

JESUS

There's no one like Him

Jesus is not a myth or legend. Jesus is not an ethereal religious figure. Jesus walked the earth at a specific time and place. There's never been another like Him. As we follow the life of Jesus of Nazareth through the Gospel of Matthew, we find our faith in Jesus rooted in the life of Jesus. Meet Jesus. Knowing this man will change your life.

JESUS • Matthew 21:1–13 • Tim McConnell • April 5, 2020

Fear dominates the world stage. We are afraid of COVID-19. We are afraid of sickness, afraid of death. We are afraid of the economic downturn. Every one of us is facing uncertainty. Plans are cancelled. Dreams are set aside. Fear. Listen, fear God and nothing can touch you; deny God, and you will fear everything. Oswald Chambers wrote, "The remarkable thing about God is that when you fear God, you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God, you fear everything else." Fear God and you have nothing to fear. What does that mean? Fear God, have a right relationship with God, know that God is the only one truly worthy of fear, worthy of reverence. Know that God, and God alone, holds your life. Without that, you will fear every single touch, every single breath, every single step you take. It reminds me of walking the streets in Havana, Cuba. You don't know where to walk. You can walk on the sidewalk, but the concrete porches over your head are crumbling, and you never know when pieces will fall. You can walk in the middle of the road, but electric bikes and scooters come along silently until they are on your heels! You get one beep. One beep to get out of the way! Everything is a threat. Everything. Remember. God holds your life. Fear not. Fear God and dread naught, dread nothing.

Jesus of Nazareth was fearless. Today is Palm Sunday. One of our favorites! One of our Sundays when there is not a seat in the house each year. You're going to have to grab branches off your houseplants this year! Or coats, they also threw coats down. Grab some coats and throw them on the floor. We are studying the life of Jesus of Nazareth, a real person in history, looking at the major moments and events almost like a reporter on the scene. What would you write down? This moment is very famous. Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the Sunday prior to the Passover Celebration. Among the throngs, Jesus rode a donkey through the East Gate. He went straight to the Temple to set things right.

Jesus of Nazareth was fearless. If you followed Him around for a few months, you would be amazed. He never seemed afraid. Angry crowds tried to throw Him off a cliff in Nazareth; He just walked right through them. He spoke with top officials, Roman generals, demon-possessed madmen, even in family conflict when His mother and brothers were worried

He had lost His mind, Jesus was unflappable. Calm. Fearless. He once fell asleep in the stern of a fishing boat in a storm so bad the others thought they were going to die. Fearless. Like Arnold Schwarzenegger in those old movies where he would just stand there shooting at a hundred soldiers--none of them can hit him! No way. Captain Marvel. Superman. Jesus walked through life with such confidence, to be around Him you would think He had superpowers nobody but He knew about. Bulletproof. You would think He was invincible. Invulnerable. On Palm Sunday, He demonstrated just how fearless He was. Fearless. Like a lion walking across the Serengeti He made his way directly into the seat of power to push out what was wrong and set up what is right.

Now, a little geography here. Jerusalem is in hill country. They call them mountains--but, well, you know. Coloradans wouldn't call them mountains. It might take you 45 minutes to walk up the Mount of Olives. Jesus was camping behind the Mount of Olives and traveled with the parade pouring into Jerusalem for Passover week. You would walk down the side of the Mount of Olives, through the Kidron Valley--which isn't really a valley, more of just a draw--then up the side of Mount Zion where the walled city of Jerusalem sits on top, the Temple the highest and most prominent feature. You can see it from the Mount of Olives, and you never lose sight of it as you walk down and up again and enter through the East Gate, called the Golden Gate or Mercy's Gate, where the Messiah was prophesied to enter. But everybody entered through there that day. Jesus riding in on a donkey did fulfill the prophecy from Zechariah, but I want to focus today on what He did next.

"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.' Jesus entered the temple courts 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" (Matthew 21:10-12). Can you imagine this? Jesus, walking up to a table where a man is smiling behind the piles of coins. "Can I help you? Need to make an exchange?" Roman money had claims of divinity for the Caesar on it. It was sacrilegious to turn that in as an offering. "I can change your coins for you. Small fee. I can sell

you a nice sacrificial animal. Small fee." Jesus reaches out with two arms and flips the table over on the man's lap. Coins everywhere. Disciples on their heels, ready for a riot. Gasps. Shouts. Then Jesus walks over to another one, reaches out and flips it over. Again. Again! Guards are rushing in now. He stops, and turns with all eyes on him, "'It is written,' he said to them, 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' [Isaiah 56:7] but you are making it 'a den of robbers.' [Jeremiah 7:11]." (Matthew 21:13). Then he walks out.

There were lots of problems with the Temple system and the moneychangers, and no, they had nothing to do with selling t-shirts for the church or having a coffee shop that sells lattes. "My house will be called a house of prayer." The passage in Isaiah is about the difference between those who use the Temple for their own benefit, to take advantage of others, and those who come with a humble and genuine spirit. Jesus quotes it. "My house," he says. My house is where people are freely in relationship with God. Where they pray and their prayers are heard. Where people enjoy the covenant relationship with God that God won, that God made, that God paid for on their behalf and they freely receive it. That's my house. Not some chintzy tourist shop where you buy your ticket and get your show.

