

The Promised King Enters His City (Matthew 21:1-22)

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[0 : 00] So Matthew chapter 21, we're going to start from verse 1 to 22 and I'll read from NIV, so follow along. This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet.

Say to the daughter of Zion, see your king comes to you gentle and riding on a donkey on a colt and foal of a donkey. The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them.

They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them and Jesus sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, Hosanna to the son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna to the highest.

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, who is this? The crowds answered, this is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.

[1 : 23] Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves.

It is written, he said to them, my house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of robbers. The blind and the lame came to him at the temple and he healed them.

But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, Hosanna to the son of David, they were indignant.

Do you hear what these children are saying? They asked him, yes, replied Jesus. Have you ever read? From the lips of children and the infants you have ordained praise. And he left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.

Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it, but found nothing on it except leaves.

[2 : 25] Then he said to it, may you never bear fruit again. Immediately, the tree withered. When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. How did the fig tree wither so quickly?

They asked. Jesus replied, I tell you the truth. If you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, go, throw yourself into the sea and it will be done.

If you believe, you will receive what you ask for in prayer. That's the word of God. William, thank you. All right.

Good afternoon, church. Lovely to see you all. And happy new year, if I haven't wished that to you yet. What a wonderful part of God's word. Now, let me pray. And let's ask the Lord to help us as we enter this new series.

Let's ask the Lord to help us as we enter this new series.

[3 : 51] And yet, thank you for showing us Jesus. Thank you for this part of God's word that leads us to the cross. May you help us to find your divine authority to be a blessing as we see the Son of God in his full glory.

And we thank you and we pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. All right. Most of us live in East Auckland or thereabouts or you've traveled around the place.

Anyone know what the Auckland suburb of Penrose is like just down the road? Yeah. Normally, just lots of traffic. You'd only want to go there if you're, well, you don't really want to go there.

You want to just go from there to somewhere else, maybe. Head to Costco or something like that. But on game days, everyone wants to go there. Because right there where there's a stadium, the traffic on game days is at a standstill.

The crowds are packed and if you've ever been to a live match, rugby league or football or something else, or you've been to a live concert, then you'll know what it's like to walk towards a stadium.

[4 : 56] As you get closer and closer, there's excitement as you approach the gates, as you recognize there's people around you wearing the same outfits, drawn together for the same purpose.

And that's the scene here, isn't it? Chapter 21. Here in first century Jerusalem, there's a similar kind of anticipation, excitement for the Jewish people.

It's the Passover festival. A Passover for the Jewish people, that was their new year. So it's very timely that we're in this part of Matthew's gospel.

You want to imagine the crowds, they're swelling as more and more people are making the trip up to Jerusalem. And as they walk up to the city, they're getting more and more excited.

Wherever they've come from, they might have come from just down the road or from hundreds of miles away, the long road trip is almost over. But this Passover, things are different.

[5 : 56] Because as Matthew deliberately has quoted, right, verse 5 from Zechariah 9, 9 is the quotation. Say to the daughter of Zion, see, your king comes to you.

Humble and mounted on a donkey and a colt. Today we start a new series from Matthew chapter 21 to 28. I've just called it Lead Us to the Cross.

It's a fairly, that's the point, isn't it? Matthew's gospel is trying to lead us to the cross. That's the climax of the good news. There's no better way, I think, to start 2025 or any year than returning to the gospel story.

Those of you who have been part of PCBC English know that one of the things we want to do as we go through God's word, we don't skip the hard bits. We don't skip the bits we might think. There's nothing for me.

All right, so we have been going through Matthew's gospel slowly, but surely. And so since 2020, when we started Matthew chapter 1, we've been hearing from one of the closest disciples of Jesus who this guy is.

[7 : 01] What did he come to do? And as you remember, if you remember, Matthew's gospel has kind of switched between blocks of story and then dialogue, story and dialogue, right?

So you might remember the Sermon on the Mount, okay? Long bit of dialogue and then a bit of story, right? Okay, Jesus healing and doing miracles. And then there's more dialogue again explaining. That's the kind of pattern that we see in Matthew's gospel.

