

CFM Matt. 21-23; Mark 11; Luke 19-20; John 12 - Ep 202

The Last Week of the Savior's Mortal Ministry

Focus: Sunday-Tuesday

22 Events

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8. Jesus cleanses the temple (Matt. 21.12-16; Mark 11.15-19; Luke 19.45-48).
9. Jesus leaves the city. The 3rd day before Passover (Mark 11.19-20).
10. On his way into the city, the fig tree is withered (Matt. 21.20-22; Mark 11.20-26).
11. Priests challenge Jesus' authority (Matt. 21.23-27; Mark 11.27-33; Luke 20.1-8).
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17. The First and Great Commandment (Matt. 22.34-40; Mark 12.28-34).
18. How is Christ both Lord and also David's son? (Matt. 22.41-46; Mark 12.35-37; Luke 20.39-44).
19. Jesus publicly shames his enemies at the temple (Matt. 23.1-36; Mark 12.38-40; Luke 20.45-47).
20. The Widow's mite (Mark 12.41-44; Luke 21.1-4).
21. Greeks who have come to Passover at the temple seek Jesus (John 12.20-22).
22. Jesus speaks of the Son of Man, his Father, and the Father speaks of Jesus' glorification (John 12.23-50).

In order to faithfully adhere to the chronological order of events as presented in the gospel narratives, we made the deliberate decision to structure our podcast recordings accordingly. We acknowledge that this deviation from the prescribed lesson plans outlined in the Come Follow Me format may pose challenges for those using our podcasts for personal study or lesson planning. Please accept our apologies for any inconvenience. We appreciate your listenership.

Events in more detail

1. To Jerusalem for the Passover (John 11.55-57)

The Gospel writers present Jesus' last week as him going to the temple for the Passover because the Passover was one of the most significant events in Jewish history and culture. It was a time when Jews from all over the world would come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover feast, which commemorates

¹ It is the sixth day before the Passover (John 12.1).

the Israelites' liberation from slavery in Egypt. The temple was the center of Jewish worship, and so it was natural for Jesus, a Jew, to go there during the Passover.

The Gospel writers probably present Jesus' last week as going to the temple for the Passover because it was during this time that Jesus' mission as the Messiah reached its climax. Jesus knew that he would be arrested and crucified, and so he deliberately went to Jerusalem to fulfill his mission. He entered the city in a triumphant procession, riding on a donkey, which fulfilled the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9 that the Messiah would come in this way.²

The significance of Jesus' last week and his visit to the temple during the Passover was that it typified his role as the sacrificial lamb. The Passover lamb was a symbol of God's deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. Jesus, as the Lamb of God, was the ultimate sacrifice that would deliver humanity from the bondage of sin. By going to the temple during the Passover and allowing himself to be arrested and crucified, Jesus was fulfilling his role as the ultimate sacrificial lamb and providing a way for all people to be reconciled to God.

2. Mary³ anoints Jesus (Matt. 26.6-13; Mark 14.3-9; John 12.2-8).

Location of the anointing

Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper" (Matt. 26.6)

The place of his anointing is important, as this detail can be seen as typologically significant, as it draws attention to the contrast between the physical impurity of the leper and the spiritual purity of Jesus as the Messiah and king.

In the Old Testament, leprosy was seen as a symbol of sin and impurity, and those who were afflicted with the disease were often excluded from society and considered unclean. However, Jesus frequently interacted with lepers and other outcasts, demonstrating his compassion and willingness to embrace those who were marginalized and rejected by society.

By being anointed as king in the home of a leper, Jesus is portrayed as triumphing over the physical and spiritual impurity that had separated humanity from God. His acceptance of the leper and his willingness to enter into his home and receive hospitality demonstrate his power to heal and cleanse, both physically and spiritually.

