

Matthew 21-10-17a

Good morning, welcome to Grace in Church Bible, Grace in Church Bible Truth. On this Sunday morning, the 17th day of October 2021, we continue our study in the Gospel of Matthew. We're picking up this morning in chapter 21.

We're going to finish chapter 20, so we're at chapter 20, verse 29, and moving into chapter 21. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study, and we'll begin. Father, we're grateful for this time of fellowship.

We thank you for your many expressions of grace and faithfulness toward us, provision, protection, and we ask that you will be with us this morning, that your Holy Spirit will help us to understand the truth of your word and see its pertinence for our own lives. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

The portion we have come to in Matthew's Gospel, at chapter 20, verse 29, is the story of the healing of the two blind men or the one blind man, depending on which gospel you read. And it's a fascinating chance for us to see how God has chosen to compose his communication to us in the different gospels with an emphasis on their theme and their focus. So here in Matthew, it says, and you can't even get into the first half of the verse, it says, as they went out of Jericho, a great multitude followed him.

Well, if you go to the parallel accounts in Mark and Luke, it says that they were drawing near to Jericho. And this has resulted in no end of angst on the part of people who are trying to interpret this. So I want to read you a little bit of the typical response.

They think, well, how can he be entering and leaving? And what are the possible solutions to this problem? So there was an Old Testament Jericho that is different than the New Testament Jericho. The Jericho in Jesus' day was about 15 miles northeast of Jerusalem. You remember in ancient times when Joshua crosses and they march around the Old Testament city of Jericho, it was somewhat to the north.

And so one solution to this problem is that Jesus was leaving the Old Testament city and entering the New Testament city. There's another one that says, based on Luke, when you go to Luke, the blind man calling out at the end of chapter 18, as Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. That's Luke 18.35. Of course, ours says now as they went out of Jericho.

Now our scripture is either inspired or it's not. And this seems like a direct contradiction. If I'm entering Dallas, that's way different than if I'm leaving Dallas.

So as I say, there's just been an incredible amount of blood spilled over this. And Mark, on whom Luke seems to have relied, also says that Jesus was approaching Jericho. Mark is the one that gives us Bartimaeus' name, Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus.

So Matthew very clearly says, as they went out of Jericho. So we have to figure out what to say and do about this. Let me read you a little bit of just one commentary to tell you how much of a difficulty this seems to be.

The trouble is Matthew speaks of two blind men. Mark and Luke make mention of one whom Mark calls Bartimaeus. Also, according to Matthew and Mark, the miracle occurred as Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho and Luke as he drew near to Jericho.

As to the first difficulty, is it possible that Mark, who was Peter's interpreter, had heard only the story of Bartimaeus? Of course, this is not really a solution. It simply pushes the problem back a little from Mark and Luke, who read Mark, to Peter. On the other hand, the problem is not at all serious.

There is no real contradiction for neither Mark nor Luke tell us that Jesus restored sight only to the eyes of one blind man. For the rest, it must be admitted that we do not have the answer. We do not know why Mark wrote, and Peter, let us suppose, had spoken about Bartimaeus and not also about the other blind men.

Well, with all respect to people who are able to get commentaries published, it just seems like a case of give-up-it-is to say, well, we just don't know. I think the scriptures were written for us to understand, not to be confused. Here's where he talks about entering versus leaving.

As to the second problem, among the solutions that have been offered are the following. There were two Jerichos. Jesus, therefore, could have performed the miracle while he was leaving the one and entering the other.

B, one blind man was healed as Jesus entered Jericho. Another was healed as he left. C, Jesus entered the city, had passed through it, and was now leaving it.

While he was going out of the city, he saw Zacchaeus up in the tree. Remember, Zacchaeus is in the next chapter in Luke. Right after the blind man story in Luke, you have a whole chapter dedicated to Zacchaeus.

So while Jesus is going out of the city, he sees Zacchaeus up in the tree, told the publican to come down, and with Zacchaeus, he re-enters the city to lodge at the tax collector's home for the night. According to this solution, it was during the re-entry of the city that the miracle took place. Hence, Matthew and Mark can say that it was performed while he was leaving the city, Luke as he drew near to it.

All three solutions are open to objections, etc., etc., etc. So the reason I'm belaboring this just a little bit is when I first started seminary in Tulsa, at Tulsa Seminary of Biblical Languages, the hermeneutics text that we had, which is the study of Bible interpretation, was written by a man named Terry. And Glenn Carnegie, our pastor and president of the seminary, had selected this text.

