

Watch, Therefore

Matthew 24–25 · A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Matthew

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. Participants discover the fifth and final discourse: Jesus' prophecy of the temple's destruction, fulfilled within a generation, woven together with the promise of his coming at the close of the age, for which no one knows the day or hour. They discover Daniel 7 as the source of Jesus' favorite self-title, and they arrive at the Gospel's judgment scene, where the King is found hidden in the hungry, the stranger, and the prisoner, and the doing-the-word thread planted in Session 4 resolves in full.

Catholic Touchstone. The Church's teaching on the Last Judgment and the works of mercy, an honest engagement with the claim that judgment by works contradicts salvation by grace, and pastoral clarity on “this generation” and “no one knows the hour.”

What You Need to Know

The discourse opens with the disciples admiring the temple buildings and Jesus' devastating reply: there will not be left here one stone upon another. Herod's temple was among the wonders of the ancient world, its stones massive beyond belief, and in the year 70, within the lifetime of many listening, Roman legions under Titus burned and dismantled it. The disciples' double question in 24:3, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age, sets the discourse's famous interpretive challenge: the prophecy of the temple's end and the teaching on the world's end are woven together, and the Church has long read the chapter with what might be called prophetic bifocals. The near event, Jerusalem's fall, is described with sharp local detail: let those in Judea flee to the mountains, pray it be not in winter or on a sabbath, and “this generation will not pass away till all these things take place,” and within that generation Jerusalem fell. The far event, the coming of the Son of man, is described in cosmic terms and explicitly unscheduled: of that day and hour no one knows, not the angels, nor the Son, but the Father only. The Church has explained the Son's mysterious saying in more than one way (CCC 473–474 treat Christ's human knowledge); what the text fixes beyond dispute is that the hour is not revealed to us. Read this way, the chapter contains no failed prediction: what Jesus tied to that generation, the temple's fall, came true within it, and what he did not date was expressly declared unknowable. The Dig Deeper box equips leaders for the skeptical objection directly.

The group's Session 6 seed pays off tonight: the sign of Jonah was a promissory note, and Daniel 7 is the vault it draws on. Have the group discover Daniel 7:13–14 live: one like a son of man comes with the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days and receives dominion, glory, and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him, an everlasting dominion. This is the source of Jesus' favorite self-designation, and it explains why “Son of man,” whatever its shading elsewhere, carries here an enthronement claim: the figure in Daniel comes on clouds TO God's throne and receives universal kingship. When Jesus says they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and

great glory, first-century ears hear Daniel's investiture. File the passage carefully: it returns at the trial next week, and its fulfillment is announced in the Gospel's final paragraph.

The watchfulness parables translate eschatology into ethics. The faithful and wise servant: blessed is the one whom the master, when he comes, finds so doing. The ten virgins: the oil that cannot be borrowed at midnight, which St. Augustine read as the interior life no one can lend you, readiness as a state of soul rather than a stockpile. The talents: the master's property entrusted according to ability, the wicked and slothful servant undone not by embezzlement but by burial, and the terrible economy of grace: to everyone who has, more will be given. The common thread: the interval before the Master's return is not a waiting room but a stewardship, and delay is the test of love.

Then the judgment of the nations (25:31–46), the summit of the discourse and one of the summits of the Gospel. The Son of man comes in his glory, sits on his glorious throne (Daniel 7 arriving), and separates people as a shepherd separates sheep from goats (Ezekiel 34's shepherd-judge). The criterion stuns everyone in the scene: I was hungry and you gave me food, thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to me. Six of the Church's seven corporal works of mercy come straight off this list; tradition adds the seventh, burying the dead (CCC 2447). Two details demand attention. First, the identification: as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me. The Emmanuel thread sounds one of its deepest notes here: the presence of God-with-us is hidden in the least, and the poor are a sacrament of encounter with Christ whether or not the giver recognizes him. Second, both sheep and goats are surprised: Lord, when did we see you? Nobody in the scene was keeping a ledger; the sheep loved without calculating, which forecloses any reading of the scene as self-salvation by tallied merits. Tonight's steelman lives exactly here, and it should be handled with the study's usual honesty: the Protestant concern guards something true, and the text still says what it says.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- **Daniel 7:13–14.** One like a son of man receives everlasting dominion from the Ancient of Days: the source of Jesus' favorite title, discovered live tonight, and the key to the trial scene next week.
- **Ezekiel 34:17–24.** The Lord judges between sheep and sheep: the shepherd-judge of the judgment scene, and the same chapter that promised the Lord himself would come seeking the lost (Session 9).
- **Daniel 12:1–3.** The resurrection to everlasting life or shame: background of the discourse's two destinies.
- **Isaiah 58:6–10.** Share your bread with the hungry, bring the homeless poor into your house: the works of mercy were always God's chosen fast.