And we'll see a bit more of that as well from chapter 21 to the end. But all of this is carefully crafted. Every action and teaching intends to drive us, as we read it, to the crucial climax where our servant king is crowned with thorns.

He's crucified for sinners. He's raised again to new life. That's the gospel, isn't it, at its heart. For those of us who are tempted to just press on with 2025 or any year as if we're the king, king of our schedules, of our careers, of our families, from this eyewitness account comes a better story to shape our lives around.

The promised king has come to save. That's the big idea of Matthew's gospel. And we're invited to listen in on it. There's something unique about chapters 21 to 28, though, right?

[8 : 16] So who can do the math? How many chapters have we got? Seven, eight? Yep, okay. All right, you can count. It's interesting, though. For such a large chunk of Matthew's gospel, time slows down.

Everything that we're going to hear in these chapters happens in the space of one week, obviously. Where the first four chapters of Matthew, we think about Jesus was born, Jesus grew up, Jesus was baptized, and he started his ministry.

That happened over 30 years of Jesus' life. Everything here takes place over one week. Okay, so, you know, if you're thinking about, you know, like movie style, like everything's slowed down, all right?

And half of the movie is like just focused on one, I don't know, one little hour in time. The hour has come, hasn't it? This is a description. These chapters will describe how our Lord, who in the past, especially in the early chapters of Matthew, would just withdraw from the crowds all the time, would tell people, even after he healed them, say, don't tell anyone yet what's going on, what's happening.

Now, we're going to hear he is, there's no filter. There's nothing holding him back from just telling people openly, rebuking people openly.

[9 : 36] There's no more need to hide his identity, his mission. Our Lord is, as we heard, entering now his capital city. He's come to enter and to declare who he is.

So, in the passage that Fran read out for us, we have three scenes, right, in today's passage. And so, we've got three points, three sections, all right? So, firstly, let's follow the scene as the king comes to a shaken city, all right?

Have a look at verse one again, right? As they approached Jerusalem, came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples and said to them, go to the village ahead of you. And at once you'll find a donkey tied there with her colt.

Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, tell them that the Lord needs them and he will send them straight away. It's kind of like a rest stop. I don't know, if you're driving back up from Hamilton, you might stop at the Pocono ice cream shop on the way back up, right?

So, you want to imagine that's what they're doing. They've just got a bit of a rest stop here of Bethphage, getting ready to go the final few kilometers up to Jerusalem. This was Jesus and his disciples getting a chance to prepare for this final entry into the big city.

[10 : 46] But as Matthew highlights for us, Jesus, you know, he requests a donkey and a colt, right? It's like a two-seater he's going to be sitting on. It's not just an excuse to have a break from walking though, right?

Because Matthew tells us, verse four, right? This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets. Is that a line that's familiar or rings a bell?

Because it should. Actually, this exact phrase has happened already eight times in the book of Matthew. And this is the ninth, and then there's going to be one more, right? In fact, this is one of Matthew's favorite words, fulfill.

If the four gospels were like, I don't know, different food products, I feel like Matthew would be like a pie because, you know, you keep filling it up, right? He keeps saying fulfill, fulfilled. I don't know. Just think filling, right? Think Matthew.

All this took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet. Whether it's Jesus' birth, whether it's his immigrant slash refugee backstory, he had to run away, remember, from a massacre, whether it's his baptism, all these things took place to fulfill God's word.

[11 : 55] The words of the prophets from of old. Matthew, when he writes the gospel, he's constantly trying to tell us and persuade us, Jesus is far more than just a nice guy. He's far more than just an interesting Wikipedia article.

He is Israel's dream come true. He is God's promises come to pass. He is the divine king who will establish his kingdom to rule and to reign.

And here is actually a sign of his divine authority right here already, right? Did you consider, did you notice his perfect knowledge in this exchange? He told his disciples where they'll find the donkey he is to ride.

