

Humble, Courageous, Intelligent and No-nonsense

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[0 : 0 0] Well, today we are continuing our study in the Gospel of Matthew, and we've come to chapter 21, and we're going to look at that chapter quite broadly, but we can just read again, verses 9 and 10.

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 those three words that you can see at the end of verse 10, in many ways form one of the most important questions that humanity can ever ask, who is this man Jesus?

And of course there's loads of things that we can say in response to that, and even this chapter alone teaches us many things about Jesus. Today, I want us to pick out four of these things that we learn about Jesus.

And for those of you who are Christians, I hope this will reinforce to you why Jesus is worth following and worshiping. For those of you who are seeking, I hope it will help you to see more clearly that Jesus has what you're looking for.

[1 : 1 2] In fact, Jesus is what you're looking for. And for those of you who are maybe not that fast, perhaps it's a good thing that you learn a little bit more about the person that you are rejecting.

The four things I want us to learn are these. Jesus is humble, Jesus is courageous, Jesus is intelligent, and Jesus is no-nonsense.

And let's look at these together in turn. So first of all, we're going to say that Jesus is humble. The first section of the chapter, verses 1 to 11, is commonly described as the triumphal entry.

Jesus comes into Jerusalem on the back of a young donkey, and the crowds around him lay their coats out and wave branches shouting, Hosanna to the Son of David.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. And in many ways, it is very triumphant. It's perhaps the occasion when we see the most prominent expression of public support towards Jesus.

[2 : 1 5] And of course, this stands in really almost, well, definitely tragic contrast to the crowds later in this week who are shouting, crucify him.

But alongside all the triumph of this moment where Jesus is recognized as king as the Son of David, Matthew also emphasizes something very important. He emphasizes that Jesus is humble.

And we see that in verses four and five. It says, Matthew, deliberately tells us 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.

So instead of coming into Jerusalem on a chariot or with soldiers, with weapons or with trumpets, Jesus comes in on a donkey. And so although we call it the triumphal entry and it's good to do so, I think we could also be justified in calling it the humble entry.

There's no display of pump and power. Instead, it's a demonstration of meekness and peace. And it's also important to remember that Jesus didn't ask for the branches and the cloaks and for people to shout.

[3 : 33] All he asked for was the young donkey. It's a very high profile moment for Jesus. But in it all, there's a very strong emphasis on humility.

And we've seen that pattern throughout Jesus' ministry. He doesn't draw attention to himself. And even when the crowds came and wanted to make him king by force, he had no interest.

His focus was on completing the mission that God had given to him. It's a reminder that humility doesn't mean never getting attention.

It means that when you do get attention, you don't let it go to your head. Jesus is an outstanding example of that. And perhaps the most astonishing thing is that even though there were crowds shouting and waving branches, in truth, they didn't know the half of the majesty and honor and glory that rightfully belonged to Jesus.

But he didn't go bragging about his status. He just humbly rides in on a donkey in order to fulfill what the Old Testament had prophesied. Jesus is humble.

[4 : 48] Number two, we see that Jesus is courageous. Verses 12 and 13 describe a very different scene. Jesus went into the temple and he overturned the tables of the money changers.

This is actually the second time that Jesus has done this. Jesus once gospel tells us that he did this early in his ministry. It shows that so often people will just go back to doing the same thing that they've been doing.

The scene in the temple was really quite a busy one. The worship activities of the Jews involved the sacrifice of animals and many people would come to worship, traveling from a long distance.

And so instead of bringing their animals from a long distance, they would just buy one when they got to the temple and there was various animals they could buy depending on how much they could afford.

Basically the scene before us here is a big commercialization of the worship of God. And worst of all, it was an opportunity to exploit people who had traveled to worship, especially those who were poor.

[5 : 52] Jesus describes them as rubbish because they did all they can to get as much money out of as many people as they could. Jesus goes in and he throws the lot of them out.

And it's showing us that even though Jesus is humble, he is no coward. And we must never underestimate how controversial this would have been. It's the start of Passover week.

