

As we open our Bibles this morning to Matthew 21, we find ourselves at the most significant spot in all this apostle’s gospel. Matthew began his book by writing of Jesus’ birth and then his baptism and his calling by God and his calling together of his disciples, and then of his ministry where he *“went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and he healed them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.”* (Matthew 4:23-25). From there Matthew records that Jesus’s led his disciples and the crowds to the side of a mountain where preached his Sermon on the Mount about the nature and principles of the Kingdom of God - where Jesus rules and reigns as Sovereign King in the hearts of those who receive him as Lord and Saviour.

In the chapters that followed we saw that in the midst of the growing crowds that followed Jesus, resistance began to grow against him, as the religious leaders of the day opposed him and accused him of being a fake, a fraud, a rebel who peached principles and taught practices that opposed and were against God. It was then that Jesus stepped back from his public ministry of preaching, teaching and healing – and then began his private ministry of teaching and mentoring and strengthening his disciples – as he turned and set his course of the remainder of his life toward the fulfillment his God ordained appointment with a cross at Calvary in Jerusalem, where he would fulfill God’s promise to send a Saviour into the world to die for our sins in our place and rise from the dead - so we might be forgiven and redeemed and restored back into the relationship with God we were created for.

Up to this point, in everything that Jesus has said and done, we saw that the region Galilee had been privileged to be the primary location for Jesus to display his messianic identity and his mission from God – but now, in our text for today, Jerusalem becomes the scene of the final revelation of Jesus Christ, as not only Lord and Saviour - but also as Jesus Christ who rules and reigns as Sovereign King, not only in the Kingdom of God, but also, as in the famous words of Abraham Kuyper: *“There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Jesus Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, ‘Mine!’”* On this morning, in God’s Word, we find ourselves at the beginning of the climactic week when Jesus concludes the primary purpose of his earthly mission - the fulfillment of the gracious promise of God to redeem fallen humanity from the wrath of God to the glory of heaven.

While the description of Jesus’ earthly mission to this point took twenty chapters, this point in Jesus’ life pressed so heavy on the heart and soul of Matthew, a disciple who lived with Jesus and walked with Jesus for three years, that he now devotes eight chapters, nearly 30 percent of his Gospel, to the last week of Jesus’ life on earth. While we began looking at the gospel of Matthew together on first Sunday of May of 2017, we will now be spending this Sunday and the next 10 Sundays, walking with Jesus through the days of the last week of his life – from his triumphal entry into Jerusalem with great fanfare to his arrest, torture, crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection from the dead. And in the midst of it all Jesus will teach us and preach to us and heal us as he fully manifests himself as Lord and Saviour, as he draws us deeper into the Kingdom of God where he reigns and rules as Sovereign King.

As we begin that journey this morning, we also need to also be that we are entering a section of Matthew’s gospel that reflects the climax of the growing opposition Jesus has been experiencing, as Matthew 21–27 could be entitled *“The Rejection of the King of the Kingdom of God.”* In these chapters we will read of Jesus Christ meeting his enemies in the final conflict that will ultimately lead to his crucifixion. In our text for today and in our text for next week (Matthew 21:1–22:14) – Jesus begins to overtly assert his reign and his rule as Sovereign King by openly challenging and demanding and pronouncing judgment on those who rejected and opposed him - and sought to put him to death.

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." **Matthew 21:1-11**

Matthew writes these words in the context of that Jesus had his face set toward Jerusalem for some time now. And he had told his disciples that when he arrives there he would suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and scribes who will finally condemn Him to death. And he would be crucified and he would be raised from the dead. Matthew does not tell us about all the events that occurred after the healing two blind men at Jericho in Matthew 20:29-34. We learn more from the other gospel accounts. Luke 19 adds that Jesus had not just passed through Jericho, but had spent a day there with a tax collector named Zaccheus, who surrendered his life to Jesus Christ. Jesus left Jericho the next day, and John 12:1 tells us that Jesus spent the Sabbath (Saturday) with his friends Martha, Mary, and Lazarus in the village of Bethany, just east of Jerusalem. That evening Jesus and the disciples ate at the home of Simon the leper. This was the same evening that Mary anointed Jesus feet with costly perfume, being another reminder of His impending death and burial (John 12:2-11).