He gives them the right answer for when the owner asks, right? And says, hey, why are you taking my donkeys for? He says that upon that answer, they'll get the animals. All of this then happens exactly as foretold.

Who can do that? This is God's authority on full display. Don't be confused. Don't be, don't doubt. Wherever we go, whatever we do, nothing is hidden from the Lord Jesus's sight.

[13 : 01] I wonder if we thought about that more, how that would shape our thoughts and actions, right? Jesus, he's reigning today. He's risen from the grave. He's at the right hand of the Father. He still has that perfect knowledge.

In public and in secret, our Lord Jesus knows and sees everything about us. Now consider how the crowd reacts as Jesus enters Jerusalem, right?

Verse 8. And the words from one of our worship songs come straight from here, right? Hosanna. Hosanna to the son of David, they cry out. Not only that they cry out, they spread cloaks and palm branches on the road.

These are all kind of culturally appropriate ways to honor a victorious leader, right? A divinely appointed warrior. A long time ago when New Zealand won the Rugby World Cup, people would just line the streets as they celebrated their victory, okay?

That's the kind of scene that we see here. And they cry out, Hosanna to the son of David. They're quoting Psalm 118. And they're saying, blessed is he here who comes in the name of the Lord. [14:06] So remind each other, though, that we want to remind each other that Israel was not quite a happy place. Israel at the time was, well, they got to live at home, their ancestral land, but they weren't in charge.

Who remembers who was in charge at this point in time? Okay. It was the Romans, right? The Roman Empire, right? Empires come and go, right? We've heard about the Babylonians, the Persians, and so on.

And eventually the Greeks, and then now the Romans, okay? And so right now the Romans kind of ruled most of that area, most of Europe and most of the Middle East. But then they had put a puppet king named Herod, approved by the Romans, saying that you can rule, but it's under our terms.

And so the crowds, they're looking for a savior. It's more likely that these crowds were welcoming Jesus with some expectation that maybe, maybe that he could start a real revolution, one that they wanted, someone that could maybe make Israel great again, politically and culturally.

When as they cry out, they're possibly expecting one of their own. Just as a couple hundred years ago, there was someone who did chase out, all right, those who were in charge ruling the Maccabees.

[15:29] Or maybe even earlier, they thought about King David who rode into Jerusalem, chasing out all of his enemies. That's the kind of expectation that was in the air.

And so no surprise, when Jesus entered Jerusalem, verse 10, people were asking, who is this guy? And the crowds answered, this is Jesus. He's the prophet from Nazareth, all right?

Interesting choice of description, right? These Israelites were basically saying, he's one of ours. He's one of ours. But I want to suggest to you, it's not enough to claim Jesus as just the fact that he's one of ours.

Matthew has done so much more than that, hasn't he? He's left scripture after scripture after scripture. He's left so many hints that we are supposed to see Jesus as more than just one of ours. We have to see him as our divine Lord. Here are Jewish people from near and far crying out, save us. But we, as Matthew's readers today, need to remember that Jesus has far more than earthly salvation or deliverance in mind.

[16:36] They could own their own and run their own country and still need deliverance, couldn't they? And this makes sense because the Bible is first and foremost not an earthly salvation story.

First and foremost, the Bible, right? It's a big book. It has one big story. One big salvation story. Starts with a God who is creator and sustainer. He loves us.

He loves the world. He's made it good. But then it continues with people who rebelled against him, who wanted to be king and God on their own, who rejected this God's loving rule.

It continues with a God who says, wow, I need to judge this. I must punish this sin, this rebellion. There can only be one king and it can't be you.

And yet at the same time, even as he judges humanity, he is merciful to them, incredibly merciful to them and to us, right? He keeps promising from Genesis all the way to here.

[17:34] There's going to be an offspring. There's going to be a seed. There's going to be someone one day who will save and bring in an eternal kingdom.

You'll come from King David's line, but every generation was waiting and waiting for this king, right? Matthew's words invite us to look beyond the scene and realize, ah, King Jesus is here.

