

The Scandalous Challenge of a Unique Authority

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[0 : 0 0] So we're now going to turn to our Bible reading. Willie Philip, our senior minister, is continuing his series through Matthew's Gospel.

And this morning we're going to be turning to chapter 21. And we'll read together all the way through to verse 32. So Matthew chapter 21.

Remember the reading we had last week finished with Jesus healing two blind men. And finished verse 34.

And Jesus in pity touched their eyes and immediately they recovered their sight and followed him. 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'll 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 of the prophet saying, Say to the daughter of Zion, Behold, your king is coming to you, humble and mounted on a donkey and on a colt, the fall of a beast of burden.

[1 : 2 9] 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 roads and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the roads.

And the crowds went before him and that followed him were saying, Hosanna to the son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

Hosanna in the highest.

It's written, my house shall be a house of prayer, but you make it a den of robbers. 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?

[2 : 5 3] And Jesus said to them, Yes. Have you never read? Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies, you have prepared praise. And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there.

In the morning, as he was returning to the city, he became hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the wayside, he went to it and find nothing on it, but only leaves. And he said to it, May no fruit ever come from you again.

And the fig tree withered at once. When the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, How did the fig tree wither at once?

And Jesus answered them, Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, be taken up and thrown into the sea, it will happen.

And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive if you have faith. 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?

[4 : 12] And who gave you this authority? 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.

What do you think? A man had two sons, and he went to the first and said, Son, go and work in the vineyard today. And he answered, I will not.

But afterward, he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, I go, sir, but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?

[5 : 27] They said, The first. Jesus said to them, Truly I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.

For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him. But the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.

Well, amen. This is God's words, and we'll return to it again shortly. Well, do turn with me, if you would, to the passage that Josh read for us there in Matthew chapter 21.

And as we began with the last line of chapter 20 there, we saw that wonderful irony last time, didn't we? That what the religious Pharisees couldn't see because their hearts were so hard, what many others couldn't see because they were taken up with the things of this world, like the rich man with all of his wealth, what even the disciples couldn't yet see clearly either.

Because their minds were still full of ideas of this world's rewards, this world's rule, this world's glory. What none of these people could really see, these blind beggars could see.

[7 : 03] Who says that God doesn't have a sense of humor? And this crowd here tries to shut them up in verse 31, but they loudly go on proclaiming, Jesus is Lord.

Jesus is God's Messiah King. And they showed, don't they, the way to true discipleship, which is following Jesus. Whereas I think we're a bit ringing around here. The king who stooped to serve them, the king who stooped to save them, receives now their total loyalty, their total homage.

Because they see, don't they, the real Jesus Christ. And they submit to follow and to serve the real Jesus. And now here in chapter 21, we see this theme of blindness and sight continuing.

And indeed it comes towards a climax because there's blindness of two different kinds in view here. There's blindness that's still confused and wants to see, wants to understand, but there's a more sinister blindness.

There are those who will not see, even when the light is shined plainly in their eyes, to make them want to see. They're determined still to be blind to the truth about Jesus Christ.

[8 : 31] And that's what chapter 21 here is really all about. It illustrates with sharp clarity the words that Jesus quoted back in chapter 13, verse 13.

You will hear, but never understand. You will indeed see, but never perceive. For this people's hearts are hard.

and have grown dull. Some people, when given even all the light in the world, choose to remain blind.

Choose not to see the truth about Jesus Christ as Lord. Why? Well, the answer is that it's all about authority.

A unique identity for Jesus means a unique authority for Jesus, an authority that demands complete surrender. Surrender in the world of organized religion, and surrender in the world of personal obedience.

[9 : 37] Of course, that's the problem, because that's the thing that autonomous human nature, in control of our own thinking, and our own behavior, and our own worship, and our own destiny. That's the thing that we will not do.

The most basic instinct in the human heart is summed up by that slogan, festooned on all those murals in Ulster. No surrender. No surrender.

No surrender to any God, other than the one who bows to my autonomy, and my free choice to live my life the way I choose. And certainly, no surrender to a unique claim of Jesus Christ.

Human nature has not changed in 2,000 years. And the issue then, as is the issue today, is this issue of a scandalous challenge, of a unique authority over our lives.

And that's what this chapter is all about. It's all of a piece, but we're going to examine it under three headings. And the first is this, revelation and reckoning. And this chapter, especially the first 16 verses, give powerful revelation of the unique lordship of Jesus, as God's Messiah, as his Christ, as his King.

