would now enter Jerusalem, ascend to the throne of David, and cast out the Romans from their land. So the people honored Him with extravagant displays, throwing their cloaks on the ground in a sign of submission and delight. They would make His way to the throne one of honor and comfort. And they cried out with loud shouts the Messianic cry, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." This wording from Psalm 118:6 was to be reserved for Messiah, and it is for this reason that the Pharisees "came unglued." They wanted Jesus to refuse the sacred psalm of messianic anticipation, but He would not. For He was exactly who they thought He was. Unfortunately, their view of Messiah was pitifully inadequate. But even in their ignorance, they were shouting truths. And so Jesus responded to the impertinent Pharisees by saying that the rocks would shout this truth even if all were silent. Creation itself was now paying attention because the events that were about to take place would affect all that God had made.

Now the city is in view. From the high hills east of the city Jesus weeps over it. He knows what will happen in just a few years. The city that Jews traveled for months to see would be reduced to unsightly rubble. This was not the first time the Spirit of God had longed to see repentance in the city. Read the haunting account of Ezekiel's vision in chapters 10 and 11. The Glory of the Lord left the temple because it was full of idolaters, and it drifted to "the mountain at the east of the city," and then it left. In a matter of days, the mighty armies from Babylonia would march in and tear the city to pieces. The Glory of God had been on the Mount of Olives before and seen the devastation which was to come. Alas, history would repeat itself. Once again the city refused to hear the good news of the Lord God Almighty. The Glory of the Lord was again entering the city, the very Son of God, yet the people would not accept Him—at least on His terms. In the midst of His triumphal entry, Jesus knew that in just a few years the city would receive judgment for not accepting Him as king. The Romans would put a horrible siege on Jerusalem and then tear it down to nothing more than rubble.

As would be expected, the triumphant procession ended at the temple. What Jesus did is still hotly debated. It was a powerful act of protest against what had developed at the temple. What should have been a "house of prayer" had become a "den of robbers." If we just read Luke's account of the cleansing of the temple, we get the idea that Jesus was preparing it for His final week of teaching. The other gospel accounts of the event give us more information about the location of the merchants and the reason for Jesus' anger. But here, Luke provides the information of the clearing out of the merchants as setting the stage for the teaching that it follows. The story serves to "wake us up" to the importance of that which is to come. There was a strong tradition among the Jews that when the Messiah came, there would be a renewed focus on the purity of the temple. Jesus' driving out the merchants would have been seen as such an act. So, as Jesus began teaching, the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the spiritual leaders began to seriously plot for His death. In this act of cleansing the temple, Jesus had fully challenged the powers that be. He was directly threatening the system of worship that had been in place for quite some time. If it were inappropriate for these merchants to be at the temple, then it would have been an issue the religious leaders in Jerusalem should have addressed. Jesus "usurped" their authority with His behavior. Of course, He had every right to do so. But this was the "straw that broke the camel's back." He would have to die. But this would be no simple plot. The people had claimed Him as Messiah, and they "hung on His words." They were listening to the good news of the kingdom. The leaders could only see the possible end to their power.

What are we to do with these stories? This actually brings us to the heart of the question of authentic discipleship. How will you receive Jesus? What kind of Messiah will you allow Him to be? The city of Jerusalem, of all places, should have been ready to receive their new king. Instead, as we all know, they would crucify Him. As long as he was their champion, their miracle worker, their great teacher, as long as they could hope for personal empowerment, betterment, and a great name, they hung on His every word. But it would not take much for them to shout “Crucify him!” How could this be?

The story continues. And we have to ask ourselves, where would we be in this story? Would we be the religious establishment seeking to maintain the system we built? Would we be open to Jesus cleansing our temple? Would we allow Him to redirect our worship toward the One to whom we owe all? Would we allow Him to overturn the tables of our comfort and call us to a dynamic, life-changing table of prayer?

“So What” for Home Church discussion:

1. Do you remember your baptism? Was it a time of joy and excitement?
2. What, in your life, has challenged your faith? What did you learn from that trial?
3. If Jesus were to come and cleanse his temple (me), what would he “cast out?”