He is the fulfillment of all of God's promises to deal with sin, to establish a heavenly kingdom that is right and just. In his kingdom, people who find their identity in Christ alone can join an eternal kingdom, will have a new forever citizenship in heaven.

It's easy to misunderstand Jesus' true identity. We live in a world where Jesus, he could be a swear word. He could be a nice guy or a cartoon character, a caricature.

And it's easy for us as well to follow the crowds, right? Follow what our friends and family think and say about Jesus. One moment we'll praise someone, the next we forget someone.

[18:44] I think it's the same with Jesus. We might think, ah, most of the time. We might functionally think, he's a good person. Oh, he's a good guide to how I should live my life.

And maybe that's you today. But Matthew reminds us that when the king comes into the city, he's more than just someone to rally around for earthly salvation.

He's someone who fulfills God's salvation plan. He's someone who is here to save and to rule. And he calls everyone to put their trust in him. Him alone for full and final salvation.

And so I think the question that comes from this passage is not just whether you've been stirred or shaken by Jesus. Have you submitted your life to him? We have our opinions about all kinds of people, right?

Celebrities, pop stars, singers. When it comes to Jesus, who is this person is the right question to ask. And then, will you submit your life to him?

[19 : 49] Knowing his true identity, knowing what he came to do for you. Will you submit your life to him? This is a big entrance, right? The king, the promised king coming to a shaken city.

Next, we watch as the king cleanses an unholy temple. We see this in from verse 12 to 17 onwards. Jesus entered the temple area, then drove out all who were buying and selling there.

Overtured the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. It's written, he said to them, my house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of robbers. One of the most terrifying days in our household's calendar is the day when I get the email from our property manager.

When she emails to make the appointment for the house inspection. As soon as an email comes through and a data sets, all right, dad mostly, gets really panic and busy, all right, tidying and throwing, cleaning and weeding.

A person of authority is coming to judge our house. Here, we get a different scene, but the same kind of panic, I think, ensues. The Lord Jesus is making a property inspection.

[21 : 05] The difference here is that this is his father's house. He has every right to be there. He's not just a hired person to do a job. He's here, he's inspecting his father's house.

That's not a pretty sight though, is it? Because Jesus sees sacred space spoiled by worldly transactions and motives. He sees prayers and sacrifices on the one hand in the temple competing with merchants and traders in business.

As Jeremiah 7, 11 once described of Israel's temple worship, the Lord's house had become a den of robbers. This is a quotation straight from Jeremiah. Jesus cries out, right?

You want to imagine he's looking at all this. And in a similar scene in John 2, he cries out, stop turning my father's house into a market because that's exactly what's going on here. Our Lord recognized something deeply offensive, unholy, about the mindset that crept into public worship here in Jerusalem.

Rather than honoring and prioritizing the temple's focus on prayer, worship and sacrifice, the Jewish people had gradually shifted to praying on the crowds, right?

[22 : 21] Taking advantage of them. Their need, right? Remember, these people have come from a long way. They didn't bring the right animals to sacrifice. They didn't bring the right money to make their payments.

And look, all of these are helpful services to offer. And yet none of them needed to be inside God's house, inside the temple precinct, right? Jerusalem's a big city. To bring it in there was to mix the motives of what was going on in God's house.

And Jesus sees this. And he gets busy cleaning house, throwing out merchants, overturning tables. Again, Matthew's favorite word is fulfill.

So this is all fulfilling Old Testament prophecies. Listen to Malachi chapter 3 verse 1. It says this, Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple. Ta-da.

Jesus is here. The Lord. And as he cleanses the temple, he is declaring himself to be this Lord that Malachi predicted. He's now the messenger, Malachi 3 verse 1, of a new covenant.

[23 : 27] A new covenant. Not based on fruitless religion. Not based on endless rituals. Jesus is the King of glory. Foretold in the law and the prophets of old.

He has every right to do what he does. Jesus is the servant King in Isaiah who heals the blind and the lame, as we then see in verse 14. All these people who came to him. People who previously had no hope.

He healed them. Jesus is the majestic Lord who in Psalm 8 too, it says, receives the praise of children and infants, even in the midst of enemies.