[10 : 50] It's the climax of the whole ministry that he had proclaimed to Israel. Behold, your King. This is he of whom all the prophets have spoken since the beginning.

And Jesus' whole ministry has given repeatedly incontrovertible evidence of his unique identity, and therefore, of course, of his unique authority as the Son of God. Verse 1 here shows Jesus moving to the end of his public ministry.

He's arrived in Jerusalem to complete his work. In previous times, he'd come quietly. He told others not to trumpet his presence. But here, there must now be public proclamation.

So that, as the apostles could say later on, this thing was not done in a corner. This is supremely public. And the point here is that Jesus is publicly challenging the whole of Israel and still offering himself to them as a savior.

And it's a very dramatic, it's a very public act of revelation. Acting out the fulfillment of a very well-known prophecy right in the public glare, right in the nation's capital.

[12 : 07] Look at verse 4. This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet. Actually, there are two acted out prophecies here. And the first is one that everyone there would recognize.

Matthew's telling us in verse 2, isn't he, that Jesus was quite deliberate in his actions. Getting the donkey so that riding into Jerusalem, he is deliberately identifying himself with the words of the prophet Zechariah in Zechariah 9 verse 9.

And that's what's quoted here in verse 5. Now notice what this quote from the prophet emphasizes. First of all, the humility of this king.

Behold your king humble and mounted on a donkey. He's a king coming now, not on a charger to make war, but as an already triumphant conqueror who's now coming humbly, offering peace, offering mercy.

He's humble, gentle. It's the same word Jesus uses in chapter 11 verse 29 where he says, come to me, I will give you rest because I am gentle and lowly of heart.

[13 : 13] It's redolent, isn't it, of the prophet Isaiah, his humble servant of God. That again was spoken of Jesus back in chapter 12. A bruised reed he will not break until he brings justice to victory.

And in his name will the Gentile nations hope. He is the servant king and he's coming bringing peace and salvation to the world. But second, although Matthew quotes only part of the verse here to focus on the donkey to explain that, the whole chapter from Zechariah, chapter 9, that they would know so well is all about salvation.

All Jesus' readers, Matthew's readers would know that. All of those who are there on the day watching Jesus would know that. Here's the whole verse. Behold your king is coming to you righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey.

And he goes on, his rule shall be from sea to sea, from the river to the very ends of the earth. You see, salvation to the very ends of the earth. And he goes on further, as for you, Israel, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free.

See, the king is coming, isn't he, to be the savior of the whole world, but he is coming first to Israel, to his covenant people, because he's Israel's Messiah first. But the question is, will Israel receive him?

[14 : 47] There's another interesting thing about this quote in verse 5. In Zechariah chapter 9, if you look at it, it begins like this, rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion. Behold, your king is coming, and so on.

But here, look, it says, see, say to the daughters of Zion, say to the daughters, in other words, proclaim to them. Now, Matthew hasn't made a mistake here. He's splicing it together with another very similar word from Isaiah, in Isaiah chapter 62, where Isaiah says, say to the daughter of Zion, behold, your salvation comes.

And Matthew is doing that to emphasize that this whole episode is a word of real challenge to Israel, to Jerusalem. Say to Israel, proclaim, here is your Messiah, here is your salvation.

He's coming as king, he's coming as a savior of all the nations, but he's coming to you first, bringing salvation, bringing reward. So what are you going to do?

How are you responding to this powerful, incontrovertible revelation of the unique kingly identity of Jesus? That's the key issue, you see, because with all revelation comes a reckoning.

[16 : 00] Every revelation of God to man is for a purpose. And here, Jerusalem is being confronted unmistakably with Jesus' unique identity and fulfillment of all God's promised words.

And therefore, Israel is being forced to reckon with Jesus and his unique authority. And we see it again, clearly, in verses 12 to 14, in a second, acted out vividly, fulfilled prophecy in the temple cleansing.

Now, already several times, Jesus has alluded in his ministry to John the Baptist and to the fact that John the Baptist had come in fulfillment of the prophet Malachi. Malachi had said, remember, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes, a new Elijah figure will come.

And remember, back in chapter 17, Jesus said, in the time of the transfiguration to his disciples, he has come, Elijah. It was John the Baptist. And what did Malachi promise would follow on from the ministry of that messenger who prepared the way?

Well, then he said, after that, the Lord himself, whom you seek, will come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight.