And I will never forget the one line out of that book. It was very thin. You would think hermeneutics, most of the textbooks are quite thick.

It was very thin. And one thing that he said was, if the plain sense makes common sense, seek no other sense. You can just wrap yourself around the axle.

You can fall into the La Brea tar pits never to reemerge. And some things are just not that difficult. As you've heard me say before, I think this is what has happened with the doctrine of the Trinity.

I agonized through, I suffered through, an entire semester listening to a course on Trinitarianism on cassette. And I never wasted so much time in my life. The Trinity is really super simple.

It's not hard. It's not complicated. There are three separate and distinct persons.

When they cooperate, it's God incorporated. And you can talk about them in the singular. If you say Microsoft has a policy, or you might say Bill Gates or his current CEO or CFO or something.

Sometimes you talk about the corporation. Sometimes you talk about an individual if they are acting more or less independently. It's just not that hard.

Same thing here. And the reason I'm emphasizing this is you can read your own scriptures. You do not have to wait for me or anybody else to go in and decode the cryptology and decipher the Hebrew and the Greek.

The reason God has given us so many versions, so many copies that his word is ubiquitous is because the word is near. It is in our hearts. It is on our lips.

And it's just not that hard. So my suggestion is when you come to something like this and you say, hey, wait a minute, this looks like a contradiction. Or somebody brings it up and says it's a contradiction.

The first thing is look at the context. What is the bigger picture here? We saw this last time looking at this structure that began with the end of chapter 19 and talking about how interested are you in following Christ? How interested are you in recognizing who he is, why he came? What is his present mission? What is his future mission? Where is greatness? Greatness is in priority. The rich man at the end of Matthew 19, it's a priority story, right? He's wanting to know how to have an inheritance, how to enter the kingdom and so on.

And Jesus says, well, is your priority your riches? Uh, you've been obedient, but it's not simple obedience that secures inheritance. It is righteousness by faith. And you can avoid sin.

The commandments are the thou shalt nots, right? Most of them are thou shalt nots. All these I have kept from my youth. I have avoided, you know, any kind of serious sin.

And Jesus says, one thing you lack, prove your priorities. This is not a requirement for Christianity that you divest yourself of your goods and give them to the poor and go out on a singular mission of following Christ. But for this man to show him his problem, to out his problem and his problem, his priorities, Jesus says, sell what you have, give it to the poor, come follow me.

And he goes away sorrowing because while he was interested in the kingdom, while he was obedient, he wasn't willing to put God and the Lord Jesus and following him first. It's up there, but it's not first. So it's a matter of priorities and to subsume our desires, our comforts, in some cases, our wishes and goals to subsume those to subordinate them to God's.

This is the theme in this section of Matthew. So when we came into chapter 20 and we saw the answer that Jesus gives to Peter, we've left all and followed you. And Jesus says, look, when you have made this the priority above your business, above your family, you are going to be great in the kingdom.

Then he tells the story of the workers in the vineyard. And he says, one key to establishing and maintaining and observing this priority is don't get your eyes on other people. And so the parable of the workers in the vineyard, if you have the job of working all day in the field and you understand that the landowner is a good individual and is going to keep his end of the bargain, that's between you and him.

To look around and say, well, others are working less hard. Others haven't borne the heat of the day, is off the mark. Peter has his eyes on the rich man and says, well, he's not willing to leave his stuff.

We have left our stuff. So what's in it for us? In the parable of the landowner and the people who work all the day, part of the day or one hour of the day, the goodness of the master, we focus on his goodness to us and we don't get into comparisons and this helps us keep that priority in order. Then after that, Jesus says, we are going to Jerusalem and the son of man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes.

They will condemn him to death and deliver him to the Gentiles to mock and discourage. He's telling this to men who have seen Jesus control the wind and the wave, who have seen him multiply bread, who have seen him heal the sick and raise the dead, who have seen Peter, James, and John have seen him glorified on the Mount of Transfiguration with Moses and Elijah. And for Jesus to say that he is going to be delivered into the hands of men and overcome and killed just does not compute.

Why? They still don't understand this matter of priority. You go all the way back to

Abraham with Isaac on the top of the mountain and what God demonstrates with Abraham when he says, put Isaac on the altar is Abraham's priority was pleasing God, believing his promises even unto death. And for Abraham, he would have rather killed himself than killed his future hope, his miraculous son that he has at the age of a hundred years.

