

April 9, 2017 by Steve Brandon

Passion Week

Matthew 21-25



Passion Week (Sunday - Thursday)
Matthew 21-28

1. Triumph (21:1-11)
2. Exposure (21:12-22)
3. Opposition (21:23-22:46)
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As I begin this morning, I want to tell you how this was a momentous week for me. I turned 50 years old this week on Tuesday. And when I came home from church on Tuesday, I was greeted by a great surprise in the front of our house. A "Happy Birthday" banner made out of a stack of Mountain Dew cans lined up against the wall. Upon closer inspection, I could see the intricate care that someone took with these cans. The cans spelled out, "50" in red and blue. There also were exactly 50 cans (5 rows high by 10 rows across).

I have yet to figure out who it was that put this together. But I thank you for the work you put into it. I appreciate the love that you showed me. I appreciate the happiness that you instilled into my life at the moment I saw the cans. Because, once you turn 50 years old, you are over the hill, and your death is closer than ever before.

Turning 50 has caused me a bit of reflection. I wrote about it on my blog. I'm not going to read it for you today, but you can read it on www.stevebrandon.com.

One of my high school friends happened to read my blog. He sent me a Facebook message. Mind you, it has been decades since I have corresponded with him. He wrote this: "Steve, I enjoy reading your blog posts when I see them on FB, the most recent being the one about turning 50. I'm not religious, but I appreciate the way that you talk about universal issues in a way that connects to people. Best wishes for you and your family, and keep up the good work."

You never know the ways that your efforts to communicate the gospel will be received. I would encourage you to be about the business of telling others of your great God!

This morning, we are not going to focus upon being 50. We are going to focus upon the Passion Week. That is, the week leading up to the death of Jesus.

When you survey the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) to look at the life of Christ chronologically, you see some interesting things. First of all, only three chapters in the gospels tell us anything the birth of Christ (Matthew 1-2; Luke 1). That's less than 4% of the gospels. When it comes to Christ's childhood, we have only one section (10 verses) in the gospels that tell us anything about the childhood of Jesus. Specifically, this passage is about when he stayed behind in Jerusalem after the Passover (Luke 2:41-50). When it comes to his life, we are told nothing from adolescence to the beginning of his ministry somewhere around 30 years of age.

That means, that Matthew, Mark, Luke and John dedicate less than 4% of their material to the life of Jesus before he was 30 years old. The vast majority of the gospels present the ministry of Jesus, which lasted some three years or so.

And what that tells us is that the gospels aren't strict biographies that seek to inform us of everything that took place in all of his life. But rather, they are focused interpretations of his life, informing us of those things that are most important. And you see by the volume of space dedicated to his ministry, that his teaching and his healing ministry is the most important thing we need to learn from Jesus.

But when you dig a bit further, you see that a third of the gospels are devoted to the last week of Jesus' life! This is 30 chapters out of 89 chapters. It's as if all of the writers wanted to focus our attention upon the most important time in the life of Jesus: his final days.

And in each of the gospels, it's not merely the quantity of text that leads us to see his final days as his most important. Jesus, himself, pointed to his final days as important. For instance, midway through the gospel of Luke, we read this. "When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem." That is, he was determined to get there. That was his goal. And several times in the gospels, Jesus repeatedly told his disciples what will happen in Jerusalem.

Consider Mark's account. Immediately after Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, Jesus ...

Mark 8:31

... began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly.

One chapter later, Jesus said this, ...

Mark 9:31

"The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise."

One chapter later, we read, ...

Mark 10:32-44

And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise."

Jesus knew that he had to get to Jerusalem, because it was there that he would die. He would die for us and for our sins. "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (

Mark 10:45). It is no accident, then, that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, all focus their attention upon the events surrounding his crucifixion. Because, this is where our hope lies! Our hope lies in the fact that Jesus came to give his life as a ransom for our sins. He paid our redemption price. We can enjoy eternity with God, only because of what Christ did on our behalf 2,000 years ago in Jerusalem.

And it is for that reason that the broad Christian church has taken time each year to focus their attention upon the final week of Jesus. In fact, so crucial is this week that specific names are given to some of these days. For instance, today is Palm Sunday, when we remember his entering into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Then there's "Maundy Thursday," when we remember the commandment that he gave us to love one another (John 13:35). And "Good Friday," when we remember his death. And "Holy Saturday," when the gospel writers are silent. And "Resurrection Sunday," when we remember his resurrection.

And, names have been given to the entire week. Sometimes the week is called, "Holy Week." The special week of the year. Sometimes the week is called, "Passion Week." The week that Jesus suffered for us. This morning, we are going to look at "Passion Week" from the gospel of Matthew.