The next day, which would be Sunday, we find that a great multitude of Jews had found out that Jesus was in Bethany and had come to see not just him, but also that they might also see Lazarus, whom Jesus had recently miraculously raised from the dead. The Chief priests and Pharisees had previously given orders that if anyone saw Jesus they should report it to them because they wanted to stop him. Now, with all the interest in Lazarus, they begin to plot on how to put him to death as well (John 11:57; 12:10). It is estimated, because it was Passover, that there could have been 2 million people in and around Jerusalem at that time. And as Jesus approached Jerusalem he gave two of his disciples instructions as to how he would prepare to enter Jerusalem. This was the only time in his ministry that Jesus actually planned and promoted a public demonstration. Up to this time, Jesus had cautioned his disciples and others not to say who he was, and he had deliberately avoided public scenes. But now, in the face of deadly opposition, Jesus deliberately planned and blatantly proclaimed who he truly was.

"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." **There are some who believe that Jesus had previously made arrangements to get the donkey and its colt/foal, possibly with one of the people that had come to see Him in Bethany the day before. Well, I would say that's true – whether he did so personally in the flesh or by the sovereign hand of the Spirit of God. In either case, the emphasis is not on Jesus getting the two animals, but on *why* he did so. Jesus would not enter Jerusalem as just a pilgrim or just a rabbi as He had done in past. this time Jesus would enter into Jerusalem in a manner that would declare to all who he truly was.**

Notice that in the instructions to the disciples that Jesus refers to himself in a different manner than he has before. Many people referred to him as "the Lord." Some out of respect, and some sensing he might be the Messiah. But while Jesus didn't correct them, he also never called himself "the Lord." But here Jesus tells them to specifically say, "THE LORD needs them." Jesus wanted to make sure that they used his proper title. "The Lord," - the one who rules and reigns over all - needs these animals.

“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.’ Jesus used a donkey and a colt/foal to reveal who he truly was, thus fulfilling the prophetic words spoken of in Zechariah 9:9. The *“daughter of Zion”* is a reference to Jerusalem, often called Zion - the name of the city’s highest and most important hill, Mount Zion. There were numerous prophecies concerning the Messiah and this one noted the manner that the promised Saviour would come as king. Jesus would ride into Jerusalem in a humble manner, on the colt/foal of a donkey. This was not the manner anyone would expect. A conquering king would come riding on a war steed or a white stallion - and that will be the manner of the Messiah’s return. Revelation 19:11 tells us that Jesus will return on a white horse riding at the head of armies of heaven. But for this entrance into Jerusalem, Jesus did not come as the leader of a victorious army, but as a humble servant claiming to be the king.

One biblical scholar wrote: *“He who makes his entry unarmed with unarmed followers on a peaceful animal must either be already acknowledged as ruler, or he must aim at dominion in such a manner as excludes all force and political power.”* That is who Jesus is. He was already was the ruler, the King, though not acknowledged as such. The manner by which He would gain the Kingdom would not be by force or by political power. Jesus came not in grandeur, but in humility. Not as judge, but as Saviour. We read that the two disciples went and did exactly what Jesus told them to do. They led the donkey and colt/foal out, laid some of their clothes on them, and Jesus sat on them. Nearly all the people in the crowd threw their coats/garments down on the road, giving him a royal welcome. Others cut branches from the trees and put them down as a welcome mat. The crowds ahead and following him cried out: *“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”*

As Jesus road into Jerusalem, his reception as King was immediate. At this point most of the vast crowd of about two million would have been there because it was the beginning of the week of the Passover celebration. The apostle John’s gospel indicates at least three sources for the large crowd that had gathered around Jesus. *First*, there was a multitude of people that had come to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. Many of them were from Galilee and they went out to meet Jesus when they heard that He was coming (John 12:12). *Another crowd* was made up of people from Bethany and friends of Lazarus and his family; these were people who had been present when Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead (John 12:17). *Another large gathering of people* were coming out from Jerusalem to meet Jesus because they had heard about him raising Lazarus from the dead (John 12:18). Imagine for just a moment the turmoil and commotion all of this would have caused. Jerusalem was in quite a state of excitement already just because of the preparations being made for Passover, then you hear and then see this huge crowd of people coming over the Mt. of Olives and down the road through the valley to enter Jerusalem through the East gate. The people are cutting down the palm branches and putting their coats down in front of Jesus as a sign of honor. At the same time everyone is shouting, *“Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is He who comes it the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.”*

What the people were shouting on that day was fitting to the occasion and in fact fulfillment of prophecy as well. Most of what they were saying was taken from Psalm 118, which is part of the Hallel of Psalms 113-118, which were psalms of praise for the Lord’s deliverance, which were often sung at Passover. In addition, *“Hosanna”* is an exclamatory word meaning, *“give us your salvation!”* and when proclaimed in the context of the phrase *“Son of David,”* is a direct reference to Jesus being the promised Messiah. What they were shouting out was exactly what was being done for them. Salvation was finally coming and was now in their midst. Jesus was coming as Lord. The Sovereign King of the Kingdom of God has arrived. The one who was from the highest heaven was bringing to them salvation. But the question was - Did those people understand all that they were saying? Sadly, they did not. They were looking for a saviour who would save them from Roman oppression, not someone who would bring them salvation from sin’s oppression. And they were still looking for a King who would defeat and rule over the Roman Empire, rather than a King who would defeat sin and rule in their hearts. What the crowds were shouting was true but they did not understand or believe it.

