

The Road to Jerusalem

Matthew 19–20 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Matthew

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Participants discover that on the road to Jerusalem, Jesus keeps raising every stake: marriage restored to “the beginning” and made indissoluble, celibacy embraced for the kingdom, riches unmasked as a rival god, the Father’s generosity offending human bookkeeping, and the destination named in his clearest words yet: the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Catholic Touchstone. The indissolubility of marriage, honestly engaging the exception clause; celibacy for the sake of the kingdom; the evangelical counsels in the rich young man; and the ransom saying as the Gospel’s own statement of redemption.

What You Need to Know

The divorce controversy (19:1–12) opens with a trap. The Pharisees ask whether divorce is lawful “for any cause,” placing Jesus between the rabbinic schools: Shammai allowed divorce only for serious sexual sin, Hillel for nearly anything, a spoiled dinner included. Jesus refuses the menu and appeals over Moses’ head to the beginning, quoting Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, which the group will find live: male and female, one flesh, joined by God. His conclusion legislates: what therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder. Pressed on Moses’ certificate of divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1), Jesus reclassifies it: a concession for your hardness of heart, never the design. Then verse 9, with its famous exception clause, which is tonight’s steelman and must be handled with complete honesty; see the steelman notes. The disciples’ reaction in verse 10 is itself evidence: “if such is the case... it is not expedient to marry.” No one gasps at a position Shammai already held; they gasp because Jesus has closed the exit they assumed was there. Jesus answers their shock not by softening marriage but by unveiling a second vocation: some make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, consecrated celibacy, received not by all but by those to whom it is given. Two vocations, both demanding, both gifts.

The rich young man (19:16–30) asks the right question and goes away grieving from the right answer. He has kept the commandments; Jesus, loving him in Mark’s telling, raises the ceiling: “if you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” The Church has always heard here the invitation beyond precept to counsel, the road of poverty, chastity, and obedience freely embraced (CCC 2053), while the camel and the needle’s eye teach everyone that riches are a rival god whose grip only God can break: with men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible. Peter’s “we have left everything” receives a staggering answer: thrones for the Twelve judging the twelve tribes (the New Israel’s government, one more quiet apostolic-office stone), a hundredfold now, and eternal life, with the refrain that frames the next parable: many that are first will be last, and the last first.

The laborers in the vineyard (20:1–16) exists to offend our bookkeeping. Those hired at dawn agree to a denarius, the just daily wage; those hired at the eleventh hour work one hour and receive the same. No one is cheated; someone is scandalized. The householder's questions end argument: am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity? Grace is not wages, God's arithmetic is mercy, and the deathbed convert and the lifelong disciple receive the same denarius, which is God himself. St.

Gregory the Great read the hours as the ages of a life and of history: whatever hour it is, the Master is still in the marketplace hiring.

The third passion prediction (20:17–19) is the most detailed yet: betrayal, condemnation, Gentiles, mocking, scourging, crucifixion, and on the third day rising. Straight into that solemnity walks the mother of the sons of Zebedee, asking thrones. Jesus' answer gives the session its summit: you do not know what you are asking; are you able to drink the cup? The cup, in the prophets, is the cup of God's wrath against sin (Isaiah 51:17); Jesus will pray about this cup in a garden soon. Greatness among the Gentiles is lordship; among you it must be service and slavery of love, “even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” This is the Gospel's own soteriology in one sentence, saturated with Isaiah 53's Servant who pours out his soul to death and bears the sin of many. The group discovers Isaiah 53:10–12 live and reads the ransom saying inside it.

The session, and the road, ends at Jericho, fifteen miles from Jerusalem: two blind men, the cry now familiar, “Have mercy on us, Son of David,” the crowd rebuking them, and the two crying out the more. Jesus stops, touches, heals; they follow him, up the Jericho road, toward the city. The Son of David list has one entry left to collect, and it is next week, at the gates.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Genesis 1:27 and 2:24.** Male and female, one flesh: the beginning to which Jesus appeals over Moses' concession, discovered live tonight.
- **Deuteronomy 24:1–4.** The certificate of divorce: Moses' concession for hardness of heart, never the design.
- **Isaiah 51:17.** The cup of the Lord's wrath: the cup Jesus asks the sons of Zebedee about, and will face in Gethsemane.
- **Isaiah 53:10–12.** The Servant who makes himself an offering for sin and bears the sin of many: the wellspring of “a ransom for many,” discovered live tonight.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Augustine (On Adulterous Marriages)

Augustine holds the line the Church has never surrendered: the bond of a consummated Christian marriage is dissolved by death alone. Separation from an unfaithful spouse may be permitted, but the bond endures, and neither party is free to marry another while the other lives; the Lord's appeal to the beginning admits no exception that ends a marriage God has joined.

