

The Son of David in His Temple

Matthew 21–23 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Matthew

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Participants discover the Son of David thread completing at the gates: the King arrives as Zechariah promised, the crowds and then the children cry the royal title in the temple itself, and Jesus caps the thread with his own riddle from Psalm 110, David's son who is David's Lord. They watch the confrontation parables strip the temple establishment bare, hear the greatest commandment, and sit with the woes of chapter 23, including the verse Protestants quote most often against Catholic priests.

Catholic Touchstone. Moses' seat and the authority of office despite unworthy officeholders; an honest, textual answer to "call no man your father"; and the dark Emmanuel note of a forsaken house, which sets up the Gospel's final promise.

What You Need to Know

The entry (21:1–11) is staged prophecy. Jesus, who has silenced messianic acclamation for ten chapters, now deliberately arranges its fulfillment, sending for the donkey so that Zechariah 9:9 happens in public view: your king comes to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey. The crowds answer with Psalm 118, the pilgrim psalm: Hosanna (save us, we pray) to the Son of David. The royal title our study has tracked since two blind men in chapter 9 is now on every tongue, and when the temple authorities hear even the children crying it in the temple courts (21:15), they are indignant; Jesus answers them from Psalm 8 as Matthew 21:16 quotes it in its Greek form: out of the mouths of infants you have brought perfect praise. (RSV2CE Psalm 8:2, following the Hebrew, reads that God has founded a bulwark from the mouths of babes; Matthew follows the Septuagint's perfect praise.) Note who has confessed the Son of David across this Gospel: the blind, a Canaanite mother, the Jericho beggars, pilgrim crowds, children. Never once the experts. The thread's completion is also its verdict.

The temple cleansing splices two prophets: my house shall be called a house of prayer (Isaiah 56:7, a text about the nations being gathered in) but you make it a den of robbers (Jeremiah 7:11, from the sermon in which Jeremiah warned that God would do to the temple what he did to Shiloh). The splice is itself the message: the temple has failed its purpose toward the nations, and judgment is in the doorway. The withered fig tree, leaves without fruit, is the same sermon in a sign.

The confrontation parables escalate. The two sons: saying yes and not going against saying no and repenting, with tax collectors and harlots entering first. The wicked tenants is built on Isaiah 5's vineyard song, which the group will discover live: Israel's prophets beaten, the Son cast out of the vineyard and killed, and the owner's verdict. Jesus seals it with Psalm 118 again: the stone the builders rejected has become the head of the corner; the builders themselves are rejecting it in real time, and Matthew notes they perceived he was speaking about them. The wedding feast adds the unsettling coda of the man without a garment: invitation is wide, presumption is fatal.

The test questions follow: Caesar's coin (render to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's, and the human person, stamped with God's image, belongs to God); the Sadducees' resurrection riddle (you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God: he is not God of the dead but of the living); and the greatest commandment, where Jesus welds Deuteronomy 6:5 to Leviticus 19:18 and hangs the whole Law and Prophets on the double love. Then Jesus asks his own question, the session's theological summit: whose son is the Christ? They say David's. He answers from Psalm 110, which the group discovers live: David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord. How is David's son David's Lord? No one could answer him a word. The genealogy of chapter 1 was true and insufficient: the Son of David is also the Lord seated at God's right hand, and only the Incarnation holds both. Our thread does not merely complete; it detonates upward.

Chapter 23 requires a steady hand. Begin with verses 2–3, which cut in a direction that surprises everyone: the scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do. Jesus affirms the teaching authority of an office while condemning the officeholders' example, which is precisely the distinction the Church has needed in every century since, and the reader of Session 8 will recognize it. The woes then fall on display religion: phylacteries broadened, places of honor loved, titles savored. Verse 9, call no man your father on earth, sits inside that context and is tonight's steelman; handle it with the same textual honesty as always. The chapter ends in tears, not thunder: how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood, and you would not. Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate. The One greater than the temple (12:6) is withdrawing from it, and the word "forsaken" tolls the Emmanuel thread's darkest note. Tell the group only this: the Gospel is not finished with the theme of presence. Two words in verse 39 leave the door open: "until you say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Zechariah 9:9.** Your king comes, humble and mounted on a donkey: staged and fulfilled at the gates, discovered live tonight.
- **Psalm 118:22–26.** Hosanna, the blessed coming one, and the rejected stone made head of the corner: the entry's soundtrack and the tenants' verdict.
- **Isaiah 5:1–7.** The vineyard song behind the wicked tenants, discovered live: the vineyard is the house of Israel, and the owner looked for fruit.
- **Isaiah 56:7 with Jeremiah 7:11.** House of prayer for all peoples; den of robbers: the cleansing's spliced sermon.
- **Psalm 110:1.** The LORD says to my lord: sit at my right hand. David's son and David's Lord, discovered live at the session's summit.