Voices of the Church

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

Preaching on the judgment scene, Chrysostom refuses to let his congregation honor Christ in church and ignore him at the door: do not adorn the altar with silks, he says, while Christ shivers naked outside in the cold. The same Lord who said “this is my body” said “you did it to me”; the sacrament of the altar and the sacrament of the brother are honored, or dishonored, together.

Voices of the Church: St. Augustine (Sermons on the Gospels)

On the ten virgins, Augustine observes that the oil could not be borrowed because it stands for what is inward: no one can lend you their conscience, their charity, their readiness. All ten slept, the wise and foolish alike, for death comes to all; the difference was not wakefulness but what each had become before the cry at midnight.

Voices of the Church: St. Cyril of Jerusalem (Catechetical Lecture 15)

Cyril teaches the two comings together: the first in humility, wrapped in swaddling clothes; the second in glory, robed in light, attended by angels. We preach not one coming only, he says, but a second far more splendid. And the Church draws the lesson: the same Lord who was judged will come as Judge, and the time between his comings is given for repentance and mercy.

Catechism Connection

- **CCC 671–673.** Christ already reigns through the Church, yet all things are not yet subjected to him; the Church prays and works for the kingdom's full arrival, and since the Ascension, Christ's coming in glory has been imminent in the sense that it could break in at any moment, though its hour is known to the Father alone.
- **CCC 1038–1041.** The Last Judgment: in the presence of Christ, who is Truth itself, the truth of each person's relationship with God will be laid bare, and the Judge's word on our lives will be his word about our treatment of the least. The message calls to conversion while God still gives the acceptable time.
- **CCC 2447.** The works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities: feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, burying the dead. Giving alms to the poor is among the chief witnesses to fraternal charity.

Thread Watch

- **Doing-the-word thread (RESOLVE).** Planted in Session 4 at the Sermon's ending (hearing and doing; "Lord, Lord"), it resolves here: the judgment scene is 7:21–27 with a throne. If a participant makes the connection unprompted, the thread has done its work.
- **Emmanuel thread (deepest hidden note).** "You did it to me": the Presence is hidden in the least. From temple to table to the poor: track where the group has now found God-with-us. One note remains.
- **Son of man / Daniel 7 (arm the trial).** The group discovers Daniel 7 tonight. Next week Jesus quotes it under oath at his trial, and the study's final session announces its fulfillment. Do not preview; just make sure tonight's discovery lands.

Session Goals

1. Participants can explain the prophetic bifocals of the discourse: the temple's fall dated and fulfilled, the Second Coming real and undated.
2. Participants discover Daniel 7:13–14 and can explain why Son of man is an enthronement claim.

3. Participants can walk through the three watchfulness parables and state their shared demand.
4. Participants hear the strongest Protestant objection to judgment by works and can answer it from the text, with the honest concessions the sheep's surprise requires.
5. Participants each choose one concrete work of mercy for the coming week.

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: treat the faithful servant and the talents together in one question and keep the ten virgins (saves about

6 minutes), then drop the Dig Deeper on “this generation” and cover it in two spoken sentences (saves about 4 minutes). Do not cut the Daniel 7 discovery or the judgment scene sequence.

EMMANUEL · SESSION 12 · DISCUSSION GUIDE

Watch, Therefore

Matthew 24–25 · 90 Minutes

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, Son of man, you told us plainly that you will come in glory, and just as plainly that we will not know the hour. Wake what sleeps in us tonight. Fill our lamps, put our talents to work, and teach us to find you where you promised to wait for us: in the hungry, the stranger, the sick, and the prisoner. Amen.

Win (15 minutes)

1. What is something you put off because there seemed to be plenty of time, until suddenly there wasn't?
2. Have you ever discovered, after the fact, that someone you helped or brushed off was far more important than you knew? What did it teach you?