But the whole purpose of that story is not that God is bloodthirsty. It is to demonstrate that Abraham, the reason he is the father of those of faith in every generation is because of his faith. And because of that priority, even when he can't understand what God is going to do, he trusts that God knows what he's doing.

That's the theme here. So Jesus is going to his death in Jerusalem. He says, we are going to Jerusalem.

I am going to be arrested, tried, mocked, scourged, and killed. He doesn't mention what's going to happen to them. And to their credit, they don't say, well, what about us? As long as we're going to be okay.

They just don't understand it at all. Then you have the, the Salome, James and John question about greatness, greatness without any connection to what is the basis for greatness. So Jesus explains that.

So now we are at the blind men as they went out of Jericho, a great multitude followed him. So back to my point, if I think the reason that we have this issue of, is he entering or is he leaving? Look how much attention it draws to this story of the healing of the blind in Matthew, in Mark and in Luke. And by extension, it draws us into John, because this is the key to understanding chapter 21 and the quote unquote, triumphal entry.

It is the key and is a key piece of information in understanding this entire section. So our attention is drawn to it. I think God sometimes must have, I just imagine he's got just a slight smile on his face when he puts something like this in his word.

And what we don't want to do is, is go off on a tangent and miss the message in the book, whether it is Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. So keeping in mind the theme, there's really like the Trinity, there's not a big issue here. As they went out of Jericho, a great multitude followed him.

There is a great multitude following Jesus, uh, ever since he left Perea. Remember he's been in Perea, it's the Perea ministry. That's Transjordan, that is, uh, north and east of Jerusalem on the east side of the Jordan.

He is heading toward Jerusalem. He's going to cross the Jordan and the first large city he comes to is Jericho. So he has crossed the Jordan and he has come to Jericho.

As soon as he draws near, people realize who's coming and a large crowd gathers before

he ever gets to Jericho. This crowd follows him from the Jordan into Jericho through or around Jericho and back out. So there are two stories that occur at Jericho.

One is Zacchaeus, one is Bartimaeus. So looking at the Bartimaeus story, which is before us, it says, as they went out of Jericho, all right, if you go over to Mark, this is going to be Mark chapter 10 verse 46 through 52. It's not that hard to figure out what has happened.

It says in verse 46, they came to Jericho as he went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great multitude. So he comes to Jericho and then Mark says, as they went out, when you go over to the parallel in Luke 18, you can keep one finger in Matthew, one in Mark and turn over to Luke 18 verse 35. Then it happened as he was coming near Jericho that a certain blind man sat by the road begging.

He's coming near Jericho. All this is saying in Luke, you know, Mark and Matthew agree that the miracle occurs as he's leaving the city. All Luke says is as Jesus was coming near Jericho, he has come from the Jordan.

He's coming near the city. Bartimaeus is already sitting on the far side of the city begging. He's been there all day.

It's probably something he does every day. So as he's coming near Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the road begging, he hears the multitude passing by. So Jesus enters the city.

Like Mark says, he passes through or around the edge of the city and Bartimaeus hears all of the noise. The two beggars blind men hear the noise. And by the time they are able to get Jesus attention, he has passed by.

Jericho is not that large and is on his way out. And so by the time the conversation takes place and by the time the healing takes place, Jesus is no longer entering Jericho. He's leaving it.

And this is going to be after, if you look in Mark, in Luke rather in chapter 19, it says, then Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. So he was going to pass Jericho by. He comes into the city, he goes through, and as he's leaving, the blind man healing takes place.

This turns Jesus around. Why? When you look at the conclusion of the story in any one of the gospels, especially in Mark, go your way, your faith has made you well. Immediately, he received his sight and followed Jesus on the road.

In Matthew, Jesus had compassion and touched their eyes. Immediately, their eyes received sight and they followed him. In Luke, you have in verse 43, he received his sight, followed him glorifying God.

And all the people, when they saw gave praise to God. So the miracle generates praise to God. Jesus, although he had passed Jericho, now he turns around and goes back into the city and you have the Zacchaeus episode.

This is not the first time this has happened where Jesus was going to pass by, but then something happens. There is an appeal. There is a need and he turns around.

You remember in Mark 6, verse 47, when evening came, the boat was in the middle of the sea and Jesus was alone on the land. Remember, he has fed the multitude. He sent the disciples ahead.

He's on the mountain praying and then he's walking on the water. When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the sea and Jesus was alone on land. He could see, this is Mark 6, 48, that the disciples were straining to row because the wind was against them.

About the fourth watch of the night, Jesus went out to them. Fourth watch of the night. First watch is six to nine.

