

# **Masterwork of the Messiah**

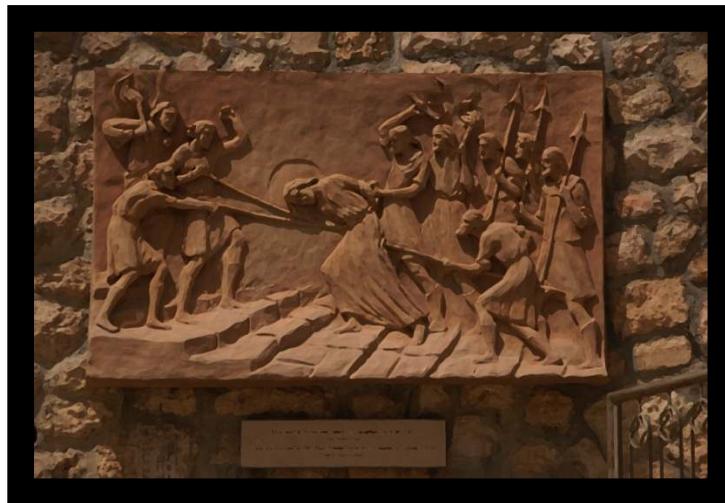
## **Expositional Study Of Matthew's Gospel**

*You Clued-In Or Clueless?*

Written By

©Pastor Marty Baker

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**A**crescendo in music is where the tune builds from a soft, melodic, contemplative flow to a moving height of sound. Here is Lang Lang playing Chopin's Etude Opus 10 No. 3 in E Major. As you listen to the opening measures, you will readily hear how it moves from the quiet, contemplative, beautiful valley to the magnificent mountaintop. [Play clip]

Comparing this wonderful piece of music to the ministry of Jesus, I can't help but see how the initial measures perfectly portray the work of the Lord for three years in Galilee. His preaching, teaching and healing were quietly powerful and soul-stirring as it substantiated Him as the long-awaited Messiah. As the music builds to a slow, sure crescendo before it makes its next transition in the number; we get an audible reminder of how Christ's entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday served to showcase Himself to Israel as the one, true messianic King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Not everyone, however, tracked with Christ's person and prophetic fulfillment. Sure, we see the masses in Matthew 21 clamoring to see Him, and we sense the emotion of the moment as they are moved to call Him the Son of David and the prophet; however, in just six short days of what has now become known as the passion week, that same crowd would turn on Him and chant for His crucifixion. Shocking, isn't it? They, who seemed so clued-in at the moment, spiritually speaking, were really clueless. Makes you stop and search your own soul: Am I really in touch with the person and work of Jesus, or have I, like the ancient Jews, chosen to

momentarily embrace Jesus because it is the thing to do, but at the first sign of Him not behaving and acting like I think He should, I will disown Him.

Among the crowd that day were those who were clued-in, spiritually speaking. On the one hand, we have the twelve disciples, then we have other Galilean disciples who followed Him to Jerusalem for Passover, and, I'm sure we have Mary, Martha, Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead just a few days before, and assorted other saints from the immediate area. These folks recognized the identity of Jesus. They had faith in Him as the Messiah, and they knew, based on the miraculous evidences they witnessed and amazing teaching they heard, that He was, in fact, the prophesied One. This group, however, was, despite all outer appearances from the account of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the minority ... the conclusion of the passion week will demonstrate just how small their numbers were as the hatred of the unbelievers against the Messiah surged, finding its sick satisfaction on a hill called Golgotha.

Again, all of this makes us ask ourselves a personal question: "Am I one of the clued-in where Jesus is concerned? Do I believe He was and is the God-man, the King of Kings, and the one and only Savior for sinners?" Taking these two groups together as they appear in Matthew 21:1-11, logically moves us to pose the question:

### Are You Clued-in Or Clueless Concerning Jesus As The Christ? (Matthew 21:1-11)

It is a question which needs answering because your placement in eternity hangs in the balance. Will you be in heaven because you placed your faith in the redemptive work of Jesus, or will you be eternally barred from His presence in a place of torment? God leaves you with a choice and there are but two groups you can be in. One will walk into His presence in eternity, while the other will not. So, what about it? Which group are you in? As I have said, both groups are easily identified in this powerful passage, and by studying them perhaps you will be moved to forsake sin and embrace the Savior.