Build (55 minutes)

Not One Stone

1. Read Matthew 24:1–3. What do the disciples admire, what does Jesus predict, and what two questions do they ask in verse 3? Then read 24:15–22 and 24:34, and separately 24:36. Notice the difference in texture: which prediction comes with local, datable detail, and which comes with an explicit refusal of any date? What happened in the year 70?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

They admire the temple buildings, among the wonders of the world; Jesus predicts total demolition, not one stone on another. Their double question, when will this be, and what of your coming and the close of the age, gets a woven double answer. The temple's fall is described with fleeing-to-the-mountains, pray-not-in-winter detail and a deadline: this generation will not pass away, and in the year 70, within that generation, Titus' legions burned and dismantled the temple to the ground. The coming of the Son of man is painted in cosmic colors and expressly undated: of that day and hour no one knows, not the angels, nor the Son, but the Father only. What Jesus tied to that generation came true within it; what he did not date he declared unknowable. Anyone selling you a date is contradicting the discourse itself.

Dig Deeper: Did Jesus Get the Timing Wrong?

Skeptics point to “this generation will not pass away” as a failed end-of-the-world prediction. A longstanding Catholic reading answers from the discourse's own structure: “all these things” of verse 34 looks first to the disciples' first question, the temple's destruction, which came true within that generation in the year 70. Catholic interpreters divide the discourse in different ways, and Matthew deliberately weaves the near and far events together; but on any faithful reading, the

close of the age answers the disciples' second question, and for it Jesus refuses a date in the very next breath. A prophet who wrongly scheduled the end would not, two verses later, insist that no one knows the schedule, a refusal he applies even to himself. Jerusalem's fall is itself a type and pledge of the final judgment, which is why the two are woven: the near fulfillment guarantees the far one.

The Son of Man on the Clouds

2. Live discovery. Jesus has called himself “Son of man” throughout this Gospel, and at 24:30 he promises they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds with power and great glory. The phrase has an address. Have someone find Daniel 7:13–14 and read it slowly. In Daniel's vision, where is the one like a son of man going, what is he given, from whom, and for how long? So what kind of title has “Son of man” been all along?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

In Daniel, one like a son of man comes WITH the clouds of heaven TO the Ancient of Days, and is given dominion, glory, and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him: an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away. The movement is an enthronement: he comes on clouds to God's own throne and receives universal, permanent kingship. “Son of man” is not the modesty title it sounds like. Its shading varies from saying to saying, but in Daniel's light, and above all here and at the trial, it carries an enthronement claim, hiding in plain sight for twenty-four chapters. Keep Daniel 7 open in your memory: you will hear Jesus quote it under oath next week, at the moment it costs him his life, and you will hear its fulfillment announced in this Gospel's final paragraph.

The Interval Is the Test

3. Read the ten virgins (25:1–13) and the talents (25:14–30). In the first: what could not be borrowed at midnight, and why is that the point? In the second: what exactly is the third servant's sin, since he stole nothing? What do the parables agree the waiting time is for?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

All ten virgins sleep, wise and foolish alike; the difference at the cry is oil, which St. Augustine read as the inward life: conscience, charity, readiness of soul, the one thing no one can lend you when the Bridegroom comes. The third servant's sin is burial: not theft but sloth, a servant who so mistrusted his master's goodness that he did nothing at all. The interval before the Master's return is not a waiting room but a stewardship: watch, therefore, means become someone, and put what you were given to work, because delay is the test of love. Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing.

The King in Disguise

4. Read Matthew 25:31–46 aloud, unhurried; it deserves it. Where does the throne scene's imagery come from, given tonight's Daniel discovery and Ezekiel 34's shepherd? List the six works named. What is the

criterion of this judgment, and what single sentence explains it? And notice carefully: what do BOTH the sheep and the goats say?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Daniel's enthroned Son of man now sits on his glorious throne, and Ezekiel's shepherd-judge separates the flock. The six works: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, visit the sick, come to the prisoner, six of the Church's seven corporal works of mercy, read straight off this list; the seventh, burying the dead, comes from tradition. The criterion is mercy shown or refused, and the sentence that explains everything: as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me. The King has been hidden in the least all along; the poor are a meeting place with Christ whether or not anyone recognizes him. Hear the Emmanuel bell: God-with-us, found now not in temple or cloud but in the hungry man on your street.

And both groups are astonished: Lord, when did we see you? The sheep were not collecting receipts; they loved without calculating, and met Christ without knowing it. The goats' defense, when did we see you and not serve you, is the Sermon's "Lord, Lord" of Session 4 come back with a throne behind it: the thread we planted at the Sermon's ending resolves here. Hearing without doing built on sand; here is the weather.

Build Then Press: Judged by Works, Saved by Grace?