Voices of the Church

Voices of the Church: St. Andrew of Crete (Oration for Palm Sunday)

Andrew bids the Church spread before Christ not garments and branches but ourselves: let us lay down our own selves like cloaks before his feet, that the One who rode on humble beasts may ride into our souls. The entry into Jerusalem seeks a second entry, into us.

Voices of the Church: St. Augustine (Expositions on the Psalms)

On Psalm 110, Augustine hears the whole mystery in one verse: as man, Christ is David's son; as God, David's Lord. The Jews of that day could not answer because they would not confess both natures; the Church answers daily, for she knows the One seated at the right hand is the same who took flesh from David's line.

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

On the woes, Chrysostom warns that Christ's severest words fall not on ignorance but on display: religion performed for the eyes of men. The disease is not the seat of Moses but the love of the seat; not the title but the appetite for it.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 559–560.** Jesus' entry into Jerusalem manifests the coming of the kingdom that the Messiah-King, welcomed by children and the humble of heart, is going to accomplish by the Passover of his death and resurrection.
- **CCC 583–586.** Jesus honored the temple and loved it as his Father's house, yet identified himself as God's definitive dwelling among men; his prophetic act and words announce the temple's destruction and point to his own body as the definitive dwelling of God among men, which the temple prefigured.
- **CCC 439.** Many recognized in Jesus the fundamental features of the messianic Son of David; he accepted the title, though with reserve, because contemporaries understood it too politically. For the title's true height, see CCC 447: in disputing with the Pharisees over the meaning of Psalm 110, Jesus hints at the divine sense of the title Lord.

Thread Watch

- **Son of David thread (COMPLETE).** Blind men, a Canaanite mother, Jericho beggars, pilgrim crowds, children in the temple, and never the experts. Then Jesus lifts the title past politics with Psalm 110: David's son and David's Lord. Read the list back to the group and let them draw the verdict about who sees.
- **Emmanuel thread (darkest note).** "Your house is forsaken." The presence greater than the temple is withdrawing from it. Do not resolve; point only to the "until" of 23:39 and say the Gospel has two more moves to make.
- **Office and officeholder (develop).** Moses' seat: authority of office affirmed while officeholders are condemned. Connect back to rock and stumbling stone in Session 8 if the group does not connect it first.

Session Goals

1. Participants discover Zechariah 9:9 and Psalm 118 inside the entry and complete the Son of David list with its verdict.
2. Participants can explain the temple cleansing's spliced prophecy and the tenants parable's Isaiah 5 foundation.
3. Participants wrestle with Psalm 110 and can state why only the Incarnation answers Jesus' riddle.

4. Participants can explain Moses' seat as authority of office despite unworthy men, and connect it to Session 8.

5. Participants hear the strongest Protestant reading of “call no man father” and can answer it from Scripture's own usage.

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 wedding feast into one sentence within Build question 3's answer (saves about 5 minutes), then drop the Dig Deeper on Caesar's coin (saves about 4 minutes). Do not cut the Psalm 110 discovery or the steelman chain.

EMMANUEL · SESSION 11 · DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Son of David in His Temple

Matthew 21–23 · 90 Minutes

Opening Prayer

Hosanna, Lord: save us, we pray. You came to your city humble and mounted on a donkey, and the children knew you when the experts did not. Give us tonight the eyes of the small and the honesty to hear even your hardest words. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. Describe a time you watched an expert miss something a child or a beginner saw immediately. Why does that happen?
2. What is the difference between respecting an office and admiring the person in it? Have you ever had to do one without the other?

Build (55 minutes)

The King at the Gates

1. Read Matthew 21:1–11 and 21:14–16. Jesus, who has hushed messianic talk for chapters, now stages a public sign. **Live discovery:** have someone find Zechariah 9:9 and read it with verse 10. What kind of king does Zechariah promise, and what does the donkey say that a warhorse would not? Then complete our list: who cries “Son of David” here, who objects, and how does Jesus defend the criers?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Zechariah's king is righteous, saving, and humble, riding a donkey while chariots and warhorses are cut off: a king of peace whose dominion reaches the ends of the earth. Jesus arranges the fulfillment deliberately; after ten chapters of reserve, he is announcing himself, on his own terms. The crowds cry Psalm 118's Hosanna to the Son of David, and in the temple the children take up the cry while the chief priests seethe. Jesus answers from Psalm 8 as Matthew 21:16 quotes it from the Greek: out of the mouths of infants, perfect praise. Read the full list back: two blind men, a Canaanite mother, two Jericho beggars, pilgrim crowds, children. Never once a scribe. In this Gospel, the royal title is confessed by exactly the people the experts overlook, which is itself the Gospel's verdict on expertise without humility.