[17 : 20] He is coming. But then he goes on, doesn't he, and says, but you're going to have a terrible shock when he does come. Because he's coming as a refiner's fire to purify, to cleanse.

I will draw near to you, he says, for judgment. And who can endure the day of his coming? Who will be left standing when he appears?

Because you see, the day of the Lord, according to all the prophets, yes, is the day of salvation, but also, it's the day of God's judgment. And you see, that is exactly, isn't it, what Jesus is acting out so vividly here.

In his highly symbolic cleansing of the temple. His coming means a cleansing fire. The Old Testament prophecies are full of that language about the day of the Lord.

A day of renewal, a day of purging of his temple. Read Ezekiel chapter 40 onwards. Read Zechariah chapter 6. The very end, the very last verse of the prophet Zechariah says this, there shall no longer in that day be a traitor in the house of the Lord of hosts.

[18 : 33] Well, here is the Lord of the temple coming to his own house. Look at verse 13. He doesn't ask permission, does he? He claims it as his house. My house, says Jesus, will be called the house of prayer.

Quoting from Isaiah 56 and also from Jeremiah chapter 7. No longer will it be a den of robbers as you have constantly made it. Because at last, the great day of the Lord has come, bringing salvation, but also bringing judgment on everything that defiles.

And that's why all the prophets called Israel to repent in readiness for that day. That was John the Baptist's great cry, wasn't it? Repent. The very last words of the Old Testament through Malachi said that the new Elijah who would come before that day dawned, he would come to turn the hearts of the people, to cause them to repent, to bow the knee before God.

Or else, said the Lord, if they don't, I come to strike the land with a decree of utter destruction. So Jesus is saying, which is it to be?

John had come, as promised, he'd called them to repent. What response had there been to the preaching of John? Because now, the day of reckoning has come. The Lord has come to his temple.

[19 : 58] What does he find when he comes? That brings us to our second heading. What he found was rebellion and rejection.

Because for the most part, Israel had not repented. Rather, so often, all through her history, she'd showed a spirit of perverse rebellion, a refusal to submit to the authority of God's word.

God's word. They loved their temple. They loved its ceremony. They loved its comforting presence in their lives. So many people today love their churches, love their cathedrals.

Never go to them. But of course, if they're going to be shut down, oh, they're in outrage. They love them. Like to see them. But this people's heart, although they loved its temple, their heart was far from the Lord.

They ignored all his real authority over their lives. And it was just empty religion. The temple just reflected what was true of all their lives.

[21 : 01] They robbed God and they robbed others. And that phrase there in verse 13, a den of robbers, it comes from Jeremiah, the prophet's temple sermon in Jeremiah 7 and 8.

Centuries before, the Lord's prophet had stood in the temple and he'd spoken the truth from God and he'd said to the people then, don't think all your pious words are going to save you. They chanted, oh, the temple of the Lord.

This is the temple of the Lord. So it was a mantra, so it was a sort of lucky charm. And people sometimes think just repeating the name of Jesus or wearing a crucifix or blubbering religious platitudes, as though that had any traction at all with God.

No, listen to how God spoke to the people then through the prophet Jeremiah. Behold, he said, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal and murder and commit adultery and swear falsely and make offerings to Baal and go after other gods that you've not known and then come and stand before me in this house which is called by my name and say, oh, we're delivered.

And then go on doing all these abominations. Has this house which is called by my name become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, says the Lord.

[22 : 23] What he's saying to them is you need to repent. As he goes on in Jeremiah chapter 8, no one does repent. In fact, he says the prophets and the priests, all the clergy of the day, oh, they're saying to you, yes, peace, peace, it's all fine.

But God says they're wrong, there's no peace. And their religion is utterly empty. It's devoid of any real spiritual fruit. There are no grapes on the vine, says the Lord.

There are no figs on the tree. Even the leaves are withered. And what I gave them has passed away from them. That was Jeremiah's words hundreds of years before.

That was Israel's constant story. It was the people who paid lip service to God, but that was all. It was a guilt-edged temple, but it was hiding barren and empty devotion.

And now, it's too late. Almost too late. John the Elijah had come to call them again, to turn their hearts in repentance.

[23 : 32] Had they listened? No. Even the incontrovertible revelation of Jesus himself, the Messiah King, in multiple ways. Ways that no Israelite could possibly fail to recognize.

And even when forced into a face-to-face reckoning with the Christ, as we have in this chapter, even then, he's met just with rebellion and rejection.