Voices of the Church: St. John Chrysostom (Homilies on Matthew)

On the rich young man, Chrysostom notes that Jesus did not say riches are evil but that clinging is fatal: the young man's possessions possessed him. What Christ asks he asks as a physician prescribing freedom, and the grief with which the man departs is the tightening of the very chains he declined to drop.

Voices of the Church: St. Gregory the Great (Homilies on the Gospels)

Gregory reads the hours of the vineyard as the ages of a human life: some are called in childhood's morning, some at noon, some in the evening of old age. Let no one presume on a late call, and let no one despair of one: the householder is in the marketplace at the eleventh hour, and the denarius he pays is nothing less than himself.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 1614–1615.** Jesus unequivocally taught the original meaning of the union of man and woman: what God has joined, man must not divide. This demand can seem impossible, but Jesus gives the strength and grace to live marriage in the new dimension of the kingdom; the grace of Christian marriage is a fruit of Christ's cross.
- **CCC 1618–1619.** Christ is the center of all Christian life, and some renounce marriage for the sake of the kingdom: virginity for the kingdom is an unfolding of baptismal grace and a sign that the world is passing away.
- **CCC 2053.** The rich young man: keeping the commandments is answered by the call to more, “come, follow me,” and the evangelical counsels are inseparable from the commandments, the way of perfection freely embraced.
- **CCC 605.** Jesus affirms he came to give his life as a ransom for many: the Church, following the apostles, teaches that Christ died for all without exception; there is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer.

Thread Watch

- **Son of David thread (penultimate entry).** Jericho's two blind men, rebuked by the crowd, cry out the more. The list now runs: the blind, a Gentile mother, the desperate, never the experts. One entry remains, next week, at the gates of Jerusalem.
- **The cup (plant).** “Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?” Isaiah's cup of wrath, accepted by the Servant. It returns in a garden in Session 13.
- **Ransom and Servant (develop).** Isaiah 53 has shadowed the healings since 8:17; at 20:28 it steps into Jesus' own mouth. The bread thread and the Servant thread are converging on the same night.

Session Goals

1. Participants discover Genesis 1–2 as Jesus' own ground for marriage and can explain “the beginning” against Moses' concession.

2. Participants hear the strongest Protestant reading of the exception clause and can answer it honestly, including what remains debated.
3. Participants can articulate celibacy for the kingdom and the evangelical counsels as gifts, not punishments.
4. Participants let the vineyard parable audit their own bookkeeping about grace.
5. Participants discover Isaiah 53 inside the ransom saying and can state the Gospel's own account of why Jesus goes to Jerusalem.

Timing for 90 Minutes

Win 15 min · Build 55 min · Send and Live It 12 min · Prayer 8 min. If running long, the pre-chosen cuts are, in order: compress the Jericho scene into the closing prayer's introduction (saves about 4 minutes), then drop the Dig Deeper on annulments and cover its distinction in one spoken sentence (saves about 5 minutes). Do not cut the Genesis discovery, the steelman chain, or the Isaiah 53 discovery.

EMMANUEL · SESSION 10 · DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Road to Jerusalem

Matthew 19–20 · 90 Minutes

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, you set your face toward Jerusalem and told your friends plainly what waited there, and still you walked. On the road tonight you will talk to us about the things we hold tightest: our loves, our money, our sense of what we are owed. Loosen our grip where it needs loosening, and give us the nerve to keep walking with you. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. What is the longest promise you have ever seen somebody keep, and what do you think kept it alive?
2. When has generosity toward someone else ever bothered you, a raise, a break, a pardon they “didn’t earn”? Be honest.

Build (55 minutes)

Back to the Beginning

1. Read Matthew 19:3–6. The Pharisees ask about lawful divorce “for any cause,” inviting Jesus to pick a rabbinic team. **Live discovery:** Jesus answers with two quotations; have two people find and read Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24. What does Jesus build from these verses, who does the joining in his conclusion, and what does “let not man put asunder” therefore forbid?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The rabbis debated the grounds for divorce; Jesus rejects the question’s premise and appeals behind Moses to the Creator’s design: male and female, a man leaves and cleaves, the two become one flesh. His conclusion adds the decisive word: what therefore GOD has joined together. Marriage is not a contract two parties write and may unwrite; it is a joining God himself performs, and once a Christian marriage is validly made and consummated, no human authority, spouse, rabbi, or state, has standing to sever it. When they cite Moses’ certificate, Jesus reclassifies the entire provision: a concession to hardness of heart, from the beginning it was not so.