A story is told of a young boy who was sick on Palm Sunday and unable to go to church. His mother stayed home with him and his father went to church by himself. When his father came home, he brought with him a few of the palm branches he received at church. He went into his son's room to see how he was feeling. His son asked him what he had in his hand. The father replied, "I have Palm branches." To which his son asked: "What are they for?" To which his father replied: "We waved them when Jesus comes to town." The boy became sad and began to cry. The father asked, "What's the matter?" The son sobbingly said, "The very day Jesus comes to town I miss him because I'm sick."

This is the reason Jesus clearly revealed who he truly was. By presenting himself as the promised Messiah and Sovereign King he exposed the spiritual blindness of God's people. And like the boy who missed Jesus because he was too sick – we quite often miss Jesus because we are too spiritually ill to see him or receive him or serve him or follow him or commit our hearts and lives to him. Just as the people of Jesus' day had their own personal expectations of who they wanted Jesus to be for them - so do we also today have our own personal expectations of who we want Jesus to be for us in our lives. Jesus had been clear throughout Matthew about how he felt about that. The context of our text for today is about Jesus healing two blind men; Jesus gave them their sight when they called him "Lord" and humbly and desperately confessed they needed His mercy. In the chapter before that Jesus confronted the spiritual blindness of a young rich man who arrogantly claimed to be perfect.

In Matthew 5:3-8 Jesus said: *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."* **In other words:** "Blessed are those who humbly acknowledge their spiritual blindness, who mourn over the poverty of their spirit, who confess their desperate need for God, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who are merciful to others because God has shown them mercy - which is the nature of the Kingdom of God, where Jesus rules and reigns in our hearts." Jesus clearly presented himself to the crowds in order to expose Israel's spiritual blindness, but their personal expectations clouded their ability to see who he truly was. Jesus does that very same thing to us all the time. He reveals himself to us to expose what our hearts are really focused on. Jesus will shine the light of who he truly is on us in order to reveal the shadows of our personal expectations of who we want him to be. The king was there. The prophecies were fulfilled. The Messiah had come and they had shouted that out themselves, but the Jews still did not recognize Jesus as their King. What caused Israel's spiritual blindness? The Jewish religious leaders had exchanged the truth of the Word of God for man-made traditions (Luke 11:52) because they were concerned only with protecting their own interests (John 11:47-53). And the people of God had joined the Gentiles and pagans in worshipping the self-made Kings of personal expectations who rules and reigns in the hearts of those in the Kingdom of self-interest. Jesus revealed himself to be the promised Saviour and Sovereign King of the Kingdom of God to expose the wilful spiritual blindness of God's people.

And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. He said to them, "It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer," 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'?" And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there. **Matthew 21:12-17**

Matthew now tells us that Jesus leaves the crowds and heads toward the great Temple in Jerusalem – and when he arrives there, he drives out all the people buying and selling animals for sacrifice. He also knocked over all the tables of the moneychangers and the chairs of those who were selling pigeons.

Now Jesus would not have been surprised what he saw in the Temple. It was Passover week and moneychangers were needed during this week because the annual temple tax could only be paid in exact half-shekels of the Sanctuary or ordinary Galilean shekels. In addition, many of the merchants in Jerusalem would only accept Jewish currency. All foreign currency would have to be exchanged and the moneychanger would charge a percentage fee for his lucrative service. That being so - they were regarded as not much better than thieves. A couple of weeks before Passover, these moneychangers would leave the small towns and set up shop in Jerusalem. To make matters worse, the High priest, Annas, and his family controlled what happened in the Temple market. In fact, the Temple market was called the Bazaars of the Sons of Annas. They were paid part of the moneychanger's and the merchant's profits. The merchants gained access to what was nearly a monopoly. All the animals that were to be sacrificed had to be inspected by an official examiner to be sure it met the Levitical qualifications. A fee would be paid to this examiner, and if he did not like your animal, you had to bring another. Corruption here was also prevalent with the result that the people basically had to buy their sacrificial animals from Annas' merchants in Jerusalem at greatly inflated prices.