Verse 10, look, the whole city stirred up by his public arrival. But look at verse 11. They're still utterly blind, aren't they? Yes, the pilgrim band all around Jesus in verse 9 are shouting, here's the Christ, here's the Messiah, the Son of David.

They're quoting from Psalm 118, shouting, Hosanna, Lord, save us. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. And they're pointing to Jesus and they say, there he is, the great hope of whom all the prophets spoke.

He's come at last. He's come to save. But what do the crowd say in verse 11? Who's this? It's just that Nazarene prophet from Galilee.

[24 : 41] He's not from Judah. He's not from Bethlehem. He's not the Messiah. He's just a man and a Nazarene at that, one of those scum. He's no big deal. That's what they're saying.

They reject him. Without even bothering to look into the evidence, correct all their mistaken assumptions, which are quite wrong, aren't they, about where he's actually come from.

But I find that that's so often just the same today. There's so many people who just reject the claims of Jesus without even bothering to investigate, without even bothering to read the Bible, without even bothering to seek out a church that will teach them the gospel so they can make an informed decision.

But here there's worse, isn't there, than just ignorance. Verse 15, there's indignance. When the priests and the scribes see all the wonderful things that he did, all the undeniable evidence, healing multitudes, incontrovertible proof of his identity, when they hear the proclamation of his identity, he's the son of God, he's the Messiah.

And their response, they were indignant. They're outraged. And they say to Jesus in verse 16, do you hear what they're saying? And Jesus says, yes, can't you?

[26 : 04] Haven't you ever read Psalm 8? They're doing exactly what that psalm spoke of. Chanting the praise of me as the majestic Lord of heaven and earth. These infants can see it.

But you clergy, you're utterly blind. Why this blindness? Well, of course, it's because, isn't it, to see and to recognize who he really is, to see his real unique identity, means that you must bow to his unique authority.

It means you must submit to him as the Lord of everything. And that was, and that still is, the scandal of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. It means a submission.

It means a complete surrender. Surrender to the control of your whole life. To his authoritative word, to direct all your thinking, all your priorities, all your deeds, all your devotion, everything.

Jesus is Lord of all. And of course, that's what human nature can't stand. We can't stand that Jesus and his word must rule our lives and must tell us our business, must tell us how to think, how to behave, how to order our whole life.

[27 : 22] When we're faced with that challenge, so often, we just say, no, no surrender. And people say that all the time, don't they? Maybe it's what you've been saying.

Certainly, it's what we see here in verses 23 to 32. Look at that second half of our reading. These chief priests, these elders, these epitome of the pious, they cannot stomach the challenge of Jesus and his clear authority.

And so they challenge him, who gave you this authority? How dare you tell us what to do? Do you know who we are? We are the religious establishment. We're the experts, Jesus. It's ironic, isn't it?

How little changes in human societies. There's just exactly the same kind of establishment mantras that we hear all the time from the political and media elites today.

It won't break any rivals. Nobody will challenge their establishment view of things. Whether it's about transgenderism, or whether it's about COVID, or climate change, or anything else, or Christianity.

[28 : 29] No, no, no. You can't claim that Jesus is unique and authoritative. He's just one among many. We'll tolerate your Christianity if it doesn't get above itself, if it just fits in with all the rest. Nothing too extreme.

Certainly nothing unique. And of course, you see, the mainstream established church reflects exactly the same human hubris and autonomy.

We'll decide how to handle God's word. We'll change it and admit and ignore bits that don't fit in with our narrative. In fact, we're the ones who rule over God's word.

It's just the same here. But you see, Jesus is not a politician. He doesn't just evade the question, verse 24. Jesus is a king and a judge.

And he is asserting his own authority. Jesus is not in the dock. Jesus is the one posing the questions. I will pose a question to you, he says. And he exposes them totally, doesn't he?

[29 : 31] Verse 25. What about John? Was John real? Or was John a phony? And that is a rapier thrust, isn't it? And they are skewered. And they know that they are.

They know they've rejected John. They say it themselves, admitted to each other. They didn't believe John. But they are just politicians, you see, very concerned with their public image. They can't say John's real.

Otherwise, they'll have to admit that Jesus is the one that John was speaking about and bow down to him. But they can't say he's just phony either because they lose all public respect. And so, what do they say in verse 17?

We don't know. We don't know. It's pathetic, isn't it? But they're exposed, you see. Actually, agnosticism is always just a cloak for unbelief.

They're just unbelievers. They've admitted it. Verse 25, they didn't believe John because they didn't want the implications of belief.

