

When You Look at Jesus, What do You See?

Thomas Robinson, *Jesus and the Presence of God 1*, May 31, 2015

Matthew 20:29 – 21:16 (ESV Adapted)

²⁹ And as they went out of **Jericho**, **a great crowd** followed him. ³⁰ And behold, there were **two blind men** sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, **“Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!”**

³¹ **The crowd** rebuked them, telling them to be silent, but they cried out all the more, **“Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!”**

³² And stopping, Jesus called them and said, **“What do you want me to do for you?”**

³³ They said to him, **“Lord, that our eyes may be open.”**

³⁴ And **Jesus** in compassion **touched their eyes**, and immediately they **recovered their sight** and **followed him**.

21:¹ Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent **two disciples**, ² 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. ³ If **anyone** says anything to you, you shall say, **‘The Lord needs them,’** and he will send them at once.”

⁴ This took place to fulfill what was spoken by **the prophet**, saying,

⁵ “Say to **the daughter of Zion**, [Isa 62:11]

*‘Behold, **your king** is coming to you,*

***humble**, and mounted on a donkey,*

on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’” [Zech 9:9]

⁶ **The disciples** went and did as Jesus had directed them. ⁷ They brought **the donkey and the colt** and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. ⁸ Most of **the crowd** spread their cloaks on the road, and **others** cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ And **the crowds** that went **before him** and that **followed him** were shouting,

“Hosanna (Save, we pray) to the **Son of David!**

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! [Psa 118:25-26; Mt 23:39]

Hosanna in the highest!”

¹⁰ And when he entered Jerusalem, **the whole city** was shaken, saying, **“Who is this?”**

¹¹ And **the crowds** said, “This is **the prophet Jesus**, from Nazareth of Galilee.”

¹² 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**.

¹³ He said to them, “It is written, **‘My house shall be called a house of prayer’** [Isa 56:7], but **you** make it **‘a den of robbers.’”** [Jer 7:11]

¹⁴ And **the blind and the lame** came to him in the temple, and **he healed them**.

¹⁵ 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, ¹⁶ 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**?’”*

[Psa 8:2]

Why Do People See Jesus so Differently?

When you hear people's opinions about Jesus, you hear variety. Many are ok with God, with spirituality, but Jesus? Exclusive. Narrow. Who was Jesus? A myth, revolutionary zealot, a man with a wife and kid who loved the divine feminine, a village philosopher, a corrupter of humanity teaching a slave mentality, a world-denying ascetic, a good pharisaic rabbi?

Matthew is leading us into the final, most crucial part of his Gospel, the end of Jesus' story, and beginning. He draws on many memories written and oral, but his aim is to help us to encounter Jesus. He's writing the past history of a living person. The challenge is not so much getting a set of facts right as helping us actually to meet the living Jesus. Mt takes us into the throngs. Helps us hear questions. Gives us resources to see ourselves and Jesus.

Looking at the People Looking at Jesus

The crowds. They weave in and out of the narrative. We stand among them. Gathered for something big. They're following Jesus, hoping to see something. With ordinary eyes.

Two blind men. In Jericho they've heard of Jesus. Need. Desire. "Son of David" – that means King, Messiah, wealth, power, benevolence. Stories of healings. Go for it! It can't hurt. They cry for mercy and won't be silenced. (The crowd sees them hindering the big event.) They ask for the impossible. Eyes are opened. All they imagined and more. They follow.

Two disciples. Learners. Apprentices. They help Jesus arrange this preaching by dramatic enactment of prophecy. They follow Jesus' instructions. Potential objectors cooperate. They join all disciples to share in drama. Cloaks on donkeys, part of Passover celebration.

Crowds. Join the drama. Cloaks, branches, the coming of the king. They lead the way and follow, singing Psa 118. "Hosanna! Save, we pray, Son of David." Like the Blind men's cry! Their eyes are opening? Jerusalem, the city feels the earthquake. "Who is this?" The city is self-centered, more ignorant than the blind men. The Crowd lets them know the big news, the Prophet, Jesus, from the distant village in Galilee. A Prophet means God's messenger.

The Prophets. Behind the story are the prophetic words of scripture like a character: Isaiah, Zechariah, Jeremiah, the Psalms. They embody hopes, promises waiting to be filled with meaning. The Daughter of Zion, Israel's ideal self, is waiting, looking for the humble king.

Temple Traders. The confrontation begins. Jesus acts first. A prophetic sign that challenges everyone to interpret and understand. The traders express a policy, a false understanding of God, shown in the way the temple as God's house was used. A house of prayer for all.

The Blind and Lame. Traditionally excluded from the temple. They were beggars at the gates. Jesus brings them in and heals them as an embodiment of Isaiah's vision of inclusion.

Children. Innocence, vulnerability, the future? They join the Blind men and the crowds.

Chief Priests and Scribes. Those who run the temple; authorize the traders. They quote the prophets and should know the work of God. They see the wonders, hear the songs, but they're indignant, angry and see blasphemy. They rightly sense Jesus' dangerous challenge to everything they've built in their temple regime. It is a vast well-oiled complex. The only thing missing is God. What the blind, the crowds, the children see, they can't see: The long-expected Messiah, Son of David, coming for deliverance of his much-abused people.

What Do You See? What Do You Hear?

But none at that time could see fully what Matthew wants us to see. A piece is missing, even for those closest to Jesus. God will act – Jesus' death and resurrection. Only then will the depth, meaning of this drama emerge. God came to his temple, in judgment and renewal. Where are we among the throngs? What do we see? What do we sing? Whom do we follow?