With this in mind, I invite you to consider the first group:

#### Group #1: The Clued-In (Matthew 21:1-7)

Let's begin by first reading the biblical text:

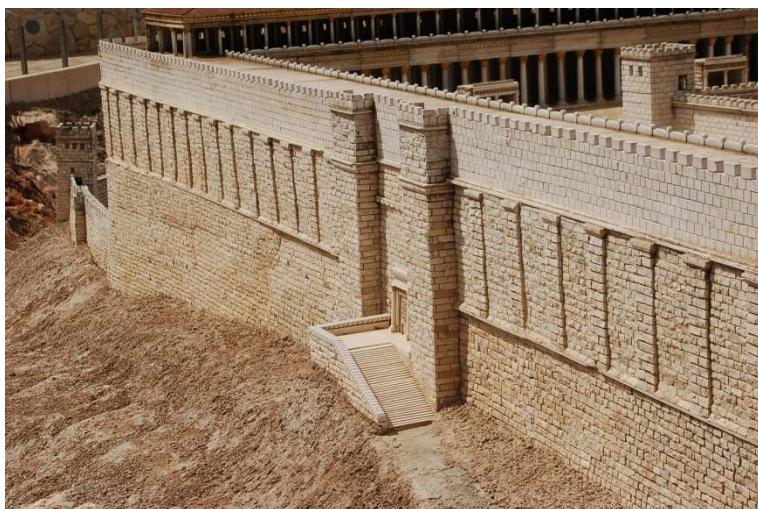
<sup>1</sup> And when they had approached Jerusalem and had come to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied there and a colt with her; untie them, and bring them to Me. <sup>3</sup> And if anyone says something to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them." <sup>4</sup> Now this took place that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, <sup>5</sup> Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold your King is coming to you, gentle, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.' <sup>6</sup> And the disciples went and did just as Jesus had directed them, <sup>7</sup> and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid on them their garments, on which He sat.

Before we can consider the import and impact of this historical account, we must first reconstruct the context by looking to the other gospel writers.

According to John 11, Jesus and the disciples eventually arrived in Bethany, an arduous hike from Jericho of some fifteen miles of uphill climbing. Bethany was located some two miles due east of Jerusalem, just over the Mount of Olives. Jesus resurrected His best friend Lazarus from the grave in this little village, resulting in Caiaphas, the High Priest, working overtime, based on his own personal jealousy of Christ's expanding ministry and admiration of the people, to murder Jesus when the news of the resurrection reached his quarters (John 11:45-53). Is it not jaw-dropping the lengths people will go in their unbelief to eradicate the evidence of the person and work of Jesus?

Christ caught wind of the murderous opposition and took His disciples on a brief spiritual retreat just north of Jerusalem to a place called Ephraim (John 11:54). He, then, walked back to Bethany, arriving on Friday during the day before Sabbath began at sundown (John 12:1). It was now six days before His final Passover. On Saturday, Mary, the sister of Lazarus anointed His feet during dinner with costly perfume, amounting to some \$10,000 in our modern currency. Her loving, sacrificial actions served to prepare Him for His coming death. Quite obviously, Mary was clued-in, spiritually speaking. On Sunday, or the first day of the week, Jesus then set in motion His redemptive work by coming to Israel as their king. The paradox was, however, that His coronation as the messianic king would first be with a crown of thorns, long before it would be a royal diadem of a conquering, victorious potentate (Revelation 19).

Contextually, we also need to understand what Passover was like in Israel at this time. The population in Jerusalem at the time was around 70,000; however, according to Barclay, a Roman census of the lambs slain at Passover marked that number at 250,000. Given the fact that the priestly regulations called for one lamb per 10 people, we can readily see how nearly 2 million people clogged the streets of the holy city for this time religious feast. And speaking of this particular feast, Passover, marked God's divine deliverance of His chosen people from Egyptian slavery. Jesus, therefore, chose an excellent and strategic time to present Himself to the nation as the messianic King and Savior. Throngs would be present to see Him and hear His teaching, and messianic fervor would easily be ignited as those throngs caught wind that He, in fact, might be the One who would deliver them from Roman bondage. Paradoxically, again, they failed to understand that Jesus would first have to be the Passover Lamb for the sins of mankind before He could come and establish His glorious empire, as foretold in the prophets (Isaiah 2; 9).



The Eastern or Shushan Gate



The Lion's gate located just north on the same wall as the Shushan Gate.

could know the person who owned the donkey and colt wouldn't stop the disciples from taking them for their appointed mission. The two disciples, who were probably Peter and John (Luke 22:8), didn't flinch at His interesting command because they trusted His word implicitly. They obeyed without question because they knew that He, as the God-man/Messiah, had a divinely, carefully orchestrated purpose behind His request even if they didn't understand it. John verifies this premise when he states:

<sup>16</sup> These things His disciples did not

understand at the first; but when Jesus

Geographically, we need to understand the royal procession came from the direction of Bethphage, a city now long gone, but which was probably located somewhere on the Mount of Olives, possibly on the southern slope ... or some one mile from the Temple mount. We don't know exactly which gate Jesus entered the holy city, but since He came from the east He probably came either through the Shushan Gate, also called the Eastern Gate, or the Lion's Gate (If He came through this gate this would be most interesting because this is the gate leading to the Via Dolorosa, or the way of the cross). Either way, His descent from the Mount of Olives would have given Him and the disciples an amazing view of Jerusalem teeming with thousands of excited and expectant worshippers.

