

Oct 29-Nov 4

Week 44

This week we enter Act 3, scene 3, “Christ’s Deliverance of His People: God’s Work through the Death, Resurrection, and Enthronement of His King.” The readings this week will take us through much of the last week of Jesus’ earthly ministry, from the triumphal entry into Jerusalem through the moment just after the Last Supper, when Jesus and the disciples were about to leave the city to go to the garden of Gethsemane.

Notice especially this week the rising conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders. Jesus confronted them on their own turf. The temple complex was the seat of their power. Also notice that the focus of Jesus’ teaching narrowed to the disciples as we move toward the cross. He was preparing them for his leaving.

As always, keep in mind the Old Testament backdrop of the narrative. Feel the tension. Imagine what it would have been like to be in the crowd in Jerusalem during that week.

Scene 3

Christ’s Deliverance of His People: God’s Work Through the Death, Resurrection and Enthronement of His King

This scene is the climax of the entire biblical story. After reaching Jerusalem and teaching the people, Jesus prepares his apostles for his death with a final meal that he turns into a symbolic portrayal of his death for them. Judas betrays him to the religious authorities. They hand him over to Pontius Pilate, the Roman political authority, who agrees to their demand. After a painful death, Jesus is quickly placed in a tomb. Yet on the third day God raises him from the dead. He appears to his disciples as the victorious Lord. Days later he ascends to heaven and is enthroned as the King at God’s right hand.

Day 1

Read Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 11:55-12:11

Matthew 21:1-22; Mark 11:1-25; Luke 19:28-48; John 12:12-36; 2:13-25

Act 3 - Scene 3 - Reading 1

We read about several turning-point events today, including the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, the anointing at Bethany, and the cleansing of the temple. The Gospel writers sometimes arranged their material for emphasis rather than strict chronology. Ask, Why does this story occur here in this Gospel? Notice the material around the story for clues.

The Old Testament backdrop is critical to understanding these events. Jesus' triumphal entry to Jerusalem fulfills Zechariah 9:9, which foretells the Messiah's coming to Jerusalem on a donkey. Notice the context of the Old Testament passages behind Jesus' cleansing of the temple (see Isaiah 56:7; Jeremiah 7:11). Both contexts emphasize the corruptness of Jerusalem and its leaders, who clung to the temple rather than God and his ways. The temple was the most important place on earth for a Jewish person. It was the seat of the Sanhedrin's authority, as well as the center of religious life. Jesus' actions would have been seen as outlandish. As with the cursing of the fig tree, Jesus was acting out a message of judgment. In some quarters of Jewish thought, the Messiah was expected to come and set the temple right. The corrupt systems and values of the world came into conflict with God's ways and a commitment to follow Jesus. This would ultimately lead not only to a cross but also to resurrection.

Notice the dynamics surrounding these events. John tells us that lots of people came out to meet Jesus as he entered Jerusalem because of the raising of Lazarus, and he tells us it was Mary, Lazarus' sister, who anointed Jesus for burial.

What corrupt systems in your world work against God's kingdom?

Day 2

Read Matthew 21:23-22:14; Mark 11:27-12:12; Luke 20:1-18; John 12:37-50

Act 3 - Scene 3 - Reading 2

Notice that just after the cleansing of the temple, the authorities came to Jesus and challenged his authority. Jesus in essence said, “OK, let’s talk about authority. Where did John’s baptism come from—from heaven or from men?” Because they could not discern John’s authority, which was from God, they would not be able to grasp Jesus’ authority. As you read the parables in Matthew, read them with an eye on the question of authority and the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders.

Mark and Luke also include the parable of the Vineyard Owner, which is a clear prophetic word against the religious leaders. Notice that Luke ends the telling of that parable with a different response to the observation “He will come and kill those farmers and give the vineyard to others” (Luke 20:16). Read the response at the end of verse 16 as coming from the religious leaders who were listening to Jesus.

In our reading from John, the Gospel writer quoted two passages from Isaiah, 53:1 and 6:10. The second quotation sounds as if God were keeping the people from coming to him. Yet in context this Old Testament prophecy was a word of judgment against those who had rejected the ways of the Lord. Spiritual dullness can lead to greater spiritual dullness.

Are you submitted to the Lord’s authority today?

Day 3

Read Matthew 22:15-23:39; Mark 12:13-44; Luke 20:19-21:4; 13:31-35

Act 3 - Scene 3 - Reading 3

As Jesus moved toward the climax of the story, he was in open conflict with the religious leaders. The readings today focus largely on conflict manifested in questions asked and answers given. The question about taxes was meant to put Jesus in a no-win situation. If he said, “Don’t pay taxes,” the Pharisees could present him to the Romans as an insurrectionist. If he said, “Pay your taxes,” many of the Jews wouldn’t like it. Jesus discerned their “malicious intent” (Mt 22:18) and gave a brilliant answer.