It's right in the middle of Jerusalem. It's at the temple where everyone was going and Jesus goes in and he turns the whole thing upside down.

Why did he do that? Because he saw something that was totally wrong. And here he is standing up against corruption and exploitation.

He's defending the honor of God and he is protecting the vulnerable. People were supposed to go to the temple to pray and to pour out their hearts to God.

[6 : 51] Instead they were being forced to go there to pay and pour out their purses to a bunch of crooks. When Jesus sees that, he goes straight in and he calls it out.

And in doing so, I think he put himself at huge risk. But despite the risk, despite the controversy, the threat of arrest or public uproar, it does not stop him from doing it because Jesus is always, always courageous.

And it's a reminder that courage doesn't mean never feeling afraid. Which means standing up for what's right, no matter what the dangers might be.

That's exactly what we see here in Jesus. Jesus is courageous. Number three we see in this passage in this chapter that Jesus is intelligent.

The chapter records extensive dialogue between Jesus and the religious leaders. You can see an example of that in verses 23 to 27. I won't read it all out. Maybe they came to Jesus with a question saying, by what authority do you do this?

[8 : 02] Do you do the things that you do? And Jesus responds and says, well, I'll ask you a question. If you answer my question, I will answer yours. And of course, as we read, they refused to give him an answer.

One of the key things that we see here is that Jesus is intelligent. He straight away recognizes that the religious leaders are trying to catch him out. So the question was a trap.

Because if he had said, well, it's by God's authority, they would have condemned him for being blasphemous. If he had said it's by my own authority, they would have condemned him for being blasphemous.

Jesus confronted by this trap is able to think very quickly, and he responds with a question which does exactly to them what they were trying to do to him so they don't answer.

And in just a simple response, Jesus silences these schemers who no doubt thought that their clever plan was going to catch him out.

[8 : 58] And again and again throughout his ministry, we see that Jesus is able to enter into debate and discussion. He's able to answer questions or even trick questions that are put to him.

And in doing that, he never had to shout his way out of a corner. He never spun the truth. He never had to wriggle. He just thought clearly and he articulated his points robustly.

And again and again, people were amazed by what he said. It's a powerful reminder that Jesus is intelligent. And that of course is one of the reasons why he's such an effective teacher.

He thinks rationally. He reads people accurately. He communicates clearly. He debates effectively. He speaks persuasively and he is able to convey some of the most profound truths simply by telling stories from everyday life.

Here in these verses, you have the smartest men in Jerusalem trying to publicly undermine Jesus and he silences them with one question. Jesus is intelligent.

[10 : 07] And that's an important reminder that the Christian faith is not and has never been mindless. Jesus emphasizes that in the very next verse when he opens it by asking one of the most important questions that humanity can ever consider.

What do you think? Far too often when it comes to religion, the question we ask is, what do you feel? And sometimes that can be an appropriate question, especially in pastoral struggles.

But in terms of whether you're going to follow Jesus or not, the crucial question is, what do you think? What do you think about origins?

What do you think about purpose? What do you think about morality? What do you think about life? What do you think about death?

And this is why one of the most common ways that people avoid Christianity is to say, I'm just not going to think about it.

[11 : 09] Don't forget, intelligence doesn't mean knowing everything. It means being ready to think. And Jesus wants us to do that. He engages with us as rational thinking beings.

Jesus is intelligent. And then the fourth thing we see is that Jesus is no nonsense. We see that in at least two places in this chapter.

First is with the fig tree. It said, 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 found 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. The key point here is that the tree had leaves, but no fruit.

In other words, from a distance, it looked great. But actually it wasn't healthy. And it wasn't producing what it should. And this is an example of an outward action displaying a prophetic message.

[12 : 12] This is something we see in the Old Testament. Jeremiah, for example, God told him to go and buy a clay jug from a potter in order to break it in front of people to make a point.

Jesus is doing the same thing here. And with the fig tree, he is showing the true state of the religious elite. They were all leaves and no fruit.

In other words, they were great at putting on an outward show. But ultimately it was of no use to anyone because their lives bore no fruit.