“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.” This was the second time that Jesus drove out these merchants from the temple. He had done the very same thing a couple of years before, but this time his accusation against them was even stronger. In verse 13 Jesus said, *“It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you make it a den of robbers.”* The first time Jesus did this (John 2:13-22) he simply told them *“not make my Father's house a house of trade”* - and now Jesus quotes from two scriptures. He first quotes from Isaiah 56:7 when God says, *“My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples”* – which would have included Gentiles. That was the purpose for which David collected materials to build the great Temple and what Solomon dedicated it for.

The court of the Gentiles was supposed to be the place where those that did not know God could come and learn about God and be taught how to worship God. It was supposed to be the place where the worship of God was showcased before the unbelieving that they might believe. Instead it had become a place no different than any pagan temple. The worship of God was being turned into a money making venture. It would have been bad enough if it had just been a case of honest merchants offering their products and services in an inappropriate place. But the practice of these merchants was corrupt. They were thieves and Jesus calls them out by quoting God in Jeremiah 7:11: *“Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the Lord.”* Jesus' generation was as corrupt as in Jeremiah's day. God's house of prayer was a den of robbers.

Jesus did not *just* clear out all the merchants and then leave - he stayed there to make sure they did not come back. Mark 11:16 adds that Jesus *“would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple.”* Apparently people who were coming or going from the city would take a short cut through the temple instead of using the common roads. Jesus would not allow them to desecrate God's house of prayer by using it as a common road. You would think that the either merchants or the corrupt priests would have stopped Jesus. There were many more of them, and they had the temple guards too, yet they fled and didn't even argue about it. Perhaps in part it was because they were afraid of the people who hated them anyway. I suspect they fled because they feared Jesus. While a couple of decades later the people did revolt against this corruption and threw the merchants out, this time it was a work of God.

We also read that once the crooked merchants were kicked out of the Temple, the blind and lame began to come in: *“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?’’ And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there.”*

Matthew tells us that the chief priests finally react when Jesus miraculously healed those who were blind and lame - and as the children in the Temple start to imitate the praise they had heard the day before. When the chief priest and the scribes saw the miracles Jesus had done, and the how the children there were crying out in the temple, "*Hosanna to the Son of David,*" they became offended and angry, and they asked Jesus, "*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 babes You have prepared praise?'*"

The chief priests were corrupt, but they were not stupid. They said nothing publicly about Jesus disrupting their business, but now that Jesus is getting praise as the Messiah and the King from these children, they couldn't take it anymore. They had to destroy Jesus and to do that they had to discredit him first. They didn't believe that he is the Messiah or the King - so it would be blasphemy for him to receive this praise by the children. Never mind the miracles he has been performing which proved who he was, they wanted Jesus to quiet the children. But Jesus used the occasion to again to proclaim that he was the Messiah and He was the King who has come to bring the Kingdom of God. Jesus answered simply and pointedly, "*Yes.*" He heard the praise of "*these children*" and by the word used here we would understand these to probably be 12 or 13 year old boys who had been through their bar-mitzvah. Yes, Jesus heard and then he added a quote from Psalm 8:2, the implication being that if God prepares praise to himself "*Out of the mouth of babies and infants*" then certainly the same is also true of older kids and also for mature adults. In quoting this Psalm Jesus equated himself with God.

What did Jesus intend to accomplish through his actions and words in the Temple? In Matthew 21:11 Matthew noted that when asked, "*Who is this?*" Jesus was called a "*prophet.*" Now, what did prophets do? They symbolically acted out the judgment of God. That was what Jesus was doing here. He was symbolically acting out the judgment of God upon this temple and upon the corrupt system by casting out the moneychangers and overturning tables. He temporarily shut down the activity in the temple. The activity probably resumed later. But Jesus made a prophetic, symbolic statement. Israel had forsaken its God, and Jesus was pronouncing and acting out God's judgment in the temple, where Israel was supposed to be worshiping its God. His actions would be especially effective during the Passover, which attracted many Jewish pilgrims. It's the equivalent of having a prime-time audience.