It is also possible that the anointing of Jesus in the home of a leper also reinforces a polemical stance against the Jerusalem temple at the time of Jesus. The Jerusalem temple was the center of Jewish worship and religious life, and its high priests held significant political power as well. The anointing also echoes the priestly anointing as described in the book of Leviticus (see Leviticus 8.12).⁴ Again, some expectations are violated: according to the law of Moses, priests are to be anointed in the tabernacle or

² "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass" (Zech. 9.9 KJV). The RSV reads as follows: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass." Robert Alter translates Zech 9.9 as "Greatly exult, Zion's Daughter, shout for joy, Jerusalem's Daughter. Look, your king shall come to you, victor and triumphant is he, a lowly man riding on an ass, on a donkey, the foal of a she-ass."

³ Note that in Matthew and Mark's account it just reads that "a woman" did this anointing.

⁴ Eric D. Huntsman, *God So Loved the World: The Final Days of the Savior's Life*, Desert Book, 2011, 44–45.

temple, but Jesus being anointed in the home of a leper flips the script!⁵ The temple and its leadership were often criticized by Jesus and his followers for their perceived corruption and focus on external rituals rather than genuine piety and compassion.

By being anointed as king in the home of a leper, Jesus is portrayed as rejecting the established religious and political structures of his time and instead embracing those who were marginalized and excluded from society. This act of anointing may be seen as a subversive gesture that challenges the religious authorities and their claims to legitimacy.

Furthermore, the anointing of Jesus in the home of a leper is in contrast to the anointing of kings in the Old Testament, which usually took place in the temple or in the presence of a prophet. By having Jesus anointed as king in the home of a leper, the Gospel of Matthew may be emphasizing the idea that Jesus is establishing a new kind of kingdom that is not based on the traditional religious and political institutions, as well as insinuating that the temple itself is leprous!⁶

In general, while the anointing of Jesus in the home of a leper has multiple layers of theological and symbolic significance, it's possible that it also reinforces a polemical stance against the Jerusalem temple and its leadership.

Ways to read the anointing of Jesus

The story of Mary anointing Jesus' feet with costly perfume is a significant, yet often under discussed episode in the Gospels, and has been interpreted in various ways by scholars over the centuries. One possible interpretation is that Mary's act of anointing Jesus' feet was a symbolic gesture of anointing him as king prior to his triumphal death and resurrection.

In the ancient world, anointing was a common practice used to signify the appointment of a king or ruler. The anointing oil was a symbol of divine favor and power, and was used to consecrate the chosen leader as God's representative on earth. By anointing Jesus' feet with expensive perfume, Mary may have been making a symbolic statement about his identity and mission as the long-awaited Messiah and king of Israel.⁷

⁵ Smith, p. 33.

⁶ J. Duncan M. Derrett argues that Mark presents the temple in Jerusalem as a house of leprosy, as it fits the description of what is to happen if a home is infested with leprosy. He writes, "If leprosy is visible (to him) he goes out and ceremonially shuts up the dwelling for seven days (Lev. 14.38). If thereafter it has spread in the walls (*qiro*t, cf. Isa. 38.2) he commands all the stones affected to be neatly withdrawn and cast into an unclean place outside the city... If the plague returns and moves about in the house the priest makes a third visit (Lev. 14.44). He pronounces it unclean. The Mishnah allows him to prolong the inspection by stages if the signs do not appear promptly (*Neg.* 13.1). When the house has disappointed every chance of being clean he (says the MT) shall break down (*NTS*) the house, its stones, timber, and mortar, and *he* (MT) shall carry them outside the city to an unclean place. Secondary versions say either that 'they' demolish and 'they' remove debris, or (Tg. Neof) 'they' demolish and 'he' removes it. The priest, as God's agent, does away with the leprous house. **Demolition was the only remedy.**" Derrett, "No Stone upon Another: Leprosy and the Temple," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 30 (1987), p. 8, emphasis added.

⁷ The fact that Jesus's head is anointed also supports the idea that this is the anointing of a king; as Ben Witherington notes, "royal figures are anointed from the head down." See: Ben Witherington III, [The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary](#). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001, 368.