The second place we see that Jesus is no nonsense is in the two parables that he told of the two sons and of the tenants. In the first parable, Jesus is emphasizing that empty words are of no use to God.

And in fact, somebody who maybe once said, no, I'm not interested, but then changes their mind and actually follows him is far, far better. Empty words are of no interest to him.

[13 : 13] And in the second parable, Jesus is just totally direct with these religious leaders. They are the ones who are rejecting God's son. And they knew fine that he was talking about them.

In all of these ways, Jesus is making it absolutely clear that he is completely no nonsense. He has no time for outward show.

He's got no interest in empty words. And he is not going to beat around the bush with the way that these leaders are behaving. And it's all a powerful reminder that Jesus is not looking for people who are perfect.

He's not looking for people who are important. He's not looking for people who are impressive, but he is most definitely looking for people who are genuine.

Being no nonsense doesn't mean saying, I have no problems. In fact, it means to stop pretending that we have none.

[14 : 15] So Jesus is humble, he's courageous, he's intelligent, and he is no nonsense. But we have to ask the question, well, what has any of that got to do with our lives today?

Well, I think there's two main ways in which we can apply this. The first is that all these things are teaching us some very important lessons about living out our lives as Christians.

And there's four key issues that arise. So first of all, the fact that Jesus is humble makes us think about Christian leadership. Now, by saying that, I don't just mean being a minister or an elder.

You are all leaders in different ways. At work, at home, maybe in your hobbies, maybe in your social life. Even the children here are leaders because your friends will watch you and will see what you're doing and at times will follow you.

And as we all go through life, it's likely that we're going to be placed in more and more leadership positions in different ways. And the brilliant lesson that Jesus is teaching us is that at the heart of Christian leadership is humility.

[15 : 25] And that means that for every one of us, whether we are a supervisor at work, whether we are in amongst a group of friends who will maybe be shaped by our behavior, whether we're involved in a committee or whatever it may be, we want our leadership to constantly display humility.

Christian leadership is about serving others. It's about putting their needs before ours. It's about valuing their success more than ours.

So often in our leadership, we can be tempted to do the things that make ourselves feel big or that will make others feel small.

And maybe you have fallen into that trap or maybe you've been on the receiving end of that trap. It's a horrible thing to experience. Jesus never did it.

He never inflated his own importance, and he constantly showed the people who followed him how much he cared about them. And that's emphasized so powerfully in these verses because while Jesus is sitting on a donkey without any pomp or ceremony, at the same time, the crowd are shouting, Hosanna, which means save us because they are recognizing that the whole reason this king was coming was for them.

[16 : 43] May our leadership always display that humility. And may the people we lead always be made to know that in our leadership, we are serving them, we want to protect them, and we want to help them.

Every Christian leader has an amazing opportunity every Monday morning to show that there is a better way to be a boss.

Jesus' courage makes us think about Christian activism. There's something that we don't often talk about that often, and it can sometimes seem like a bit of a controversial area.

Should Christians be involved in social action? What sort of things should we speak up about? What kind of things should we get involved in? And sometimes it can be even more complicated because good causes can very often get tangled up in all sorts of controversial or maybe even aggressive ideologies.

And there's also many things that Christianity is neutral about, and that can often apply to political parties and movements. And the result of all that is we can often conclude that it's far better to just keep our heads down.

[17 : 53] And sometimes it is. But God forbid that we ever, ever forget that the Christian church should never stop speaking out in defense of the poor, the exploited, and the vulnerable.

In other words, we are to speak out for those who have hardly any voice of their own. James was not exaggerating when he said, religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this, to visit orphans and widows in the reflection and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

Like the whole Bible, there is a relentless emphasis on the fact that God wants us to help the helpless, to speak for the voiceless, and to protect the defenseless.

That's why the work of charities like Bethany here in Scotland or Tierfront or International Justice Mission, all that work is so brilliant and so important.

Today in Scotland, when the Christian church feels persecuted, very often we get annoyed and then we react.