You have made it a den of robbers. From Jeremiah. Let me give you a little of that: "Stand at the gate of the Lord's house and there proclaim this message: 'Hear the word of the Lord, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the Lord. This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. Do not trust in deceptive words and say, 'This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!' If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you do not oppress the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your ancestors for ever and ever. But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless." Then verse 11: "Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the Lord" (Jeremiah 7:2-8, 11). That's what Jesus had in mind when he kicked those tables over. He had in

mind to set things right. Fearless. Fear God and you have nothing to fear. Many historians say this is what got Jesus killed. Jewish leaders had no tolerance for interruption to temple profits. Romans had no patience for public disturbance. They had plenty of crosses for men like that.

In an age of anxiety, in a moment of global panic, of universal fear, where mortality has marched out on the battlefield, in the form of a tiny virus, and shouting at all of us in brash challenge like Goliath: "come and fight," when we wonder what tomorrow will hold or how long it will last, in that moment, in this moment, I want you to see Jesus, bold and fearless. Jesus, at peace in the face of fright. Jesus, strong and steady to set things right. See Jesus. This is why we talk about Jesus our Rock, Jesus our Savior who is the Rock of Ages. This is why we quote Proverbs: "The name of the Lord is a fortified tower; the righteous run to it and are safe" (Proverbs 18:10). Fear God and you stand with Jesus. Stand with Jesus and there is nothing that can prevail against you. Fear God and dread naught. Get right with Jesus, honor the Lord, worship the Lord your God, enter the house of prayer in Jesus Christ, and you have nothing to fear. What can touch you? It may look like you are surrounded, but you are surrounded by Christ: "For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3). If you give your life to Jesus, your life is hidden in Him. Death can't touch you. It can't take your life because you already gave it to Jesus. And He keeps it and gives you eternal life. Life in death; life after death; life over death. Fear God and have nothing to fear, or else walk in fear of every single blade of grass.

Jesus of Nazareth was fearless. But there was one time when He felt fear. Halfway down the side of the Mount of Olives is a grove of olive trees called the Garden of Gethsemane. It's the last place the sun reaches when it rises. From there you can see the east wall, the gate, the Temple, the whole side of Mount Zion and Jerusalem on top. Gethsemane means "oil press" and Jesus felt like he was getting crushed. Four days after Palm Sunday is the Thursday when Jesus knelt down at a rock and prayed, fearful. He knew the soldiers were coming. He knew his friend Judas had betrayed Him. He knew what it was going to cost to set us all free--it was going to cost the cross. Jesus felt fear. Luke the physician records,

"And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground" (Luke 22:44). It's called hematidrosis. There is so much pressure and anxiety, the body reacts to the emotions and the tiny capillaries in your skin burst, making your sweat pink with blood. Every square inch of skin would be tender to the touch.

Jesus, fearless, felt that much fear. Why? Because Jesus resolved to take on all that it means to be divorced from the Father. He resolved to take our place. It wasn't the physical pain or the shame that made Him cry; it was the separation from His Father He was about to endure on our behalf. He took all our fear, all our anxiety on Himself. Fear God and nothing can touch you; break with God and every blade of grass, every touch, every flat surface, every leaf on every tree threatens your life. Jesus went there. Isaiah described what that place is like: "Woe to the sinful nation, a people whose guilt is great, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the Lord; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him ... From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness--only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with olive oil" (Isaiah 1:4, 6). That's what separation from God feels like. Jesus went there. He took our place. He bore our sins. He walked out into our pain and fear and anxiety. Jesus says, "I'll be fearful and anxious, you rest assured. I'll be afraid, you be at peace. I'll be scared. I exchange my place for yours. I'll take the wounds, you be healed."

Jesus. Fearless. Took our fear on Himself so we could be free. Yes, Jesus felt fear. He chose to take ours. Jesus felt fear. Courage is not the absence of fear, but the resolve to carry on through it. We are in a scary time. It is easy to let fear run away with us right now. Fear God and dread naught. Isaiah said, "Do not call conspiracy everything this people calls a conspiracy; do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread. He will be a holy place" (Isaiah 8:12-14). A holy place. A mighty tower. A refuge and a rock. Jesus. Fearless Jesus. He took our fear to make us free.

STUDY GUIDE

JESUS • "He Set Things Right"

Matthew 21:1-15

UP: **UP: Connect with God through Spending Time in His Word**

Friends, humanity is being rocked right now by needing to physically distance ourselves from one another. For the Christian, we do this out of love for neighbor. Fight hard to distinguish these two realities: physically distancing and relationally separating.

Now is the time to become the greatest artist you have ever been. Create ways to stay relationally and spiritually tethered to your core circle. We need each other. We are gifts to one another! Make phone calls; text photographs; set up video gatherings. Together, we are the hands and feet of Christ to one another and this city!

Begin your study in prayer. Read and reflect on Matthew 21:1-13.

- 1) What did Pastor Tim share about the significance of Jesus entering through the East Gate?
- 2) After entering Jerusalem for His final week, where in the city did Jesus go first, what did He do there, and why did He do it?
- 3) Jesus says, "My house will be called a house of prayer." Why is prayer so important to Jesus and how ought this priority of Jesus' shape our own behavior today?

OUT: **Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)**

4) Create a "house of prayer" for this city. Spend time praying that God, because of His infinite mercy and strength, will bring His healing and salvation to the people of Colorado Springs in an even greater capacity. Identify needs around you and commit them to the Lord.

IN: **Connect with Each Other**

COVID-19: Spend time connecting with your core circle on how you are doing. Pray together.

What are you most grieving in this season? Who within your social sphere is hurting the most? How might you and your Life Group be the hands and feet of Christ in this situation?

As you enter into Holy Week, what can you do to be most present with God and your community?