Second watch is nine to 12. Third watch is 12 to three. And the fourth watch of the night is three to six.

So they've, he sent them into the boat and they started across before dark. And they've been out there all night rowing, trying to get across the lake. So Jesus went out to them walking on the sea.

He intended to pass them by Mark 6, 48. You can write it in the margin next to any or all of these references about the blind men. But when they saw him walking on the sea, they cried out thinking it was a ghost and Jesus turns around and comes to the boat.

He was going to leave them to row the rest of the way. He intended to pass them by. That's what scripture says.

They cry out. They get his attention. They say, we're in distress.

And Jesus changes his intention and comes to the boat in the city of Jericho. Jesus intends to pass it by. He's already come to it.

He's passed through it. He is leaving it. The blind men draws attention.

The people praise God. He turns around, sees Zacchaeus in the tree, enters the city and eats at Zacchaeus's house. You remember the story Zacchaeus was a wee little man and I'm, I'm going to your house today.

And Jesus shares a meal at Zacchaeus's house, which is in Jericho. And that takes place after the healing of the blind men. So in all cases, he's entering, he leaves, he re-enters the city.

So all this does is focus our attention on the blind man story. And so that's what we want to do now. I just give that as an example that a little bit of attention to detail and a little bit of observing context, nine times out of 10, you can solve these for yourself.

So back to our Matthew 20, 29, as they went out of Jericho, a great multitude followed him. The same multitude that followed him as he approached the same multitude that the blind men heard as he goes all the way through the city. You can hear the roar of a crowd.

I remember living about a half a mile or more from a high school, but we could hear the marching band practicing in the afternoon after school, because of the drums and the, the marching of the feet and all the rest of it. You could hear them at a great distance. These blind men have got very acute hearing, so they can hear the tumult and the crowd noise all the way through town.

A great multitude followed him and look two blind men sitting by the road. This, this is so amusing to me in verse 30, you need to behold these blind men who can't behold. All they can do is listen.

Look, blind men. It's, it's kind of a conceptual pun. Why is behold even in the, in the sentence? Because we're supposed to focus on this issue of sight versus no sight.

The disciples are traveling with Jesus. What do they see? Do they see a king on his throne and want to sit at his side? Or do they see the suffering servant who has emphasized to them that he is going to Jerusalem to have all these horrible things happen to him? When you look, what do you see? So we are exhorted in verse 30 to look, not just look at the story of the blind men, but to look at what it means and to look at this theme in this section of Matthew. What are our priorities? Do we go along to get along? Do we look to our own comfort and security by our own strength and by our own means, or do we truly rest in the promise and the provision of God? God will occasionally test us to out what those priorities are.

And testing is not necessarily joyous at the time, but it does show us where we are. This is why we have tests or we used to have in academia. When you take classes, you have quizzes, you have nine weeks tests, you have midterms, you have tests along.

How are you doing? Are you building the foundation that the rest of the course is going to build on from their tests? It's a status check. This is why ham radio people get on and just shoot the breeze on ham radio. Is my antenna connected correctly? Am I making a good signal? Can others hear me? Can I hit the repeater? Can I communicate when the chips are down? I don't want to be dusting off my radio and wondering if it works.

And so there's regular and frequent practice. Are my procedures correct? Am I doing the things that the FCC requires? Regular practice, regular testing, regular checkups,

habituation to these things is key. And in the spiritual realm, it is easy to fool ourselves into thinking that we are doing better than we really are.

Now, I am amused, I shared with you some weeks ago, the predictable irrationality that we have, where we believe that we are going to do things in a certain amount of time. And they had college students operate, they gave them a choice at the beginning of the semester. Would you like a plan where there will be fixed tests and fixed assignment due dates during the course? If so, I will give you a schedule.

And this is when I will administer your tests and require you to hand in your papers. Or would you like a free form class where you set your own deadlines? And as long as you get all the work in by the end of the semester, it will be graded accordingly. Which one do you want? So some of the students chose the structured plan, some of them chose the I will do my own thing plan.

Universally, the people with the do it my own way plan thought that they were going to do better that way, that their grades would be better because they would have flexibility to polish their papers to a high shine and turn them in without having to rush to a deadline. All of those students did more poorly in the course than the ones who worked under the structure and used the pressure of those deadlines to get their work done on time to sequence it and to find out where they were in the course. And if they were understanding the material and get feedback from the professor, those students did markedly better than the ones who tried the free form approach.