We will begin in Matthew, chapter 21. And during this week, I want to issue a little challenge. I want to challenge you families to set aside some daily times this week in which to read through Passion Week in the gospel of Matthew.

The schedule is quite simple. A chapter each day. So, Sunday, we begin with Palm Sunday, and read Matthew 21. And tomorrow, read Matthew 22 together as a family. And on Tuesday, read Matthew 23 together. And so on and so on, until you climax with the resurrection (Matthew 28) on Sunday morning.

My challenge is for you to do this as a family. And so, my challenge is for the fathers. I want for you to take some leadership in your family, and consider when it would be best to do this all together. Every family is different. Perhaps this is in the morning at breakfast. Perhaps this is at dinner in the evening. Perhaps this is just before bed. Just find a time that would work best for your family. Talk with your wife to confirm that this would be the best time for all of you. Talk with your family of your plan.

And at the appointed time, summon your family for the daily Bible reading on that day. Read through the chapter, and offer up a short prayer. Each day should take no longer than 10 minutes. I think that doing so would enhance your family's engagement with God this week.

Personally, fathers, I think that such an event should take place in your home with some regularity--daily, if possible. It's called, "Family Worship." And if this isn't the habit of your family, or you have fallen out of the practice, perhaps this week will help to kick start your family in the practice once again.

So, my message this morning is entitled: Passion Week: Sunday-Thursday It comes from the first 5 chapters in the gospel of Matthew. Now, normally at Rock Valley Bible Church, we take a verse or a paragraph from the Bible and open it up, explaining it, interpreting it, and applying it.

Obviously, this morning, we are taking a bit more than one paragraph. We are taking five chapters from the gospel of Matthew. And in so doing, there is much that we will skip over. To read it out loud would take some 25-30 minutes to read. So, we aren't even going to read the entire passage before us.

But my aim is this: to walk you through the last week in the life of Jesus. This morning we are going to work from Sunday through Thursday. On Friday night we will gather here again for our Good Friday service (6:30pm-7:30pm). And we will look at what took place on Friday and Saturday. And next Sunday, we will look at the Resurrection. We will consider what took place on Sunday morning! And all of this will come from the gospel of Matthew. We are simply going to pull out lessons from the text as we go along.

I know that many of you have heard these stories before. But I want for you to hear them again. May the Lord encourage our hearts to hear these stories afresh.

Let's begin in Matthew 21. To help with some hooks upon which to hang my thoughts, here's my first point.

1. Triumph (21:1-11)

That's what Palm Sunday is often called--"The Triumphal Entry." It is the day in which Jesus rode into town on a donkey. Let's pick it up in verse 1, ...

Matthew 21:1-11

Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once." This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying,

"Say to the daughter of Zion,
'Behold, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'"

The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

Jesus was no stranger to Jerusalem. He had traveled there many times. He could have entered Jerusalem in much the same way that He had entered many times before. He could have simply walked into the city.

However, this time it was different. Jesus wanted to make a special entrance to display His kingship. He wanted to so enter Jerusalem in a manner that would make it clear to all who He claimed to be. He claimed to be the king! He claimed to be the Messiah!

For us in America, this is strange. We do things differently. When Donald Trump was formally installed at president a few months ago, he rode in a limousine along a parade route ending at the West Front of the U.S. Capitol, where he took the oath of office: "I do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States." This is the way in which we as a nation inaugurate our presidents. We don't parade our presidents on a donkey. But such was the sign of the Messiah in the days of Jesus.

Verse 5 is a quote from Zechariah 9:9, "'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'" And the city got the message! The crowds shouted out, ...

Matthew 21:9

... "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

The crowds were worshipping their king. The crowds were anticipating Jesus to come and overthrow the Roman tyranny and redeem Israel from their bondage (Luke 24:21). All was well! The crowds were excited! They could sense their freedom coming!

And what began on such a high note quickly turned sour. Here's my second point:

2. Exposure (21:12-22)

By "Exposure," I mean Jesus exposing the false religious leaders of the day. Look at verse 12, ...

Matthew 21:12-13

And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."

Can you imagine the scene! Jesus comes into the temple, the place of worship, and causes a stir! He overturns the tables and the chairs. And he drove the people out. He quotes from a few Old Testament Scriptures (Isaiah 56:7; Jeremiah 7:11): "'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."

I remember preaching on this passage a number of years back and doing the same thing. Rich Garden was sitting in the front row and was nearly hit by the table and some of the flying clipboards. He told me later, "I'm definitely not sitting in the front row when you speak about the crucifixion."

In taking such drastic action, Jesus was seeking to "expose" the false religion of his day. What was happening in the temple was not pleasing to the Lord. It was not what the Lord desired.