[19 : 07] And there are ways in which that is important. But the thing that should really stir us up into action is when we see precious people made in the image of God who are exploited, degraded, and left to suffer.

That's what should really stir up our action. And as for persecution, well, when that comes, the Bible doesn't actually tell us to get annoyed.

It tells us to do something else. It tells us to rejoice. Thirdly, Jesus' intelligence makes us think about Christian intellectualism.

Now, by that, I don't mean just learning as much as you can about Christianity. I mean learning as much as you can about everything.

The fact that Jesus is intelligent is reminding us that as Christians, we want to be and to grow in our intelligence as well. Now, I don't mean getting straight A's or doing PhD's.

[20 : 20] I mean that in whatever profession you have or whatever role you have in life, be a thinker. Learn what you can, stretch your mind, grow in understanding, develop your skills and never, ever stop thinking.

For many of you, that will be in your studies at the moment. But for some of you, it's in terms of your job, for others, it's understanding your children, for others, it's developing a skill or an interest or an involvement that you may have.

And the reason that I am saying that is because so many people think that becoming a Christian means abandoning your intelligence.

People have this idea that Christianity is a kind of crutch for insecure people or a kind of nostalgic connection to days gone by or a kind of hope for the best but don't think about it too much, kind of approach to life.

All of that is complete and utter nonsense. It's untrue and that's proved by history. You look back over history, you look at many of the greatest inventions, achievements and discoveries of humanity and they were all achieved by Christians.

[21 : 32] In fact, Christianity is the whole reason why science and technology flourished in Europe ahead of the rest of the world. This whole kind of science versus religion or technology versus Christianity conflict is a figment of recent imagination.

For the last 500 years, Europe was full of people whose faith in God motivated them to discover more and more about the world that he'd made.

But we don't want to just prove that from history, we want to prove it ourselves. We want people to see it in us that we keep thinking, keep learning and keep doing the best that we can in our work.

So as you go into this week, go and learn something new and go into your job or into the responsibilities that you have and do them really well. And always remember that if we encounter people who disagree with us, if we just say to them, shut up, you're wrong.

Is that really displaying our God-given intelligence? I don't think it is. And then, fourthly, the fact that Jesus is no nonsense makes us think about Christian integrity.

[22 : 48] Again and again, Jesus' teaching and his example shows us that one of the most important aspects of Christian discipleship is our integrity. The religious leaders in Jerusalem were constantly putting on an outward show to mask an inner condition that was selfish, cold and hard-hearted and that it's such an easy trap to fall into.

There are so many today who will say one thing, do another, behave one way here, behave another way there. And throughout her history, the Christian church has been plagued with hypocrisy.

And it's such a strange thing because one of the most basic truths that we believe about God is that he can see everything.

And that's why integrity is fundamental to our discipleship because in every part of our lives, whether everyone's watching us or no one can see us, whether we're speaking out loud or thinking in our hearts, the one thing that we know about God is that he sees that and our concern should be that in all these parts of our lives, we are living for him as integrated followers of Jesus.

Now, in all of these areas that I've highlighted, I have made tons of mistakes in my life and I'm sure that you have as well.

[24 : 14] And I really hope that saying all that doesn't sound like a kind of thing to make you all feel guilty. It's not about feeling guilty.

It's about reminding ourselves that Jesus sets us an absolutely brilliant example. And boy do we want that to shape the way we live in the week ahead.

And it's also crucial that we keep all four of these things together. If you've got intelligence without humility, that's not a very nice combination.

If you've got humility without courage, then it might cripple you from achieving anything. If you've got courage without intelligence, you might go barging into things in an unhelpful way and in all of these things, we want them to be grounded on consistent Christian integrity.

Need it be brilliant? If everyone in Scotland could look at the Christian church and say, they are humble, they stand up for what's right, they are not idiots, and what you see is what you get.

[25 : 36] There's so much for us to learn in terms of how we live out our Christian lives. But the second key area of application is that in the week ahead, it is probably likely that you will come across the precise opposite of everything that we see in Jesus.