[30 : 35] They didn't want to have to bow down to the unique authority of Jesus, the Christ. And the real issue isn't where Jesus' authority is from.

The real issue is, will you submit to his authority? And their answer, which is the answer of so many today, is no, no surrender. Well, says Jesus, verse 27, then I'm silent because the truth is those seeing, you will not see and those hearing, you will not hear.

You've made your choice to resist, to refuse the Son of God. But Jesus has another question for them and really nails them there in verse 28.

Do you see? Or rather, they're hoist, aren't they, on their own petard? What do you think, he says? And he tells them a story all about religious style but absolutely no substance.

And the punchline, verse 31, which of these two sons actually did the will of the Father? One who refused and then repented and did go and respond and go into the vineyard?

[31 : 44] Or the one who gave all that immediate verbal promise, yes, yes, yes, and then did absolutely nothing at all? And even they can't possibly answer, we don't know to this one, can they? Without looking utterly foolish.

And so Jesus rams the rapier right home in verse 31, right into their hearts. Do you see? It's about you, he says. And you're exposed you talk all about God's temple, his kingdom, his law, but you see nothing.

You're blind because you are rebels, you're enemies. You don't obey because you don't believe. You're apostate, you've said it yourselves, you've rejected God's messenger, John, and you've rejected God's message.

But, says Jesus, these people who are revolting sinners in your eyes, these tax fraudsters, these whores, they received John's message and they did repent and they have entered the kingdom of heaven before you, before you clergy, before you experts.

You refuse to believe John, he says, verse 32. But all these others did believe his gospel. And even now, with your own eyes, when you've seen everything that John spoke about, you've seen it fulfilled in me and in my ministry, you've seen all these wonderful things and still you refuse, you will not change, you will not repent and believe because you're hardened, you're bitter, you're relentlessly perverse in your unbelief.

[33 : 32] And theirs was a fatal unbelief, wasn't it? This was the unbelief that ultimately crucified Jesus. And friends, the truth is that this kind of willing blindness, which is born of a perverse refusal of Christ's authority, it will, in the end, it will lead to a reciprocal rejection of that unbelief by Jesus.

such rejection of the Son of God is inexcusable. And therefore, judgment becomes unavoidable. And that's the awful, that's the fearful message right at the very heart of this passage.

Look at verses 17 to 22. Do you see? Having acted out two prophetic fulfillments so vividly, Jesus now gives a vividly acted parable.

verse 17 shows Jesus faced with this intransigence, this indignance from his enemies. Jesus departs. He left them.

He left their city. Those are fearful words, fraught with destiny, aren't they? Back in chapter 16, verse 4, where he turned his back on them. He called them an evil and adulterous generation.

[34 : 49] He left them. And you see, verses 18 to 22 here picture vividly what it means to be abandoned by Jesus in this cursing of the fig tree.

Bethany and Bethphage, the name means house of figs. It was a place famous for them. It wasn't the main fig season yet. That came in the autumn. But there were always some winter figs that remained on the trees unpicked.

And they would begin to ripen in the spring as the new leaves would come onto the trees. Isaiah chapter 28, verse 4, speaks about the delight in these first fruits, these first ripe figs.

So maybe Jesus was walking and he saw this one tree that had begun to have leaves on it. And he hoped to find some of these first fruits of the season. But no, verse 19, you see, there's nothing but leaves.

Promised much, but just disappointed. Just like Israel. Israel was so often in the prophets likened to God's fig tree.

[35 : 54] But so often when God sought fruit, as Jeremiah said, there was nothing, no figs. Here is a tree that has been privileged, tended by God, set apart to be the first fruits of God's saving grace for the world, to see his salvation first before all these other Gentile nations.

But no, it's barren and fruitless. Despite all the blessings of God down the ages, all his promises, all his warnings, despite now the Son of God himself, God incarnate right among them, giving incontrovertible revelation.

But he finds in the temple not a house of prayer, but a den of robbers. He finds not a passion for God, but just empty religiosity. He finds not fruit, but just spurious, deceptive leaves.

He finds not real faith at all, just rank unbelief. And therefore, the only thing left is inevitable and final judgment.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem. He sought to gather them, he said, as a hen gathers her chicks, but you would not. And so, in the end, the hand of judgment must fall, because the coming of God's kingdom means the end of a rebellion.

[37 : 21] And when confronted with a revelation of Christ's kingship, the question is this, is the response going to be real faith, or is it just going to be unbelief? And the answer to that question is revealed by another question, is there fruit, or is there just leaves on the outside?