2. Read Matthew 21:12–13. Jesus splices two prophets in one sentence. Isaiah 56:7 promised the temple as a house of prayer, and for whom? Jeremiah 7:11 called it a den of robbers, in a sermon threatening what? What is the splice saying, and what does the fig tree (21:18–19) add?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Isaiah's house of prayer is “for all peoples”: the temple existed to gather the nations to God. Jeremiah's den-of-robbers sermon warned that God would do to the temple what he did to Shiloh:

destroy it. The splice indicts and sentences in one breath: the temple has failed its mission to the nations, sheltering commerce and presumption instead, and judgment stands in the doorway. The fig tree, all leaves and no fruit, withered at a word, is the same sermon as a sign. Remember who said, in chapter 12, that something greater than the temple is here.

The Vineyard and the Stone

3. Read Matthew 21:33–46. **Live discovery:** Jesus is renovating an old song; have someone find Isaiah 5:1–7 and read it. In Isaiah, who is the vineyard and what did the owner seek? In Jesus' version, who are the servants, who is the son, and what is chilling about where the story was pointed all along? What does the Psalm 118 stone add?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Isaiah's vineyard is the house of Israel; the owner looked for justice and found bloodshed. Jesus keeps the vineyard and changes the villains: not the vines but the tenants, the leaders entrusted with God's people. The servants are the prophets, beaten and killed in waves; the son is sent last, "they will respect my son," and they cast him out of the vineyard and kill him: Jesus is narrating his own death to the men planning it, days in advance. The stone the builders rejected becoming the cornerstone (Psalm 118) turns the murder inside out: the rejection itself becomes the foundation. Matthew notes they perceived he was speaking about them, and feared the crowds. The parable was a mirror, and they saw.

David's Son, David's Lord

4. Read Matthew 22:34–40, then 22:41–46. First the greatest commandment: what two texts does Jesus weld together, and what hangs on them? Then Jesus finally asks his own question. **Live discovery:** have someone find Psalm 110:1 and read it slowly, noticing who speaks to whom. What is Jesus' riddle, why could no one answer a word, and what is the only answer that works?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

He joins Deuteronomy 6:5, love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and mind, to Leviticus 19:18, love your neighbor as yourself, and hangs all the Law and the Prophets on the pair: everything this Gospel has taught, from the antitheses to the woes, is commentary on the double love.

Then the riddle. In Psalm 110, David himself, speaking in the Spirit, says: the LORD (God) says to my lord (the Messiah), sit at my right hand. Fathers do not call their sons "my lord"; ancestors do not defer to descendants. If the Christ is merely David's son, David cannot call him Lord; if merely David's Lord, the genealogy and the promises fail. The only answer is the one this whole Gospel has been assembling: the Christ is David's son according to the flesh, born of the line traced in chapter 1, and David's Lord according to his divinity, the Son whom the Father seats at his right hand. Our Son of David thread does not simply complete tonight; it detonates upward. No one could answer him a word, and no one dared ask him anything more.

Moses' Seat and the Woes

5. Read Matthew 23:1–12. Verses 2–3 surprise almost everyone: what does Jesus affirm, and what does he condemn, in the same breath? Where has this study met that distinction before? Then verses 5–7: what exactly is the disease Jesus diagnoses?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

He affirms the office: the scribes and Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so practice and observe whatever they tell you. He condemns the men: do not do what they do, for they preach but do not practice. Authority of office despite unworthy officeholders: we met exactly this in Session 8, where the rock received the keys and was called Satan five verses apart. The diagnosed disease is display: religion performed for the eyes of men, honored seats, broad phylacteries, loved titles. The greatest among you shall be your servant; whoever exalts himself will be humbled.

Build Then Press: “Call No Man Your Father”

6. Read Matthew 23:8–12 exactly as written before the steelman.

The Strongest Protestant Reading, Given at Full Strength

The verse could hardly be plainer, the objection runs: “call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven.” Yet Catholics address every priest as Father, the pope as Holy Father, and abbots by a title that literally means father. This is not a strained inference; it is apparently direct disobedience to a recorded command of Christ, in a passage condemning exactly the religious title-love the Catholic clergy seems to institutionalize. Many sincere Protestants find this the single clearest case of the Church contradicting her Master. Let it stand at full strength.