You know, the old Anison commercial from when I was a kid, the lady gets all out of sorts and says, I'd rather do it myself. And of course, she's got a headache and she's cranky and she needs Anison. We often think we're doing fine and we're not.

And we need testing. We need a checkup. And God is going to give checkups to those of us who care enough to respond to the feedback.

That's what's happening here. And this is an example. These blind men are put for those in Israel.

You've got two different categories of Israelites here. You've got the crowd and you've got the blind men. So as they went out of Jericho, a great multitude followed him and look, two blind men.

Are the blind men like the crowd or not like the crowd? The crowd has been celebratory. They've been noisy. They've been enthusiastic.

They've been following Jesus ever since he set foot on their side of the Jordan. They followed him into town, followed him through town. They're following him out of town.

They can see him. Why are they celebrating him? This goes back to this anticipation

that's going to come in the next chapter that he is the king and he's going to throw off the hard bondage that they're suffering under the Romans. But look, two blind men.

They are not following him. They are not seeing him, but they call out have mercy on us. Oh, Lord, son of David, compare the attitude of the crowd.

And by extension, what we've seen earlier, the attitude of the disciples, there's greatness coming. There are chairs and thrones coming. There is glory coming.

I see the Lord Jesus. I see him in his glorious rule. I want to be a part of that being on top.

The blind men can't see Jesus. They know that he's there and they cry out for mercy. Two completely different dynamics at work.

Everybody is appreciating Jesus. You think about this Sunday morning, you think about the churches across America in whatever form they are meeting. Are there any reasonably rational Christian churches that aren't celebrating Jesus this morning? Everybody says, praise the Lord.

Everybody sings songs of praise. Everybody has a message. I'd say almost everybody has a message that comes from somewhere in the Bible and in some way appreciates God and appreciates the Lord Jesus.

That's the common denominator. But look, here's real greatness as Jesus has just been describing in the last several sections that we reviewed. These men recognize their need and Jesus as the answer to their need.

Sitting on each side of the Lord in his glory. Is that a need? Do I need to be there? Celebrating Jesus and wanting to make him king. This has been happening ever since he fed the multitude.

It's going to happen in the next chapter in Matthew. Is this a need? These men are conscious of their need, recognize their need, and they recognize Jesus for who he is as the answer to their need. That's the attitude Jesus is looking for.

So they cry out saying, have mercy on us. Oh Lord, son of David, son of David. This is a messianic term.

You're not sure what the people in the crowd are celebrating. We're not told, but we know what these men recognize him for. The multitude warned them that they should be quiet.

Why? We are supposed to see the contrast here. Why wouldn't the multitude, if they recognize who Jesus is for real, why wouldn't they say, bring the blind men to Jesus? Let's watch him do another miracle. Let's, let's see the glory of God at work.

Why are they shushing the blind men? Doesn't fit the scenario. They want triumph. They want glory.

They want celebration. They want excitement. They don't want the ugly side showing that there is need, that there's blindness, that there's something that needs fixing.

And this really draws out the contrast because the multitude warned them, rebuked them that they should be quiet. Don't spoil the image. Don't spoil the moment.

But the blind men are having none of that. They cry out all the more have mercy on us. Oh Lord, son of David.

So Jesus stood still and called them. Now they're blind men. Could Jesus have gone all the way to them and said, well, I don't want them to have to discommode themselves or get up or have an occasion for stumbling or whatever.

Jesus doesn't come to the blind men. He stands still and called them. They have a choice at that point.

They can listen to the crowd or they can listen to Jesus. Jesus stands still. The blind men have to get up and make their way to Jesus.

Even in their blindness, there is a way for them to approach. They can hear the call. This has such tremendous meaning.

When you think about the Calvinist argument that no man can come unless my father draws him and Jesus stands still, the blind men make it to Jesus all by themselves. The crowd's not helping. The crowd's shushing them.

They had the ability to respond to the call of Jesus. And this is no accident. We have the ability to respond to this call.

We think, well, I'm just not made of the cloth that the great believers of the faith, the great Christians of history are made of. I'm average. No, you're not.

The key to accessing God's power is to recognize our need. It is not by our might. It is not by our power.

It is by God's spirit, God's power, saith the Lord. And the more fully we acknowledge our need and go to God with it, the faster, quicker, and more effectively, his power is going to enter our lives. It is listening to this word.

It is responding to the spirit that brings the power of God into our lives. And this is central here. This piece, you can't understand the parade that is coming up in the next chapter without understanding this pericope, this story right here.

And we're going to continue looking at it in just a moment, but we're going to pause here and take our break.