It is significant that the anointing takes place shortly before Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, where he is hailed by the crowds as the "King of the Jews" (Matthew 21.1-11). This suggests that Mary's act of anointing was not only an expression of devotion and love, but also a prophetic sign of Jesus' true identity as the promised messianic king.⁸

Furthermore, the fact that Mary anoints Jesus' feet, rather than his head or body, is also significant. In ancient Israel, the feet were considered a symbol of authority and power⁹, as well as a sign of humility and service. By anointing Jesus' feet, Mary may have been acknowledging his dual nature as both a powerful king and a humble servant who came to serve and save humanity. In his role as a human, soon to die, Mary's anointing could also be seen as an anointing for his burial.

In Mark's story, Jesus's anointing by an unnamed woman has several distinct purposes.¹⁰ We know it is a burial anointing because Jesus says that the woman has "anoint[ed] [his] body to the burying" (Mark 14.8). So one function of this anointing is as a typical burial ritual—premature, but prophetic. This unnamed woman recognizes—at a time when the disciples still have a hard time accepting the idea (see Mark 8:31–32)—that Jesus must die.¹¹

In light of these factors, it is possible to interpret Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet as a prophetic act of recognizing and honoring him as the true king of Israel, who would soon triumph over death and establish God's kingdom on earth. This interpretation adds depth and richness to the story of Mary and Jesus, and highlights the importance of understanding the cultural and historical context in which the events of the Gospels took place.

The timing of this event in John as opposed to the Synoptics

John again links Jesus' imminent "hour" with the Passover season (13:1). In contrast to the Synoptic picture of the Last Supper, however, Jesus' closing hours before his arrest in this Gospel are "before" Passover (13:1). This detail fits John's chronology (13:29; 18:28; 19:14, 31, 42), which ultimately supports his portrayal of Jesus as the paschal lamb (1:29, 36; 19:36). At this point, however, John underlines a different aspect of the chronology: Jesus loved his own "to the end" (13:1). This is Johannine double entendre: it can imply "to the utmost," "fully," as well as "to the point of his death."¹² Such a double entendre reinforces the measure of God's love in the Fourth Gospel (3:16) and early Christianity (Rom 5:5–9): Jesus' death. The preceding context also illustrates Jesus' love (11:5) that would cost him his life

⁸ Julie Smith asserts, "There is ample evidence that this anointing fits the patten for the coronation of the king." Smith, "She hath wrought a good work," p. 33.

⁹ Baker and Ricks, [*Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord?: The Psalms in Israel's Temple Worship In the Old Testament and In the Book of Mormon*](#), Eborn books, p. 498-416. "Thus the king's being on the throne with his feet securely planted on the Ark of the Covenant was a multi-faceted affirmation of his royal status and of his acceptability before God." (p. 410).

¹⁰ John mentions that the person anointing him is Mary. See John 12.3: "Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment."

¹¹ Julie Smith, "She Hath Wrought a Good Work": The Anointing of Jesus in Mark's Gospel," *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity*: Vol. 5 , Article 4, p. 32.

¹² Brown, John, 2:550; Michaels, John, 231; O'Day, "John," 721; to display a virtue even to the point of death was viewed as praiseworthy (Valerius Maximus 4.5.6). The Targum (Tg. Yer. 1 and 2 on Deut 32) describes Moses' impending death similarly (Glasson, Moses, 74). Cf. the eschatological "last day" (6:39, 40, 44, 54; 8:24, 48; 11:24; 12:48; cf. 7:37; 8:56).

