

Matthew 21-24: Easter plans

The key moment, in Matthew 16, when Peter stated publicly the identity of Jesus—‘the Messiah, the Son of God’ - changes the movement of the whole of Matthew’s good news biography.

The identity of Jesus is confirmed, from the mouth of his disciples. The mission of Jesus is clarified—he has come to be rejected, die and rise again (from the very mouth of Jesus). And there is a divine confirmation at the Transfiguration, which matches the one made at his baptism—with the added command, ‘Listen to him’ (Matt.17:5).

At this moment, Jesus seems to start his move towards the climax of his earthly mission, moving towards Jerusalem. It is a move made explicit in Matthew 20:17.

There are plans afoot—plans by Jesus, plans by the religious authorities, plans that will bring to fruition the very plans of God: that the sins of his people will be forgiven by the life, death and resurrection of his Son.

We all make plans at/for Easter. And those plans all involve good things—food, family, rest, reflection. As we organise our plans, let’s take time over the next four weeks to look at the ‘Easter plans’ revealed in God’s word, in four snapshots from Matthews 21-24.

Study 1: Matthew 21:1-17

Read Matthew 21:1-17

Comprehend

1. As Jesus and his followers approach Jerusalem, what instruction does he give to his followers? What explanation does Matthew give for such instructions? (vs.1-5; cf. Is.62:11; Zech.9:9)

2. The disciples obey Jesus—then they enter Jerusalem. Who is with them as they enter, and what do they shout? (vs.6-9; cf. Ps.118:22-26)

3. What is the reaction in Jerusalem? What contrast is presented here? (vs.10-11; cf. Matt.20:29)

4. Jesus clears the Temple—why? (vs.12-13; cf. Is.56:7; Jer.7:11)

5. The response of particular people is striking—who responds in vs.14-17, and what do they say? What explanation does Jesus give? (vs.14-17; cf. Ps.8:3)

Consider

6. As Jesus comes to Jerusalem, what are his plans?

7. As Jesus comes to Jerusalem, what do you think are the plans of the 'crowds'?

8. As Jesus comes to Jerusalem, what is familiar about Jerusalem's reaction? (cf. Matthew 2:3; not the same

Greek word, but a similar idea!)

Looking at Matthew 21:15-16, what do you think the plans of the religious leaders might be?

Contact

9. As we come to our Easter plans, how might these three lots of plans—those of Jesus, the crowds, and the religious authorities—provide a magnifying glass over our plans?

10. At its hearts, what clash of plans does Easter reveal?

How do we experience this today?

Write down a prayer that seeks to respond to the plans we have read about in Matthew 21:1-17...

Study 2: **Matthew 21:23-46**

Read Matthew 21:18-46

Comprehend

1. As Jesus comes back into Jerusalem the next morning, he is confronted by the religious authorities—what is their question? (vs.23)

2. Jesus responds with a question, which leads to a debate and a resolution. What is the question, what is the debate, and what is the resolution? (vs.24-27)

3. Jesus continues speaking, and provoking answers, through two parables. What is the first parable, and what does it expose? (vs.28-32)

What is the second parable, and what does it expose?
(vs.33-46)

Consider

4. In the second parable, Jesus quotes a Psalm. What is it, and why is this significant? (vs.42; cf. Matt.21:9)

5. As Jesus returns to Jerusalem the next day, what do his plans seem to be?

6. As Jesus returns to Jerusalem the next day, what does he expose about the plans of the religious leaders?

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7. What do these plans expose about the nature of, and the authority wielded by, Jesus?

8. How might such a revelation be confronting for our plans for Easter?

9. In what way are the plans of the religious authorities confronting for our Easter plans?

Write a prayer of confession that might be prompted by these plans revealed...

Study 3:
Matthew 22:34-46

Read Matthew 22:34-46

Comprehend

1. Verses 34-35 suggests that there was a cohesive and coordinated plan operating. What was it? (glance back to verses 15-16, and 23-24)
2. What is the question posed in verse 36? What is tricky/testing about it?
3. What is Jesus' response? (vs.37-40; cf. Deut.6:1-6; Lev.19:18 (19:2))
4. What is Jesus' plan in verse 41-42?
5. What emerges, and how does Jesus 'trap' them? (vs.42-45; cf. Ps.110)
6. What is the final outcome? (vs.46)

Consider

7. As Jesus visits Jerusalem, what plan do the religious leaders have? Which groups are involved and, from your knowledge, why is it important to know which religious groups are involved?
8. As Jesus visits Jerusalem, what plan does Jesus seem to be undertaking?

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9. As you consider the plans of the religious leaders, does anything strike you as familiar as you consider religious authorities today and Jesus? How might we be confronted, in our plans?

10. As you consider Jesus' response (his 'plan'), is there anything revealing about the manner and content of his responses? How might we be encouraged in our plans?

Write a prayer seeking wisdom from God to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and his response to murderous and testing opposition...

Study 4

Matthew 24

Read Matthew 24

Comprehend

1. This is a notoriously tricky passage (similar to Mark 13!). And it starts with a predictably provocative statement by Jesus. What is it? (vs.1-2)

Why does Jesus say this? (vs.1)

2. The disciples return with another question—what are they (really) asking? (vs.3)
3. Jesus' response is long... In verses 4-35, what broad outline does he lay down, and what plans will be faced by Jesus' followers? And what plans must Jesus' followers make?

In verses 36-44, Jesus lays out a clear 'timeframe' - what is it? And what plans must Jesus' followers make?

In verses 45-51, Jesus lays out a clear discipleship statement—what is the 'plan'?

Consider

4. Why do you think Jesus emphasizes the destruction of the Temple?
5. What is revealed, in vs.3, about the disciples' plans?

6. What does Jesus reveal about God's plans for the future?
7. What does Jesus reveal about the plans disciples of him should have?

Contact

8. How might Jesus' plans confront our plans, for discipleship?
9. How might Jesus' plans confront our plans, for the future?
10. How might the disciples plans (vs.3) confront our plans as disciples?

Write down a prayer asking for perseverance in these days, and for Jesus to return soon...