That's Jesus, isn't it? You see them. All the children coming to him. Verse 15. I think children can get things sometimes that adults like us sometimes don't get the first time.

Hosanna to the son of David. Right? They cry out. Jesus is the one. Jesus is the Lord that we've been looking for. I think when we read this account, it doesn't mean we should just automatically go out and throw everything out.

[24 : 28] No chocolates. No coffee. No nice things in the temple. No. That's not the point. And yet, I think Jesus does want to challenge our heart motives, right?

Behind what goes on when we meet together as God's holy people. When we gather to worship, are we tempted to do things out of love of convenience or ease?

Or to get the approval of others? Are we here and we're trying to profit personally or relationally as we serve one another? Are there areas of our church where we've just, without even knowing it maybe, let worldly values and mindsets creep in in how we make decisions and what we choose to do?

And if God's temple today is more than just bricks, right? We talked about this last year a lot. God's temple, spiritually, is where the Holy Spirit dwells. He dwells in every believer, right?

This living temple. Then the question then becomes even more pointed. If Jesus walked into this temple, this house of prayer, what would he want to chase out?

[25 : 43] What traditions or worldly habits would he be overturning? What unholy motives does he want to cast out? The Bible tells us God will purify his dwelling place of all that is unholy.

Just like this. And you know, when Christ the Lord comes to dwell with us again the second time, he will purify his visible church. Just as he did this temple.

He will cleanse the spiritual temple, the dwelling place of the Lord, his church, from everything that defiles and corrupts.

No double-minded person will have a place in the new Jerusalem. And so in light of this, what should be our response? Well, I'll tell you what, it shouldn't be our response, right?

These religious leaders getting angry, commanding Jesus, silence the children's praise. We're going to hear more from these leaders next week, unfortunately. No, don't follow their response.

[26 : 45] Rather, just as Jesus has previously shared with us, let us model our praise and worship after the children who shout, Save us. That's what Hosanna means, by the way. Save us, son of David.

Let's follow after those who identify Jesus rightly. Save us. Lord. Let's follow after those who know Jesus as more than a prophet from our culture.

Who follow him as God's true king. Save us, Lord. Look for the people who shout that. Who live that out in their lives. Follow them.

Follow their response. And perhaps we'll be starting to see a more purified temple of the Lord. The promised king comes to a shaken city.

He cleanses this unholy temple. And finally, in an act of kingly authority, verses 18 to 22 describes how the king curses a fruitless tree.

[27 : 48] All right? Now, I'll be honest, there are two difficulties with this passage. All right? You may or may not know. But one is that how this scene is retold here in Matthew actually comes across quite different when it's retold in Mark's gospel.

I don't know if you've ever thought about it before. Mark's gospel and Matthew's gospel. You lay them out next to each other and you'll be like, hmm, are they talking about the same thing? Is there a contradiction? All right?

That's one. Another is that we often struggle to know what to make of Jesus' teaching on prayer.

Right? At the end of this. Right? Wow. Is this a blank check for any kind of gift from the Lord?

Can I now treat our Lord, you know, in heaven as some kind of magic genie? Well, let's tackle the first problem. Now, Matthew 21, 18 to 22 recounts that after the temple cleansing, Jesus and disciples, they walk to Jerusalem.

They come across a fig tree by the roadside. Right? That's what it says. And then although he's hungry, he finds nothing but leaves. And then he says, may you never bear fruit again. Immediately the tree withers.

[28 : 54] But Mark 11, chapter 11, verses 12 to 14, and then 19 to 20, recounts how Jesus came to the fig tree, finds no fruit.

And then he says, may no one ever eat from you again. All right. And then what happens is that he goes and cleanses the temple. And that's the next day in Mark's gospel. And Peter sees a fig tree.

And he's like, oh, look, Lord, it's withered away to its roots. So what's going on here? It's true that disciples' accounts differ. But I want to suggest they do fit together.