When Jesus overturned the tables he overturned the self-centered agendas of those who rejected him. Jesus does the same to us also. He will overturn our agendas when they are about us rather than him. The truth be told: we, too, have our idolatrous agendas. We too worship our agendas instead of the Lord. We cling to ambitions that may have nothing to do with God's will for our lives, often without being aware of it. Our agendas sometimes have little to do with Jesus and everything to do with our own version of Christianity. In our spiritual blindness, we can't see Jesus because our agendas are in the way. And, at the same time, we establish certain habits and routines that allow us to feel spiritual. We hope that these habits routines will provide a hedge against a God who might have something to say about our agendas. We pray; we read the Bible; we attend shepherd groups; we go to church; we lead ministries in the church. However, perhaps like the Jews in the days of Jeremiah and Jesus, we're just hiding out from God. It's been said that, "*Most people don't go to church because they're looking for God. Most people go to church because they're running from God and looking for cover.*"

Like the Jews of Jesus' day, we may long for the presence of the God, but when he shows up, he's often not what we expected. Jesus usually shows up not to endorse our agendas but to frustrate them. He casts out and overturns beliefs and actions that are not oriented toward God. He disrupts our lives, our fellowships, our churches. He throws tables and chairs and our lives around. And, in doing so, he shows us that it's not really the presence of the God we were longing for but the approval and success of our agendas. Perhaps we're not so much longing for the presence of the Lord as we are longing for the Lord to do what we want him to do. Jesus is here to change that longing. In order to change it, he must frustrate it. Jesus knows we can't keep doing what we were doing and continue to think that everything is all right. So Jesus gets our attention by casting out and overturning our lives.

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 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. 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." Matthew 21:17-22

Matthew tells us that Jesus left Jerusalem and goes to Bethany for the night. He gets up on Monday morning and as he makes his way back to Jerusalem he became hungry and saw a fig tree in leaf. It was early spring and not the normal season for the early figs, but this tree was unusually early. The normal characteristic of the kind of fig grown there was for an early spring crop to be produced before or at the time of it leafing out. A second crop would be produced in the late summer. It was early in the year, but this tree had leaves and therefore should have had figs. So Jesus, being hungry, went up to it and found there was no fruit. In a demonstration of his humanity was Jesus was hungry. And in a demonstration of His deity as Sovereign King, Jesus pronounced judgement on the fruitless fig tree. When we consider the time and place of this event, we understand what Jesus was doing. Jesus was near Jerusalem in the last week of his public ministry to his people. The fig tree symbolized the nation of Israel. Just as this tree had leaves but no fruit, so Israel had a show of faith in God but no passionate commitment of faith resulting in living for God. Jesus was not angry at the tree. Rather, he used this tree to teach several lessons to his disciples. God wants to produce fruit in the lives of His people. Fruit is the product of a life lived for God. The presence of leaves usually indicates the presence of fruit, but this was not the case. In the Parable of the Fig Tree in Luke 13:6–9, the gardener was given more time to care for the tree; but now the time was up. This tree was taking up space and doing no good. We can make a personal application of this event, but the main point has to do with Israel. The time of judgment had come. The sentence was pronounced by the King as Judge, but it wouldn't be executed for forty years. Then Rome would come and destroy the city and temple and scatter the people.

**There is a warning for us in our text for today, both as individuals and as a nation. As individuals we need to realize the truths we see in Romans where sin and immorality begin with a wrong view of God and improper worship of Him. It descends from there. Sin gives birth to more sin and it does not take long to be led astray from God and into wickedness. The excuses and rationalizations we give now for the sinful things we do can quickly lead to a seared conscience that will no longer bother us. From that depravity enters in and in twisted thinking we can even end up advocating immoral, evil things as good things to do. As the nation of Canada we should realize that is happening now to us and to the United States as well. Both of our countries are dying – spiritually, morally and relationally - and it's not because of outward forces against us, but because of internal corruption of our hearts and souls. But God has placed us in this place at this time to be instruments of the gospel of glory and grace. Jesus mourned the spiritual state of the nation of Israel. He sacrificed his life so God's people could be saved. Jesus revealed himself as the coming King to expose Israel's spiritual blindness. Jesus presents himself to us as the King whose Kingdom has come to expose our spiritual blindness. Jesus purified of the temple to expose Israel's inward corruption. Jesus casts out and overturn our lives to make us aware of our inward corruption. Jesus cursed a fig tree to expose Israel's outward fruitlessness. I pray that Jesus would curse anything and everything we think, say or do that is keeping us from bearing fruit for the Kingdom of God. The principle that runs throughout our text for today is that God is not limited by what we can see and understand for ourselves. Jesus' disciples did not understand the miracle about the fig tree, just as they did not understand any of the miracles Jesus did. Yet, those things happened. In the end Jesus said: *"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."* Amen!
*"If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chron 7:14).***