7. Now press, first on the verse's own context, then on Scripture's practice. Verses 8 and 10 forbid two more titles alongside father: what are they, and does anyone, Protestant or Catholic, avoid the words teacher, doctor, or even dad? Then the apostles themselves: **Live discovery:** have someone read 1 Corinthians 4:14–15, and another Acts 7:2 and 1 John 2:13–14. How do Stephen, Paul, and John use the word?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

The same paragraph forbids “rabbi” (teacher) and “master/instructor,” yet every Christian tradition uses teacher, doctor (which means teacher), professor, and of course father for the man who raised them. A woodenly literal reading proves far too much, and no one, in any church, actually lives it. The context supplies the real target: verses 5–7, religion performed for honor, seats loved, salutations savored, titles as trophies. Jesus is forbidding the appetite, and the pretension that any man is the source of what only God gives.

Scripture's own authors read him exactly that way. Stephen opens his speech, “brethren and fathers.” John writes, “I am writing to you, fathers.” Elisha cries “my father, my father” after Elijah. Above all Paul: “I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel,” and he calls Timothy his true child in the faith. So in the same generation that received Matthew 23, Christians freely addressed men as fathers, and Paul claimed spiritual fatherhood outright, because derived, instrumental fatherhood honors rather than rivals the Father from whom, as Ephesians 3:14–15

says, every family in heaven and on earth is named. Calling a priest “Father” confesses that he begot us in the Gospel and feeds us as a father does, all on behalf of the one Father. Concede the warning’s bite without wriggling: clergy who love the title, the seat, and the salutation are the verse’s actual targets, and the vices that make up clericalism, the loved seat, the broadened phylactery, the savored title, are condemned here one by one. The Church’s answer to Matthew 23:9 is not to rename her priests; it is to demand they be the servants verse 11 requires.

8. Read Matthew 23:37–39, the chapter’s true ending. What image does Jesus reach for, and what emotion carries it? What does “your house is forsaken” mean from the mouth of the One greater than the temple? And what small word in verse 39 keeps the ending from being final?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Not thunder but tears: a hen gathering her brood under her wings, and you would not. “Your house is forsaken and desolate” from him means the Presence is withdrawing from the temple, the darkest note our Emmanuel thread has sounded. But the last word is “until”: you will not see me again UNTIL you say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. The door closes without locking. Hold this ache; the Gospel has two moves left, and the theme of presence is not finished.

Send (12 minutes)

1. The Son of David was recognized by the blind, the foreign, the desperate, and the small. What in you belongs to the experts’ seats, and what still belongs to the children?
2. Everything hangs on the double love. Which half is currently weaker in you, and what one act this week would strengthen it?

Live It This Week

- Pray Psalm 110 once this week and let its first verse carry the weight it carried in the temple courts.
- Perform one act of hidden honor: give away a seat, a credit, a salutation you could have kept.
- Pray for your priests by name, that they be the fathers verse 11 demands: the servants of all.

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, Son of David and David’s Lord, you wept over the city that would not be gathered. Gather us. Purge from us the love of seats and titles, teach us the double love on which everything hangs, and keep us among the children who know your name. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Amen.

Scripture Memory

Matthew 22:37 (RSV2CE): *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”*

EMMANUEL • SESSION 11 • LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every Passage in Order of Use

The Son of David in His Temple · Matthew 21–23

Primary Text

• Matthew 21:1–11, 14–16 · Matthew 21:12–13, 18–19 · Matthew 21:33–46 · Matthew 22:34–40 · Matthew 22:41–46 · Matthew 23:1–12 · Matthew 23:37–39

Live Discovery Passages

• Zechariah 9:9–10 (the humble king) · Isaiah 5:1–7 (the vineyard song) · Psalm 110:1 (David's Lord) · 1 Corinthians 4:14–15; Acts 7:2; 1 John 2:13–14 (spiritual fatherhood)

Background Passages

• Psalm 118:22–26 (Hosanna; the stone) · Psalm 8:2 (out of the mouths of infants) · Isaiah 56:7 with Jeremiah 7:1–15 (the splicer) · Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 (the double love) · 2 Kings 2:12 (my father, my father) · Ephesians 3:14–15 (every family named)

Catechism

• CCC 559–560 · CCC 583–586 · CCC 439 · CCC 447

Memory Verse

• Matthew 22:37