The Sadducees also had ulterior motives when they questioned Jesus about the resurrection. They did not believe in life after death and were trying to frame the doctrine as illogical. When Jesus said they “don’t know . . . the power of God” (Mt 22:29), he was referring to God’s power to raise the dead. He also said they didn’t “know the Scriptures” and pointed to a portion of Scripture they were supposed to believe, Exodus 3:6, since the Sadducees viewed only the first five books of the Old Testament as valid. It makes no sense for God to call himself “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, if they are forever dead. A resurrection must be a part of God’s ultimate plan and power.

Notice how much of the conflict in these passages centers on the religious leaders’ lack of integrity. Their motives and inner lives did not line up with their teachings. Evaluate your life and ask God to identify areas of hypocrisy that need attention.

Day 4

Read Matthew 24-25; Mark 13; Luke 21:5-38

Act 3 - Scene 3 - Reading 4

In today's reading Jesus addressed being ready for his second coming. We need to keep several theological points in mind as we read.

1. This chaotic, violent world as we know it will come to an end when Christ returns. History is not a meaningless series of events. God is going to bring things to a conclusion according to his plan.
2. No one knows exactly when the end is going to take place. There will be very difficult times leading up to and surrounding Christ's coming. While prophecy lets us know we live in the "time of the end," no one will be able to predict the exact time of the return.
3. Today's teachings and parables emphasize being ready for Christ's return. We should live each day in light of the day Christ returns. In Luke's version Jesus specifically warned against letting our minds be dulled by partying, drunkenness, and worry.
4. There will be accountability in the end. The way we live in this world matters, and we will give an account of how we lived or did not live for the Lord. But if we "abide" daily in Jesus, he guarantees HE will have us ready.

Are you living in readiness today for Christ's return?

Day 5

Read Matthew 26:1-5,14-35; Mark 14:1-2,10-31; Luke 22:1-38; John 13

Act 3 - Scene 3 - Reading 5

Today we read about Judas' betrayal of Jesus and Jesus' celebration of the Last Supper with the disciples on the night before his crucifixion. The two events are intertwined, and both have their backdrops in the Old Testament. This meal was a Passover meal (see Exodus 12:1-28), which in the first century had to be celebrated within the walls of Jerusalem. It was a way to remember God's deliverance of his people from slavery in Egypt. For devout Jews, a number of traditions surrounded the meal, including an interpretation of the various elements of the meal, eating a sacrificed lamb, giving to the poor, spending the night in prayer, and singing a hymn (they would have sung the Hallel, Psalms 113–118; read 118 in light of this moment in Christ's life and ministry). Jesus interpreted the meal in light of his death, which would provide deliverance from spiritual slavery.

John focused on Jesus' washing the disciples' feet as a dramatic way of teaching sacrificial love. As you read, recognize that only Jesus could change a tradition that God had given in the Old Testament, transforming it in light of the new era he was about to inaugurate. Today we take the Lord's Supper to remember that Jesus' death provided our spiritual exodus from slavery and death under sin to life and freedom in Christ.

Day 6**Read John 14-17****Act 3 - Scene 3 - Reading 6**

Today we come to a great discourse Jesus gave on the last night before his death. The discourse is framed by the theme “going out.” In John 13:30 Judas had gone out into the dark night. In 14:31 Jesus and the disciples went out of the room where Jesus had washed their feet. In 18:1 they went out of the city to the garden of Gethsemane.

This gives us a beautiful narrative context for Jesus’ words, which focus on three themes: Jesus was going out of the world, the disciples were staying in the world to bear witness to him, and Jesus would send the Spirit to comfort and continue to minister to them.

Other subthemes are also important. Persecution would happen because of the disciples’ identification with Jesus, but Jesus would give them peace and victory (see John 16:25-33). Like a vine and branches (see Isaiah 5:1-7), they were to remain closely related to Jesus as the key to bearing fruit for him (see John 15:1-8). They were also to be unified as the Father and Son are unified. In John 17 Jesus prayed for his glorification, for the disciples, and for those of us who have believed because of the disciples’ witness in the world.

Celebrate that Jesus has prayed for you. Pray for our unity and love for one another as disciples of Christ.

Day 7

Reading Summary for Week 44

The closer the Gospel writers got to the crucifixion, the more detailed they became. What we've read can be put into a day-by-day sequence. Sunday was the day the Lord entered Jerusalem and was welcomed as King. Monday was when he cleared the temple complex. On Tuesday, he taught in Jerusalem and on the Mount of Olives. Wednesday was the day Judas agreed to betray Jesus, and then on Thursday Jesus celebrated Passover, instituted the Lord's Supper, and gave his final teachings.

Prayer/Meditation

Lord Jesus Christ, I worship you. You planned before the ages to offer yourself as a perfect sacrifice for sinners. You entered Jerusalem, your own beloved city, hailed as the King, only to be rejected days later. Thank you for what you taught the disciples about the coming of the Spirit, and thank you for praying for them and for me: "I am in them and you are in me, so that they may be made completely one, that the world may know you have sent me" (John 17:23). Amen.