The Strongest Protestant Reading, Given at Full Strength

Here is the objection at full strength, and it guards the Reformation's central conviction: Scripture teaches that we are saved by grace through faith, not because of works, lest any man should boast (Ephesians 2:8–9). If Matthew 25 taught that feeding the hungry earns heaven, it would contradict the Gospel itself and make Christ's cross unnecessary. Therefore, the Protestant reading runs, the judgment scene describes the EVIDENCE examined at judgment, not the GROUNDS of salvation: works are the fruit that proves faith was living, and the sheep are saved by faith, then identified by works. Any Catholic reading that turns the scene into a merit ledger is exactly the error Paul fought. This objection is powerful, biblically serious, and protects a truth no Christian may surrender: salvation is grace from first to last.

5. Now press, gently, because this steelman deserves both honesty about the text and honesty about what Catholics actually believe. Read verse 34 and verse 41 again: what word connects the verdict to the works ("inherit the kingdom... FOR I was hungry")? Recall Matthew's pattern: 7:21–27 and 16:27 ("he will repay every man for what he has done"). Then ask: does the Catholic reading actually say anyone EARNs heaven unaided? What do the sheep's surprise and the word "inherit" each contribute?

ANSWER: share after the discussion

Take the text as it stands: the verdict is grounded, not merely evidenced, in the works: "inherit the kingdom prepared for you... FOR I was hungry and you gave me food." Matthew has said it consistently: not everyone who says Lord, Lord, but he who does the will of my Father; the Son of man will repay every man for what he has done. A reading that reduces the works to courtroom

exhibits has to read against the grain of the sentence and of the whole Gospel.

But now say what the Catholic Church actually teaches, because the objection is often aimed at a position no Catholic holds. Notice “inherit”: the kingdom is an inheritance prepared from the foundation of the world, a Father's gift to heirs, not a wage bargained by strangers. Notice the sheep's surprise: no ledgers, no boasting, no self-salvation; they loved because grace had made them lovers. The Catholic teaching is that grace comes first, faith working through love (Galatians 5:6) is grace's own life in us, and the works God rewards are, as St. Augustine wrote, nothing other than his own gifts crowned: when God crowns our merits, he crowns his own gifts (Letter 194.5.19). So the honest resolution honors both testimonies: with St. Paul, salvation is grace, never our unaided achievement; with St. Matthew, the grace that saves actually transforms, and what it makes of us, shown in mercy to the least, is what the Judge will name on the last day. Faith alone that leaves the hungry unfed is, as St. James says outright, dead; and works without grace were never on offer. The sheep are not saved by works instead of grace: they are what grace looks like when it has been allowed to finish its work.

Send (12 minutes)

1. Of the six works on the King's list, which one have you never done, not once? What is the nearest opportunity to change that?
2. If the Master returned tonight, what buried talent would you have to explain? What would digging it up this month look like?

Live It This Week

- Choose one of the six works and do it this week, in person where possible: the scene's verbs are visits, not transfers.
- Pray each morning: Lord, let me recognize you today in the least, and not walk past.
- Read Matthew 26–27 before next session. Come a few minutes early if you can, and come quietly: next week we stand at the cross, and the session will be reverent by design.

Closing Prayer

Son of man, enthroned on the clouds of heaven, your dominion is everlasting and your judgment is mercy remembered. Fill our lamps with the oil that cannot be borrowed, put your talents in our hands to work, and open our eyes to your face in the least of your brethren, until the day you come, and we hear, please, Lord, the words: come, O blessed of my Father. Amen.

Scripture Memory

Matthew 25:40 (RSV2CE): *“Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.”*

EMMANUEL • SESSION 12 • LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Every Passage in Order of Use

Watch, Therefore · Matthew 24–25

Primary Text

• Matthew 24:1–3 · Matthew 24:15–22, 34, 36 · Matthew 24:30 · Matthew 25:1–13 · Matthew 25:14–30 · Matthew 25:31–46

Live Discovery Passages

• Daniel 7:13–14 (the Son of man enthroned)

Background Passages

• Ezekiel 34:17–24 (sheep and goats) · Daniel 12:1–3 (two destinies) · Isaiah 58:6–10 (the chosen fast) · Matthew 7:21–27 and 16:27 (Matthew's pattern) · Ephesians 2:8–10, Galatians 5:6, James 2:14–17 (for the steelman)

Catechism

• CCC 671–673 · CCC 1038–1041 · CCC 2447

Memory Verse

• Matthew 25:40

Do Not Forget

• Closing note to the group: next session is the Passion; come quietly, the session will be reverent by design.