All right? Perhaps in order to teach the meaning of Jesus cursing the tree, Matthew's captured things maybe topically. Right? We see three scenes. We've gone from city to temple to tree. So maybe that's what's going on. Maybe Matthew's kind of not going by strict time order. And maybe another idea is that maybe Mark has captured things, right, in his account as they happen in time.

[29 : 52] But he's more interested in kind of presenting things like sandwiches, right? And Matthew was a pie. Right? Mark, I think, loves sandwiches, right? There are lots of scenes in Mark's gospel where something happens, another thing happens, and then they go back to that first thing that happened.

Right? So, and again, Mark does that to make a point. So he's trying to say that this fig tree, for example, start and finish, and then the cleansing of the temple, they go together.

Right? What happens around the fig tree is meant to be a picture of the unfruitfulness that's happening in the temple, as it were. Okay? So that's how Mark likes to write.

And I think Matthew, then, has maybe a different agenda, and so that's why they've rearranged things differently. There are other possible explanations, right? Perhaps the disciples record Jesus cursing the fig tree twice.

Maybe. Right? Jesus likes to say things more than once. Right? He teaches the Sermon on the Mount, and then there's a sermon, you know, on the field. Right? So, in different gospels. Maybe what's happening here is that the withering process began, you know, when Matthew describes it, while Peter, in Mark's gospel, says, Ah, it's withered to the roots.

[31 : 05] He's kind of seen the end part of it. Whatever the explanation, the key is when we read scriptures, and there are hard bits, and there are hard bits in scripture, we want to read it, scripture, with scripture.

We want to compare the context. We want to ask, what's Matthew trying to do here that Mark's trying to do differently? The more we do that with our Bibles, right, the more we'll get better at going, okay, I can't answer all the contradictions, but I can see that God's word makes sense.

I can see there's a rhyme and reason to what Matthew is doing here in our context. And I can keep going. I can trust this Jesus, this word. But the fact remains that regardless of how you put together Matthew and Mark and these stories, it remains, though, that nowhere else in the gospels do we see Jesus curse anything out of God's good creation, right?

Why is he being so mean, we might ask? Why here? Why now? Again, we see from both Mark and Matthew's accounts of the same big idea. This is Jesus basically teaching us visually.

The temple in Jerusalem, its barren religion and ritual, was just like a fig tree, full of leaves, but barren of any fruit, and ripe for imminent destruction.

[32 : 21] Now, Jesus actually is channeling the rebukes of other prophets, right? Centuries before Micah 7, verse 1, records God's voice crying out to the same city, Jerusalem, lamenting of their fruitless worship.

Micah 7, verse 1 says, there's no cluster of grapes to eat. None of the early figs that I crave. Jesus is using the same language here, and he's found an object lesson to tell the disciples.

Beneath all the leaves of this busy, busy temple, glittering as it was, full of people serving, the daily service, yearly feast, was a religion utterly barren of true spiritual fruit.

This was a system set up, right? As beautiful as it was, but had no grace, no spiritual life, because it had no Messiah. It was not looking forward to a true king that was coming.

And the rest of Matthew chapter 21, 22 especially, Jesus is going to press home the consequences of that rejection that this religious group was continuing to put forward.

[33 : 27] And the message here is this, and this is a true for all of us. God will judge, he will uproot all fruitless worship that's not centered around the Messiah.

I'll say it again. God will judge and uproot all fruitless worship that's not centered around Jesus the Messiah. For the Jews, actually, that happened as predicted.

Forty years later, the Romans actually come and destroy this temple to the ground. They left one, you know, there's one wall left. It's called the Wailing Wall, the Western Wall. If you've ever been to Israel, you can see it there.

This is the judgment of a nation that refused to recognize the Messiah Jesus. But I think for us as Christ's church, God's spiritual temple today, there's a leafy lesson as well, as it were. I think Jesus is also warning us that every fruitless branch of God's people in Christ is in danger of withering away, beyond a doubt.

[34 : 27] It's not my assessment, that's what Jesus says. Any church can become puffed up about what they do for the Lord, while at the same time not resting on what God has done for us by his grace through Jesus.