And that's Jesus' whole point here, look in verses 21 and 22. Disciples, you see, they totally miss the symbolism, don't they? They miss Jesus' whole meaning, the whole point of this miracle.

And they just focus on the power, so in verse 20, they say, how did that happen? They're still so worldly in their thinking, aren't they? But Jesus ignores that. He says, never mind how it happens, ask the real question, why did it happen?

Why? It's all about whether outward professions speak of real faith, or in fact, are just hiding real unbelief.

If there's fruit, it's going to be visible. Look at verse 21. It's going to be visible in lives where great things have been done by God, like mountains moving, like great kingdom prayers being answered, momentous change.

[38 : 34] In other words, there will always be real fruit where faith is real. If Israel had welcomed her Messiah with real faith, the whole world would surely have been utterly shaken.

Because real faith moves mountains, causes earthquakes among people, it changes everything in people's lives, always. We know that's true, don't we? When somebody really does have their eyes open to Jesus and his lordship, there's always a great reckoning with authority.

There's always upheaval, isn't there, in your life. Because there's always a real surrender to him and to his sole authority, a total change of direction. People's lives, when they really encounter Jesus in faith, are turned upside down.

That change is seismic, it's momentous. But there are still many people today who when they're faced with the revelation of Jesus Christ, they determine to remain ignorant.

Or from content, as I said, to write him off without even bothering to look into the evidence. He's just a Nazarene prophet. Others, of course, they do see, they are gripped by his person, but they won't believe because they do not want to submit.

[39 : 46] They won't surrender. And there's always those who try and take refuge in agnosticism like these priests. I don't know. But don't be fooled. God isn't fooled. Jesus knows what you mean, which is really, I do know, but I don't like it.

I'm not going to have it, so there'll be no surrender for me. Friends, if one of these responses has been your response, you need to remember the fig tree.

If you persist in rejecting Christ's authority, in the end, you will bring that curse of desolation, bring it upon yourself.

Those who choose to be fruitless because they're faithless, in the end, will be confirmed as fruitless and faithless forever. There's a strong word of warning in these words.

But there's also, isn't there, a word of wonderful encouragement, a word of invitation for everyone who will respond to Jesus and his call. This is also a chapter about real repentance and rejoicing.

[40 : 59] Despite Jesus' rejection by the majority, by the establishment, by the culture leaders, just like today, by the great ones, all those who think themselves leaders, those who think they're the first in the world's eyes, despite that, there's wonderful encouragement for those who will welcome Jesus, those who will come to him in prayerful repentance.

Those who will, as verse 22 here says, you see, who will ask him in prayer with real faith. They ask and they receive, says Jesus.

Well, who are they? Well, sadly, not many of the great and the good, the establishment, the big people. But verse 9, those who want to simply be around Jesus, before him and behind him.

Those for whom Jesus' authority over their lives isn't a threat, but it's a blessing. These healed blind beggars, these little ones who are brought by their parents. Verse 14, it's the blind and the lame.

Verse 15, it's the singing children. It's all the ones who come to Jesus just to be near Jesus. The ones who sing, Hosanna, Lord, save us. The ones who say, yes, blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

[42 : 13] The ones who are saying, yes, Jesus, we want you. We love you. It's even those who are once very, very far away from God. Verse 31, look, the thieving tax collectors, the whores, all these people whose lives were a total mess.

But when Jesus comes to them and says to them, I want to cleanse you. I want to transform the temple of your life. I want to make you into someone that I want to be at home with forever and ever.

They say, yes, Lord, Hosanna, save me. I do surrender to everything that you want of me. All such who receive him, who repent, who bow to his gracious lordship, they find a present joy, singing, delight as they enter his kingdom now.

And they have that assurance of eternal salvation. Ask for that, you see, verse 22, and you will receive if you have faith.

Don't be scandalized by Jesus' unique authority. Don't say no surrender to him. Rejoice in repentance. Rejoice just to be among his little ones.

[43 : 28] rejoice to be under his supreme rule. Because that's the way and that's the only way to real fruitfulness and real flourishing in this world.

And it's the only way to the life of the world to come. Amen. Let's pray together. Amen.
eternal God, who are the light of minds that know you and the joy of hearts that love you
and the strength of wills that serve you.

Grant us so to know you that we may truly love you and so to love you that we may fully
serve you. Whom to serve is perfect freedom through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.