

REGIME CHANGE**Matthew 21:1-16****(Read Matthew 21:1-16)**

Intro: Wikipedia describes regime change as “. . . *the forcible or coerced replacement of one government regime with another.*”

In 2002 the US brought about a regime change in Iraq by invading that country and driving its strongman dictator, Saddam Hussein into hiding.

Last summer regime change happened in Afghanistan when the US pulled out causing the democratically elected government to swiftly fall to the Taliban who returned the country to their heavy handed Islamic form of government.

The Russians have been attempting a regime change in Ukraine for over ten years and they turned up the pressure for that with a disinformation campaign that increased in intensity for many months that culminated with an invasion at the end of February. They've discovered that their plan to swiftly bring about regime change is very difficult when it's ill-conceived, shoddily executed, and just plain wrong! AND against a determined population.

Regime change was happening when Jesus rode into Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. But it wasn't a forcible takeover. It was an invasion fueled by the love of God for the entire human race. B. B. King sang of love coming to town and this was the beginning of a week where love came into town as Jesus rode into Jerusalem and closer to a cruel death on a cross for the sin of humanity.

BUT for a short while it seemed like it was the other kind of regime change, that one that happens by force and is perpetuated by the hand and hatred of man.

Let's look at the powers at work as Palm Sunday unfolded.

There were **the Romans**:

- They were the hated conquerors. They were hated just because they were foreign, and because they were pagan. They had their foot on the neck of the Jewish people AND much of the rest of the known world. People often don't like the people in power, but in the case of the Romans, the dislike was well-deserved. They were harsh rulers who made sure that opposition was swiftly dealt with. They also heavily taxed the Jewish people. This meant that every time the people of Judea handed over their coins which bore the image of a distant emperor who thought himself a god, it was a grim reminder of the affront to their own religion and God as well as subjection to him.

There were **the religious leaders**:

- These are identified in our text in verse 15 as *the chief priests and the scribes*. These included the leading religious parties known as the Pharisees and the Sadducees who sat on the governing council known as the Sanhedrin. The Sadducees had the power at the moment, so their chief priest named Caiaphas was the head honcho. He served in the office 18 years and this was after his father in law, Annas, had been his predecessor. The Sadducees were the rich and elite. They loved power and they loved money and they did what they needed to, to keep it. That means they needed to be in collusion with the hated Romans to remain in power. In fact they did whatever was required to stay on the good side of Rome. This made them suspect and disliked by their own constituents. But that didn't matter as long as they held the reins.

There were **the money changers and merchants** in the outer courts of the temple:

- Money is power and the poor were throttled with that power. Passover was one of the biggest, if not THE biggest, festival of the year for the Jews. Think Christmas and Easter, with a little Mardi Gras thrown in and you have what Passover was for the Jewish people. Jewish men were supposed to make an annual pilgrimage to the holy city of Jerusalem at the very least during Passover. Many took along their entire family for this religious celebration. All this was combined with a time of gathering with loved ones and an air of festivity that swelled the population of Jerusalem from its normal 30,000 people to upwards of 300,000 or more.
- All **this meant MONEY!** Lots of it! And money is power. Thousands upon thousands of lambs were slaughtered for thousands of Passover meals and for thousands of sacrifices. Thousands upon thousands upon thousands of pigeons, doves, and sparrows were needed for people who could not afford the higher priced livestock the rich could purchase. This made visions of denarii dance across the imaginations of

opportunistic salespeople who, with a little kickback to the religious establishment, could charge whatever they wanted to people who would pay whatever they had to pay, to do what the religious people required to be good in the eyes of God for another year. William Barclay points out, “*A pair of doves could cost as little as 4 pennies outside the Temple and as much as 75 pennies inside the Temple.*” They were 20 times more selfish inside the temple than they were outside.

- There were also money changers who converted the currency of unwitting travelers who didn’t know the exchange rate. If you want to make the eyes of a resourceful South Asian sparkle, just hand over American dollars for something costing mere rupees and see how little change you get in return. I’m speaking from experience here. The moneychangers had eyes that sparkled.

And then there was Jesus:

- Quoting from Zechariah 9:9 and Isaiah 62:11 Matthew points out that the true King is coming, *lowly, and sitting on a donkey*. Jesus came to Jerusalem in humility, yet with appropriate dignity. Instead of coming on a horse as royalty or a conquering general, he came on a donkey’s colt that had never been ridden before. God had regime change in mind as his obedient son came to Jerusalem as the Prince of Peace.
- There was violence, but the conqueror was the one who suffered that violence as he ushered in a new government. If people would have been alert and not wrapped up in their own wishes for an earthly change, they may have noticed that Jesus fulfilling messianic prophecies as he peacefully rode into the city. Adam Clark wrote, “*This entry into Jerusalem has been termed the triumph of Christ. It was indeed the triumph of humility over pride and worldly grandeur; of poverty over affluence; and of meekness and gentleness over rage and malice.*”
- Oh, it was regime change alright, but it was God’s perfect version of it. Indeed, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

And blessed is the one who comes to cleanse

- Regime change means the old must be driven out. Jesus drove out the merchants, who in cooperation with the religious establishment cheated visitors to Jerusalem by forcing them to purchase approved sacrificial animals and currencies at inflated prices. When we allow Christ to inhabit our heart you can expect him to clean out the cheating activity of Satan. David Guzik makes a good point: “*Jesus’s anger was against all those who bought as well as those who sold.*” The works of the devil anger our holy God, but he is also angry at his people who are called by his name when they fall for the cheating activity of the evil one.
- Make it your prayer to always seek after the cleansing power of his grace and forgiveness. Charles Spurgeon, making a perfect analogy of Jesus’s cleansing of the temple wrote, “*I do not believe we shall thoroughly purify any church by Acts of Parliament, nor by reformation associations, nor by agitation, nor by any merely human agency. No hand can grasp the scourge that can drive out the buyers and sellers, but that hand which once was fastened to the cross. Let the Lord do it and the work will be done, for it is not of man, nor shall man accomplish it.*” Or in F. B. Meyer’s words, “*We shall never know the full power of Christ’s salvation until we have welcomed him to our heart as king.*”
- He continues, “*Where Jesus comes, he cleanses. At his word the heart that was filled with the din of worldly care, becomes a home of prayer.*”
- Jesus went from cleansing the temple to healing the blind and the lame which seemed to pour salt on the wounded religious leaders. They saw him cut into their profits and then they saw the healing power of Jesus and they lashed out. I love how the text puts it, . . . *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?”* Matthew 21:15-16a. They were so blind they didn’t recognize wonderful when they saw it. And Jesus’s response was, in my paraphrase, “Yep! I hear them. Isn’t it great?! Kids get what grouchy old preachers completely miss.”

Conclusion: Don’t miss it Church! Jesus came to conquer – but not in the violent and selfish way of the human race. His way of regime change is a way of love and cleansing. That’s the kind of power we need to proclaim. Amen.