Build Then Press: What About the Exception Clause?

2. Read Matthew 19:7–9 slowly, and then verse 10, the disciples’ reaction, before the steelman.

The Strongest Protestant Reading, Given at Full Strength

The Protestant case here is as textual as it gets: Jesus himself says “whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery.” An exception clause is sitting in the verse. The natural reading, held by most Protestant churches, is that sexual infidelity genuinely dissolves the bond, freeing the innocent spouse to remarry. Matthew records the clause twice (5:32

and 19:9), so it is no scribal stray. On this reading, the Catholic Church's absolute indissolubility teaches more than her Master did, binding heavy burdens Christ himself loosened, at enormous pastoral cost to abandoned and betrayed spouses. This objection is serious, compassionate in motive, and standing on the very verse in front of us. Give it full weight.

3. Now press, starting from inside the passage. Read verse 10 again: the disciples respond that if this is the case, better not to marry at all. Here is the historical key: the school of Shammai ALREADY allowed divorce for adultery; that position was on the menu. If Jesus had just agreed with Shammai, what sense does their shock make? Then consider: the word translated “unchastity” is *porneia*, not the ordinary word for adultery (*moicheia*), which Jesus uses in the same sentence. And compare the parallel accounts: Mark 10:11–12, Luke 16:18, and St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:10–11 all report the teaching with no exception at all.

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The disciples' shock is the tell. Nobody says “better never to marry” about a position a major rabbinic school already held; they gasp because Jesus has taught something stricter than every school, closing the exit everyone assumed. Then the vocabulary: Jesus distinguishes *porneia* from adultery in the same breath, and many scholars, ancient and modern, understand the clause to address unions that were never lawful marriages at all, the incestuous unions of Leviticus 18, a sense many also find in *porneia* in the apostolic decree of Acts 15:20. Separating from such a union “divorces” no true marriage, because none existed. Others read the clause as permitting separation without remarriage, which the Church in fact allows in grave circumstances. Scholars genuinely debate the clause's precise force, and honesty requires saying so.

But notice what cannot be debated: Mark, Luke, and Paul, teaching the same doctrine to the wider Church, record no exception, and Paul attributes the no-remarriage rule to the Lord himself. An exception broad enough to dissolve real marriages would make the disciples' shock, and the celibacy teaching Jesus gives to answer it, unintelligible. The Church's reading holds the whole witness together: valid, consummated Christian marriage is dissolved by death alone; separation may be permitted; and an annulment is not a Catholic divorce but a finding that no valid bond existed from the start, the very situation the unlawful-unions reading of the exception clause has in view. Concede the pastoral weight without flinching: this teaching is heavy, the disciples said so first, and Jesus' answer was not “you exaggerate” but “not all can receive this, only those to whom it is given.” Indissolubility is not survivable by willpower; it is a grace of the sacrament, flowing, the Catechism says, from the cross.

Dig Deeper: Annulment Is Not Catholic Divorce

A divorce claims to end a marriage; a declaration of nullity finds that, despite appearances and good faith, some essential element (free consent, openness to children, capacity, form) was missing from the start, so no valid bond ever formed. The Church cannot dissolve a valid, ratified, and consummated Christian marriage; she can and must discern whether such a bond was ever formed. In certain limited cases she does dissolve other bonds, a marriage never consummated, or a natural marriage in favor of the faith, but a consummated sacramental marriage ends only in death. The

exception clause and the annulment process are, at bottom, about the same reality: unions that were never true marriages.

4. Read Matthew 19:10–12. The disciples say better not to marry; Jesus answers with a third way no one asked about. What is it, who receives it, and what is it for? What do verses 1–12 taken together say about vocations?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Some are incapable of marriage by birth or by men's violence, and some "have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven": freely chosen celibacy as total availability for God, received not by all but by those to whom it is given. Jesus does not soften marriage to make it easier; he unveils a second demanding gift beside it. Two vocations, both callings, both graces: lifelong covenant love that images the beginning, and consecrated celibacy that images the end, when they neither marry nor are given in marriage. Every celibate priest, every religious sister and brother, stands inside this verse.