Christ's triumphal entry, then, presented Him as the King of Israel, but He was the most unusual king with the most unorthodox presentation. We see this in what He asks the disciples to do to prepare for His presentation as the King. His words, of course, speak of omniscience. Only God could know where a given donkey would be and if it had a new colt alongside her. Only God



Looking at the temple mount from the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives

was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things to Him (John 12).

Yes, the disciples didn't grasp the full theological import of Christ's actions that day; however, because they were clued-in as to His identity, they walked obediently before Him without question. Is this you?

- If you are a spiritually clued-in person, one who is convinced that Jesus is who He said He was, then you will walk obediently before Him. When He gives you a commandment, you will not balk at it but walk in it. As Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Do you love Him?
- If you are a clued-in person you will follow where He leads and directs you because you know He knows what is best for your life.
- If you are a clued-in person, you will worship Jesus by singing "Hosannas" around His throne. If you are clued-in person, you will understand that Jesus first had to come as the meek, humble king so He could become our perfect sacrifice before He comes to erect His glorious kingdom.
- If you are a clued-in person, you will connect the prophetic dots where Jesus is concerned, dots which were spoken hundreds of years before His birth, making it statistically impossible for Him not to be the prophesied Savior. The prophecy of the Messiah coming to Israel on a colt was uttered some 500 years before His birth (Zechariah 9). Did you get that? Do you believe that? Clued-in people do. Clued-in people also continue to study the prophesies of Jesus so they know the proofs of His identity so they, in turn, can share those with the lost. Matthew was a clued-in Jew who connected those dots. When he says that Christ fulfilled what was written of Him by riding the colt, this was the ninth of ten such statements in his book (Matthew 1:22; 2:25, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 27:9). Do you connect the dots for evangelistic purposes?
- If you are clued-in person, you will see how His descent into Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives from the east was but a taste of the day when He comes to destroy the forces of wickedness so He can erect His Davidic Empire (Zechariah 12-14).
- If you are a clued-in person, you will see how Jesus, the maker of heaven and earth, the Lord of all creation (Colossians 1:18-19), kept a new colt in peaceful control on His triumphant ride thereby giving us a small taste of life in the kingdom when the curse is removed and there is peace between the world of animals and men. As Isaiah prophesied some 2,800 years ago:

<sup>6</sup> And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little boy will lead them. <sup>7</sup> Also the cow and the bear will graze; their young will lie down together; and the lion will eat straw like the ox. <sup>8</sup> And the nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's

den. <sup>9</sup> They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. <sup>10</sup> Then it will come about in that day that the nations will resort to the root of Jesse, who will stand as a signal for the peoples; and His resting place will be glorious (Isaiah 11).

Admittedly, our house of worship is probably full of clued-in people, but we are the minority when we step away from this location. Out in the world, we walk among the throngs who do not embrace Jesus as the Messiah. Out in the world, we walk among those who embrace all other gods which are not gods. Out in the world, we have a serious responsibility to make sure we live like clued-in people, people who worship and lovingly share the evidences for the reason why Jesus is, in fact, the one true King and Savior of men.

The second group constitutes the majority of the people in the world. I call them the clueless because for them Jesus is not the God of their liking. Are you in this group? Let us take a quick look at them.

### Group #2: The Clueless (Matthew 21:8-11)

For all intents and purposes, this group sounded so spiritual, so in tune with Jesus; however, upon closer analysis we will sadly see this was not the case.

<sup>8</sup> And most of the multitude spread their garments in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees, and spreading them in the road. <sup>9</sup> And the multitudes going before Him, and those who followed after were crying out, saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!" <sup>10</sup> And when He had entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?" <sup>11</sup> And the multitudes were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee."

Why were the people throwing their outer garments in front of Jesus as He rode by on that little, innocent, humble donkey? Historically, this was what Jews did when they wanted to recognize their new king (2 Kings 9:13). Additionally, why did they cast palm branches in front of Him? Of Israel's seven religious feasts, the seventh, or tabernacles (also called Booths), not only called Israel to build booths to live in to remember their wilderness wandering, but according to the prophet Zechariah, this feast summoned Israel to realize that all the feasts would culminate with this one at the appearance of the Messiah and His glorious kingdom (Zechariah 14:4, 16). Obviously, the masses that day excitedly and emotionally thought, "This is it! This is the day! Jesus is the One who will free us from Roman domination! This is the day when Israel is the head and not the tail!" All of this excitement even moved them to quote from the Hallel/Praise psalms (Psalms 113-118) which were typically used for Passover; namely, Psalm 118:19-29, where they cry for God to save them ... and save them He would, but not by a military victory, but by a victory on a cross. And save Him He would, but not from enemies but from the enemy called sin and death.

