



Matthew 21:42–44

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

“The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
the Lord has done this,
and it is marvellous in our eyes”?

43 “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. 44 Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.”

Reflection

The second half of Matthew 21 consists of a very public showdown between Jesus and the Jewish religious authorities. Jesus has only three days left to live. He'll die on Friday, and today, Tuesday, from sunrise to sunset will be spent publically denouncing the chief priests, the teachers of the law, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the elders of various Jewish ruling families – the entire leadership of the Jewish religious establishment in Jerusalem. Jesus' words today bring about his crucifixion. And what Jesus says on this day

is so important that Matthew has slowed his narrative right down, so much so that this Tuesday, just one day of Jesus' thirty three years on earth, extends from Matthew 21:17 to Matthew 26:4; almost a fifth of his gospel concentrating on one day of Jesus' life. More than half of this day, all the daylight hours and up to the end of Matthew 23 will be spent teaching in the heart of the temple in Jerusalem, or more specifically, tearing strips off the Jewish religious leaders.

The day began when a delegation of temple officials and elders interrupted Jesus' teaching. In front of hundreds of onlookers they asked him very bluntly where he got the right to enter Jerusalem like a king, and disrupt the temple markets so violently, and to now be teaching in

the temple courts when he's not even a trained rabbi. The subtext of their question is hostile. Essentially they're saying, 'We're in charge here. This is our temple and we govern the Jewish faith. How dare you overrule us? This is our city, our temple and we rule this religion. So you'd better have a good answer otherwise we have every right to arrest you for causing such a commotion.'

It turns out Jesus did have a very good answer. With three successive questions and two parables he has completely turned the tables on them. They've been silenced, publically humiliated and condemned by their own words. What's more the crowds that they'd been hoping to bring around were more strongly than ever behind Jesus.

In today's passage Jesus brings this hostile encounter to a close by decisively quoting Scripture. In fact, Matthew 21 has seen more quotes from the Old Testament than any other chapter of Matthew's gospel so far, except the infancy narratives in chapters 1 and 2. This torrent of direct quotes and allusions to Scripture will continue for the remainder of the gospel. Matthew wants to show us that Jesus fulfils prophecy as much in his death as he did in his birth.

Our passage begins with Jesus asking a fourth question of some of the most learned men of the Jewish religious faith,

“Have you never read in the Scriptures:

“The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
the Lord has done this,
and it is marvellous in our eyes”?

Of course they'd read them but they'd never fully understood them. What's more these words would have been continuously recalled to their minds over the past couple of days, teasing them at the edge of their thoughts. God's gracious like that. You see, this is the song that the people were singing when Jesus entered Jerusalem. The same song that the children picked up and have been singing in the temple courts. When the king came into Jerusalem two days ago they shouted out and sang,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

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

“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

Words from verses 25 and 26 of Psalm 118. Yesterday the children were again singing verse 25, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” in the temple courts as Jesus performed wonders healing all the blind and lame who were brought to him. And today, Jesus quotes to them the verses that lead up to this praise, verses 22 and 23. He leaves unspoken verse 24 that would have followed on in their minds. This is so powerful, I’m going to read the whole section starting at verse 21. Imagine the crowds and the children singing praises to Jesus not fully understanding just how true and powerful their testimony was as Jesus comes to fulfil this prophecy. Imag-

ine the penny perhaps dropping for some of these learned Jews, those whose hearts weren't being further hardened. Here's the full text, this is what would have played through their minds as Jesus entered Jerusalem and as the children sang in response to the miracles performed in the temple,

21 Open for me the gates of the righteous;

I will enter and give thanks to the Lord.

20 This is the gate of the Lord

through which the righteous may enter.

21 I will give you thanks, for you answered me;

you have become my salvation.

22 The stone the builders rejected

has become the cornerstone;
23 the Lord has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes.
24 The Lord has done it this very day;
let us rejoice today and be glad.
25 “Hosanna [to the Son of David!]”
26 Blessed is he who comes in the
name of the Lord.

The people are praising the one their leaders are rejecting, who will become the cornerstone of the new Israel. The new Israel who will consist of both Jew and Gentile saved through repentance and faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ as he brings in the everlasting kingdom of God.

Jesus continues along these lines adding in allusions to Isaiah 8 and to Daniel 2, Is-

rael and Kingdom passages,

43 “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. 44 Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.”

Jesus Christ, Israel reduced to one, the cornerstone on which the new Israel will be built, a people of God that will include not just ethnic Jews but people from every tribe and nation on earth, has become the cornerstone or capstone of this new building, of this new kingdom that will last forever. You can be part of this kingdom which will grow to fill the earth, or you can stand up against this kingdom and be bro-

ken to pieces and crushed.

Think & Pray

In three days' time Jesus will be broken and crushed so that all who put their trust in him might be a part of his everlasting kingdom. Will you be part of his kingdom? Or will you reject him and continue to hold on to what is passing away? Is Jesus the cornerstone of your life? Are you building your life on him? On his promises? On his wisdom? Are you building your life on Jesus? Because in the end, nothing else will stand. Not your health, nor your illustrious career, not a paid off mortgage or retirement savings or your group of mates at the pub; not your kingdom, only his kingdom will stand. In the end if your life isn't built on Jesus Christ then it's all for noth-

ing, like a beautiful mansion painstakingly built on a foundation of sand. A life built on the solid rock of Jesus Christ will stand for all eternity. You can build something truly great, a life that resounds into eternity by making an everlasting contribution to the kingdom of God. Why not spend some time right now praying and planning for exactly this?