Any church, big or small, can get good at pulling together events and activities and look busy without the fruit of holiness to the Lord. Right? Without the spiritual fruit, the fruits of the Spirit that Galatians talks about, for example.

Any church can become proud of a slick service, well-attended worship services, well-organized leadership structures, loads and loads of charts that say, look how organized we are.

Any church can do that, but yet without the fruit of repentance and faith, being sorry for our sin and just trusting the Lord and relying on him. And so Jesus would warn us, let us not be a church full of leaves, yet without the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus would warn us, let us not be a church that appears godly, yet denies the resurrection power of Jesus over our lives. Rather, first and foremost, we need to be a church that abides in Christ, relies, depends on him.

[35 : 48] As Jesus declared to his disciples in John 15 verse 5, I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me, right, not in the religion, not in your structures and services, you remain in me and I in you, then you'll bear much fruit.

Apart from me, you can do nothing. If you don't remain in me, you're like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Same teaching, isn't it?

And this is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. At the start of the year, this is a wonderful place to stop and reflect, isn't it?

Jesus' logic here, right, helps us to make sense of this challenge in our lives. Are we, you know, leafy as it were, but with no fruit?

And I think this also helps us to make sense of this prayer of faith in verse 21 to 22, right? Again, we want to read our Bibles in context, so we don't look at verse 21 to 22 and go, yeah, I can now uproot all the mountains in my life.

[36 : 58] I think the question that we need to ask is, right, I can pray boldly. What should I ask for God in prayer now that I know about the dangers of fruitless religion?

Far more crucial than your ability or my ability to look godly without a changed heart is to, Matthew 3, 8, bear fruit in keeping of repentance. Far more important than being able to throw mountains to the sea or to curse fig trees of our own is our need to cling to Jesus as our solid rock.

Would we pray that by faith, that we would do that more and more? That we wouldn't rely on our own merits? I think that's an invitation here, isn't it? That is a prayer worth praying, asking in faith.

And if you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer. And so as the disciples follow the Lord to Jerusalem in the weeks to come, maybe that could be the prayer that you and I can make for ourselves, that we would remain in Jesus.

We would lean on him, rely on him, and not ourselves. We'd cling to him through faith in his atoning work for our sins. That we would repent of all our efforts to save ourselves.

[38 : 13] We would just be like the children. Save us, O son of David. And that would be the anthem for our lives. Because at the cross, Jesus answers that prayer.

That's the good news, isn't it? Here, Jesus enters the city of Jerusalem. But we will see that there outside the city walls of Jerusalem, on Good Friday, Jesus, the son of God, the one who lived with perfect righteousness, becomes the cursed one who hangs on a tree for our sins.

Jesus, the fruitful one, the one who blessed so many people in his life and ministry, dies thirsty and abandoned and alone.

He was laid in a tomb, raised to glorious life three days later. And where lifeless, dead religion must one day wither away. Life in Christ only grows richer and fuller as you and I await his return.

And for that glorious day, when one day we will reunite with him, finally alive, branches, fruit and all. As Matthew's gospel continues to lead us to the cross, let us continue to fix our eyes on Jesus, the fruitful one.

[39 : 35] PCBC, there is no name more beautiful, no name more wonderful, no name more powerful than this Jesus. Shall we pray together? Lord Jesus, you were the word with us at the beginning.

And so we worship you. We confess that, whether it's through the holidays or through the years, we have turned our eyes to less worthwhile pursuits, ambitions that just fit in with the world.

Lord, we want to commit this year to you. We want to say that all the gifts you've given us are good, and yet the gift of Jesus is far better. We want to cry out like the children, Hosanna, save us, son of David, save us, promised one.

And we want to give you great praise and thanks, knowing that you do answer the prayers that we ask by faith, the ones that we boldly ask for spiritual growth, for closeness with you, for true and better knowledge of your son Jesus.

Help us to not rely on our own strength, Lord, but to trust you by faith. We pray all these things in Christ's precious name. Amen. Amen.