All of the folks, who were before Jesus and behind Him, blessed His name as the messianic son of David that day. Who were these people? Predominately, I think they were worshippers who had traveled, for the most part, from the Galilee region. Matthew does draw a

distinction between them and the people of Jerusalem in verse 10, further underscoring their identity as being from the north.

Think long and hard about this. They had either seen or heard from valid witnesses concerning the miraculous powers of Jesus. From the healing of the man with leprosy in Capernaum (Matthew 8:1-4), to the feeding of the 10,000 on the eastern slopes of the hills surrounding Galilee (Matthew 15:32-39), they were awash and inundated with messianic proofs. They even recognized Christ's royal messianic lineage, and they ascribed the praise psalms rightly to Him. Yet when asked by the inhabitants of Jerusalem, "Who is this?" mark their words well:

This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee.

They didn't say He was the Messiah. They didn't say He was God with us as prophesied by Isaiah (Isaiah 7:14). They didn't say He was the Ancient of Days, the eternal God Himself as foretold by Micah and as substantiated by His miraculous works only God could pull off (Micah 5:1-2). No, they called him simply "the prophet," and there is absolutely no indication they believed He was, in fact, the fulfillment of the prophecy of Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15-18). Jesus was merely the prophet who had caused so much excitement and commotion in the Galilean region, you know, the one everyone had heard about.

This is all so instructive and unsettling.

First, realize these theologically clueless folks wanted God on their terms, not on His terms. He wanted a cross before a crown. They wanted a crown with no cross. They wanted a King, not a Savior. He wanted to become the Savior before He became the King. They wanted freedom from their enemies. He wanted to free them from their biggest, most dreaded enemy, sin, first. They wanted Jesus to bypass Passover and go straight to Tabernacles, to glorification and domination. He, on the contrary, had to experience Passover first by becoming our sin sacrifice so He could one day let us enjoy worship of Him in the kingdom through the observance of Tabernacles.

Is this not a sobering discussion? You can have the proofs of who Jesus is all around you, and you can still reject, outright, who He was and is. In light of this I must ask you, "Have you created a god of your own liking, a god who is tame, a god who will be content with you uttering ritualistic, memorized prayers, a god who doesn't upset your openness for all religious to be true, a god who bypasses ... maybe even rejects the concept of the cross, opting for something more palatable for how to usher sinful people into God's presence?" Beyond this I must ask, "Has a religious emotion swept over you, leaving you thinking you are following God when, in reality, you just have emotion which isn't tied to lasting, abiding spiritual truth about the person and work of Jesus, the Christ?

Equally shocking are the Jews from Jerusalem who met these Galilean Jews with a provocative question, "Who is this?" Are you kidding me? They didn't recognize Jesus, really?

- You mean they hadn't heard how He cleared the temple when He started His ministry (John 2)?
- You mean they hadn't heard about the man who had been lame for thirty-eight years who received new legs from Jesus at the Pool of Bethesda (John 5)?

- You mean of the thousands who heard Him speak at the Temple during the October Feast of Tabernacles that not one of them watched the Triumphal Entry (John 7:1ff)?
- You mean of the throngs who heard Him take on the Pharisees at the Feast of Tabernacles and tell them He was, in fact, the great I AM of history, you mean that none of them were in this particular crowd (John 8:58)?

Somebody stop me. You mean they were absolutely without any evidences as to who Jesus claimed to be? Give me a proverbial break. They were awash in evidences, just like their counterparts in Galilee, but they were wrapped tightly in even greater unbelief because they actually had the godless gall to articulate, “Who is this?” ... as if they didn’t know. In all reality, this is the group who always needs one more proof to follow Jesus, you know, just a little more information because I don’t know what to do with what I’ve received.

Is this you? You might sit in church every Sunday, but still you can’t answer the question “Who is Jesus?” You have Christians intersecting with your life constantly, Christians who speak up and out about Him, but still you ask, “Who is Jesus?” You have read book after book Christians have put in your hand validating the person and work of the Lord, but you continue to press, “Who is Jesus?” My friend, if you are this clueless, the problem isn’t informational ... it is VOLITIONAL!

What do you need to do? Move, by placing your faith in Jesus Christ, from a place of being spiritually clueless to being spiritually clued-in for all eternity. Anyone ready to make that move?

And for those who are clued-in, thank God He has drawn you to Himself. Thank God He has shown you your need of the Savior. Thank God He became your Passover Lamb. Thank God is your King. Thank God and share His story, a story of salvation which is like no other.