It leads to the natural question: What happens in this place of worship? What happens in our lives? Are we worshipping Jesus as he would have us to worship him? One thing I have noticed over the years is this: People don't like it when you expose their sin. You want to see people upset and angry, simply point out their sin. And duck.

Jesus was exposing the sin of the Pharisees and they didn't like it. In fact, they hated Jesus, even when he was doing wonderful things. Look at verse 14, ...

Matthew 21:14-16

And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant, and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read,
"'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies
you have prepared praise?'"

The Pharisees wanted his worship to stop. But Jesus, again quotes from the Old Testament (Psalm 8) to show how what was happening was right. It was right for the children to be singing the praise of Jesus.

It is right for us to sing the praise of Jesus, even when surrounded by a culture that resists the Lord. We must press on! This leads nicely to my third point, ...

3. Opposition (21:23-22:46)

You can see the opposition of the Pharisees in verse 23, ...

Matthew 21:23

And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?"

It doesn't take a lot to read through the lines and see that this question was meant to confront Jesus. The Scribes and Pharisees had complete authority over the temple. And now, Jesus was in the temple teaching things they hated. They wanted to remove him by confronting the issue of authority. And Jesus turns the tables so nicely.

Matthew 21:24-27

Jesus answered them, "I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?" And they discussed it among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet." So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

They wanted to remove Jesus. But they feared the crowds. And Jesus continued along.

In verse 33 and following, Jesus takes the offensive. He said, ...

Matthew 21:33-44

"Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.' And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons." Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:

"The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
this was the Lord's doing,
and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."

I love this story because it so clearly illustrates the gospel. It illustrates the kindness of God and the rebellion of his people. God was kind to give Israel a vineyard. He entrusted them with its care. He sent them prophets to direct them in the right way.

And yet, Israel wanted nothing of it. They killed the prophets (Matt. 23:30). When confronting Israel, Stephen said "Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?" The exception for a prophet was to experience a life of no persecution.

And yet, despite their great rebellion, God continued to demonstrate His patience to this rebellious nation by sending them more prophets and more prophets and more prophets. And Israel hated them, and beat them and stoned them and killed them. It was exactly as Jesus described it in His parable. You see the kindness of God on the one hand and you see the rebellion of Israel on the other. Yet, even in their rebellion, the Lord continued to demonstrate His patience to them, even sending his son, whom they killed!

But such was the plan of God.

Psalm 118:22, 23

"The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
this was the Lord's doing,
and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

The meaning of the parable was not lost on the Pharisees. They knew exactly what Jesus was saying:

Matthew 21:45-46

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.

And since they could arrest him because of the crowds, they sought another way. Look at chapter 22 and verse 15, ...

Matthew 22:15

Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words.

And so they asked Jesus some tricky questions.

First, the Herodians asked him about taxes, hoping to get him in trouble with Caesar (who demanded taxes) or with the Jews (who hated paying taxes).

Second, the Sadducees came and asked about the resurrection, hoping to show him the absurdity of it.

Third, an expert in the law asked him about the greatest commandment.

Now, in all of these questions, they weren't really seeking answers. They were trying to trip up Jesus with his words (22:15). Jesus didn't falter in any way.

Matthew 22:46

And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

In answering these questions, Jesus is amazing! I leave the study of his answers to your own study. Perhaps this week as you read through chapter 22, you can pause and reflect to understand the answers of Jesus.

But know this this: there are people who are like this today. People who have figured out the toughest of questions to ask. And they aren't interested in the answer! They are interested in tripping you up and making you look foolish! Hoping that you will come to doubt your faith and eventually deny it along with them.

So, stand your ground when such people come! You won't be able to answer with the wisdom of Jesus. But, the Spirit will help you in your weaknesses.

Let's move on. We have seen, ...

1. Triumph (21:1-11)
2. Exposure (21:12-22)
3. Opposition (21:23-22:46)

And now, we look at ...

4. Hypocrisy (23:1-39)

Chapter 23 is all about hypocrisy. The heart of the matter comes in verses 1-12.

Matthew 23:1-12

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

Here is the picture of hypocritical leaders. They love being seen as being righteous, when in fact, they are not! This isn't the first time that Jesus addressed hypocrisy. If you look back at Matthew 6, we see Jesus addressing hypocrisy in giving and in praying and in fasting.

Nothing kills genuine religion more than hypocrisy, and all of those around you can see it when it takes place.

Well, here is my last point, ...

5. Future (24:1-25:46)

Here we see instructions for the future. Jesus at this point is trying to tie up loose ends; to set things in order before he dies. , ...

Matthew 24:42-46

Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.

We see Jesus instructing to, "stay awake" and "be ready." And, later in chapter 25, we see the instruction, ...

Matthew 25:13

Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

We are to, "watch therefore." The time is near, so we are to be ready. Be about doing God's will.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on April 9, 2017 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.