So it might be that you're going to have to deal with somebody who instead of being humble is arrogant, someone who's just out to benefit themselves, someone who thinks that the world revolves around them and who maybe even gets a kick out of making your life difficult.

You might have to deal with that. You might meet someone who instead of being courageous is cowardly. Now, by that I don't mean nervous. Everyone gets nervous, even Jesus did.

By cowardly, I mean someone who will gladly leave you to take the hit. And you might be on the receiving end of that as well. You might have to deal with people who instead of being intelligent are ignorant.

Now, I don't mean that in an insulting way. I'm not saying that people are idiots. I mean it in the technical sense of the word ignorant whereby people willfully ignore what they need to hear.

[26 : 52] So you might be with someone who just refuses to listen to you or who misrepresents you or who just bats every problem into the long grass or who judges you without actually knowing anything about you.

Or you might have to deal with someone who instead of being no nonsense is superficial. Where everything is a bit of an act, where it all seems a bit false and very empty and who maybe picks you up and puts you down depending on their mood.

These kinds of behavior are all very common and it's very, very hard to be on the receiving end of that. And it's a reminder that nothing can hurt us as much as people.

And what I want to say is this. Jesus is the complete opposite of all of these things.

He is the complete opposite of arrogant. He is the complete opposite of cowardly. He's the complete opposite of ignorant and he is the complete opposite of superficial.

[28 : 05] And what proves that more powerfully than anything else is what happens in the next few chapters of Matthew's Gospel. Because Matthew 21 is describing the beginning of the week running up to the crucifixion.

And this is the last few days before the cross. And in all of these things we see Jesus demonstrating so powerfully that he is the opposite of all the horrible behavior we often find ourselves on the receiving end.

So people around us might be arrogant. Jesus is the complete opposite. Jesus left the glory of heaven to humble himself, to become one of us, to come alongside you, to suffer and to go all the way to the point of death.

And even now he is exalted at the right hand of God the Father. What's he doing? Is he basking in that glory and wanting to lap up all that attention for himself? No, at the right hand of God, Jesus right now is interceding for you.

Some people are cowardly. Jesus is the complete opposite. And so he knew what he was going to face.

[29 : 26] And as that reality became more and more clear as he went through Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday into Thursday and Friday of this week, he was overwhelmed, utterly overwhelmed by all that was involved in the cross.

But he kept going and he did it. Some people want to ignore what's going on.

They'll be willfully ignorant. Jesus is the complete opposite. He knew exactly what was happening. He knew exactly what was needed.

He knew exactly what it would cost. But he did it. And some people are superficial.

Jesus is the complete opposite. If someone is superficial, if you strip away the layers from that person, then you will find the real truth.

[30 : 36] In this week that began in Matthew 21, everything was stripped away from Jesus. So the crowds that waved and shouted in support of him, they disappeared.

Even his closest friends who had followed him, they began to fall away. He was arrested.

His freedom was taken away from him. He was stripped literally of his clothes.

He was taken and nailed to the cross. And he was even stripped away from him was even his awareness of God's love and presence with him.

And he felt forsaken and alone. Everything around Jesus in Matthew 21 was stripped away from him as the week went on, except for one thing.

[31 : 51] The one thing that no one could pull off him was his determination to save you.

And that's because the thing that Jesus is most no nonsense about is the fact that he loves you and that he's come to save you.

Jesus is humble. He is courageous. He's intelligent. He is no nonsense. That's why he's the perfect savior. That's why he is the greatest leader.

And that's why he is the most wonderful friend you can ever know. If you're a Christian, may that encourage you going into the week ahead.

If you are seeking Jesus, may that encourage you to just go for it. And if you started off this sermon not that fast, I really, really hope that all these things about Jesus will make you think.

[33 : 01] Amen. Let us pray. Dear Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are humble, courageous, intelligent and that with you there is no nonsense.

We pray for your forgiveness for all the times that we've not been like that. But we thank you that in you, in you we have the perfect leader, the perfect savior, the most wonderful friend.

And may we all just go into this week with our eyes fixed on you. Amen.