The Man Who Owned Too Much

5. Read Matthew 19:16–26. The young man has kept the commandments; what does Jesus offer him next, and with what two-word invitation does it end? Why does he leave grieving? And when the disciples ask who then can be saved, what is Jesus' answer, word for word?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

"If you would be perfect": sell, give to the poor, treasure in heaven, "and come, follow me." Beyond the commandments lies not a rule but a Person and an invitation, the way of the counsels the Church's religious life has walked ever since. He leaves grieving because his great possessions possess him; St. John Chrysostom says the grief is the sound of chains tightening. The camel and the needle teach the hard universal: riches are a rival god no one dethrones alone. Who then can be saved? "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Salvation is not the strong succeeding; it is the impossible being done by God, in rich men and poor.

6. Read Matthew 20:1–16. Do the payroll math: who worked how long, who received what, and was anyone cheated? What are the householder's two closing questions, and which of the two men in you do they interrogate: the dawn worker or the eleventh-hour man?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Twelve hours, nine, six, three, one: every man receives the same denarius, the agreed just wage. No one is defrauded; the dawn workers receive exactly their contract, and their grievance is pure comparison: "you have made them equal to us." The householder's questions close the case: am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity? Grace is not wages; God's arithmetic is mercy, and the denarius, St. Gregory says, is God himself, whom the deathbed convert and the lifelong saint receive whole and entire. The parable means to catch us grumbling, and usually does.

The Cup and the Ransom

7. Read Matthew 20:17–28. Against the most detailed passion prediction yet, what do James, John, and their mother request? What does Jesus ask them about a cup (see Isaiah 51:17 for what “the cup” means in the prophets)? **Live discovery:** then his climactic sentence, verse 28, has a source; have someone find Isaiah 53:10–12 and read it. What does the Servant do there, for whom, and what words does verse 28 draw straight from it?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Against betrayal, condemnation, mocking, scourging, and cross, they ask for thrones. Jesus' question, can you drink the cup, reaches into the prophets, where the cup is the cup of the Lord's wrath against sin; he will hold that cup in a garden very soon, and yes, they will share it, James in his martyrdom under Herod (Acts 12:2) and John in a long life of persecution and exile, though not by their own strength. Greatness among his people is inverted: whoever would be great must be servant, whoever would be first, slave.

Then the sentence the whole road has been building toward: the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. Isaiah 53 stands open behind every word: the Servant who makes himself an offering for sin, pours out his soul to death, and bears the sin of many. Jesus is announcing, in the Servant's own vocabulary, why Jerusalem: his death will be the price of release, the offering that sets the many free. The Church teaches with the apostles that “many” excludes no one: there is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer (CCC 605).

Send (12 minutes)

1. Married, discerning, or single: what would it mean this week to treat your state of life as a vocation Jesus gives rather than a status you manage?
2. The young man was one possession away from following. Name yours, honestly, in the silence of your heart. What is one step toward an open hand?

Live It This Week

- If you are married, pray this week for your spouse by name and for one married couple under strain; if you are single, pray for the grace to hear your vocation as a call, not a verdict.
- Give something away this week that costs you: money, time, or the eleventh-hour grudge you have kept against someone God treated generously.
- Read Matthew 21–23 before next session. And keep the Son of David list handy: it completes at the gates.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, Servant and Ransom, on the road you healed two blind men who would not stop shouting your royal name, and they followed you up the hill toward Jerusalem. Give us their stubborn voices and

their following feet. Loosen what we clutch, teach us the greatness of serving, and when you pass by this week, let us not miss you. Son of David, have mercy on us. Amen.

Scripture Memory

Matthew 20:28 (RSV2CE): “...*even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*”

EMMANUEL · SESSION 10 · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every Passage in Order of Use

The Road to Jerusalem · Matthew 19–20

Primary Text

• Matthew 19:3–6 · Matthew 19:7–10 · Matthew 19:10–12 · Matthew 19:16–26 · Matthew 20:1–16 · Matthew 20:17–28 · Matthew 20:29–34

Live Discovery Passages

• Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24 (the beginning) · Isaiah 53:10–12 (the ransom for many)

Background Passages

• Deuteronomy 24:1–4 (the certificate) · Matthew 5:32 (the clause's first appearance) · Mark 10:11–12; Luke 16:18; 1 Corinthians 7:10–11 (no exception in the parallels) · Leviticus 18 and Acts 15:20 (porneia as unlawful unions) · Isaiah 51:17 (the cup)

Catechism

• CCC 1614–1615 · CCC 1618–1619 · CCC 2053 · CCC 605

Memory Verse

• Matthew 20:28