(11:7–16), but here the specific objects of his love in the Lazarus story give way to all of “his own” (cf. 10:3) who would be remaining in the world (17:11).¹³

“Precious ointment” (Matt. 26.7)

It was customary to anoint the heads of important guests, but this woman’s Matthew 26:8-9 anointing of Jesus is extraordinary. This perfume (undoubtedly imported from the East) was expensive, worth a year of a common laborer’s wages, and had probably been kept in her family as an heirloom. Its fragrance was preserved by its sealing in alabaster (the favored container for perfume). Once the flask was broken, the freshness could be lost, and the contents would have to be used quickly.¹⁴

“A pounds of ointment of spikenard, very costly” (John 12.3)

The Roman “pound” (NASB) or “pint” (NIV) may have been roughly 324 grams, about twelve ounces. A flask would normally contain not more than an ounce, so Mary is tremendously extravagant here. Actual “myrrh” could take the form of either powder or liquid, perfume or ointment; its manufacturers derived it from resin from a sort of short balsam tree in the horn of eastern Africa and southern Arabia. John, however, employs the Greek term here more generically, the specific aromatic substance being spikenard, a very expensive fragrant oil from a plant in the mountains in northern India.¹⁵

3. Enemies conspire against Jesus (John 12.9-11).

4. Jesus’ Triumphal entry (Matt. 21.1-11; Mark 11.1-11; Luke 19.28-38; John 12.12-18).

“Thy king cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and the colt the foal of an ass” (Matt. 21.5)

Colts that had not yet been ridden sometimes accompanied their mothers. ***Following a common Jewish practice of reading the Hebrew text for all one can get from it, Matthew reads Zechariah 9:9 as referring to two animals instead of referring to the same animal in two ways.*** The text is messianic, as ancient interpreters generally acknowledged, but applying this part to himself redefines Jesus’ messiahship: officials used donkeys for civil, not military, processions (e.g., 1 Kings 1:33). Thus this text is not a “triumphal entry” in the sense of Roman triumphal processions; it is Jerusalem’s reception of a meek and peaceful king. With respect to leaders the term translated “meek” or “gentle” involved compassion and mercy as opposed to exploiting one’s power.¹⁶

One animal or two?

Matthew portrays Jesus coming into the city of Jerusalem on two animals (Matt. 21.1-11). The text states that Jesus sent his disciples to get a donkey and a colt, and he rode on them into Jerusalem. Matthew quotes the prophet Zechariah 9.9, which says, “Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.”¹⁷ Some translations, including the King James Version, translate this as “ass and a colt.”¹⁸

¹³ Keener, *The Gospel of John*, Baker Academic, 2010, p. 899.

¹⁴ Keener, *Gospel*, p. 113-114.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 285.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 97.

¹⁷ Translations vary – see above.

¹⁸ ὄνον καὶ πῶλον – “an ass and a colt” or “an ass, even a colt” (Matt. 21.5). The Greek allows for both readings.

The question of whether the King James Version is a mistranslation of Zechariah 9.9 is a matter of interpretation. Some scholars argue that the phrase "ass and a colt" in the KJV is a mistranslation of the Hebrew word "*ayir*," which can mean "young donkey" or "colt of a donkey." Matthew, or a later editor, seems to have sought meticulous fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah by specifying two animals, although Zechariah's prophetic preview of the Messiah is couched in the poetic structure called parallelism, which presents an image or subject in two parallel phrases. Many translations portray only one animal, such as the New International Version, translate the phrase as "a donkey, the colt of a donkey," which is a more accurate translation of the Hebrew.

Kelly Ogden explains:

"There was actually only one animal intended, and Jesus, of course, could ride only one animal. The discrepancy in the number of animals is resolved by a simple correction that the Prophet Joseph Smith made: Matthew 21:2 and 5 in the Joseph Smith Translation indicate that only one animal was involved."¹⁹

Other gospels mention only one animal

R.T. France offers this commentary, presenting the idea that one of the animals may have been present to help soothe the young offspring of the female mother of the foal and help it cope with carrying its load in the midst of a large crowd:

In the other three gospels only one animal is mentioned, a "foal" in Mark and Luke and a "small donkey" in John—and John's version of the Zechariah quotation is abbreviated to mention ***only one animal***. ***Matthew has explicitly mentioned two in both the instructions to the disciples*** (v. 2) and the Zechariah quotation (v. 5), ***and now two animals are brought to Jesus and prepared for riding***, probably by the disciples' using their own cloaks as saddle cloths. ***Assuming that he rode on only one animal*** (and Matthew does not tell us whether it was the mother or the foal), the presence of the other is probably best explained at the narrative level by the comment of Mark and Luke that the "foal" had not been ridden before, so that its mother's presence would help it to cope with the new experience (and the frightening noise of the crowd); the festive occasion required that the mother, even though not ridden, should also be given a saddle cloth. ***But it is not typical of Matthew to add circumstantial detail to his narrative without a purpose, and it seems likely that, aware that two animals had been present, he enjoyed the fact that the wording of Zechariah's oracle can be read as including both mother and foal, and so mentioned them both***. That is not to say, as some have suggested, that Matthew simply invented a second animal because his wooden reading of the Hebrew parallelism told him that it was needed. The author of this gospel was not ignorant of OT idiom, and would surely have recognized parallelism when he saw it. His mention of the second donkey is due rather to a typically Jewish interest in the form of the text, so that even though he knew it referred to only one animal, its wording nonetheless lent itself to the mention of the other. This is not, therefore, another example of Matthew's "doubling" of characters in the stories (as in 8:28-34 and 20:29-34); if the suggestion that those doublings were connected with the need for "two or three witnesses" has any merit, it could not apply here: the donkeys are not witnesses to anything. In those cases there was no OT text underlying the story, but here there is, and its

¹⁹ D. Kelly Ogden, [Where Jesus Walked: The Land and Culture of New Testament Times](#), Desert Book, 1991, 115.

expansive poetic wording has given Matthew scope for adding a further creative twist to his concept of “fulfillment.”²⁰

5. Jesus weeps over Jerusalem (Luke 19.41-44).

Jesus weeps over Jerusalem because he knows that its inhabitants, particularly the religious leaders, have rejected him and his message. Jesus has just entered Jerusalem and the crowds are praising him as the Messiah. However, as he approaches the city, he weeps, saying, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes."

Jesus' weeping over Jerusalem is significant because it highlights the tragedy of human sin and its consequences. Jerusalem was the center of Jewish worship, and the religious leaders were responsible for leading the people in righteousness and faithfulness to God. However, they had instead become corrupt and hypocritical, using their power to oppress and exploit the people. Jesus weeps because he knows that their rejection of him and his message will lead to their destruction and the destruction of the city itself.

6. Jesus stays in Bethany, Monday the 4th day before Passover (Matt. 21.17-18; Mark 11.12).

And he left them, and went out of the city into Bethany; and he lodged there. Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered (Matt. 21.17-18).

7. On his way into Jerusalem, Jesus curses the fig tree (Matt. 21.18-19; Mark 11.12-14).

In the morning, Jesus approaches the city of Jerusalem, and is hungry. He sees a fig tree in the way, but it had no fruit, so he cursed it (Matt. 21.19). The story of the barren fig tree in Matthew 21.18-19 has been interpreted in a variety of ways, but one common interpretation is that it *serves as a symbolic representation of Israel's spiritual condition during the time of Jesus*.

In the story, Jesus sees a fig tree by the side of the road, but when he goes to find fruit on it, he discovers that it is barren. He curses the fig tree, and it withers and dies. Some suggest that the fig tree represents Israel, which was expected to bear spiritual fruit and fulfill its role as a light to the nations, but had failed to do so.

According to this interpretation, the cursing of the fig tree represents God's judgment on Israel for its failure to bear fruit. This theme is echoed in other passages in the New Testament, where Jesus warns that Israel's rejection of him as the Messiah will lead to its destruction (e.g. Matthew 23:37-39). **The withering of the fig tree can also be seen as a foreshadowing of the destruction of the temple, which occurred just a few decades later in AD 70.**

Other interpretations of the story have focused on the importance of faith and obedience in living the Gospel, or on the power of Jesus' words. However, the symbolic interpretation of the fig tree as a representation of Israel's spiritual condition is probably the one most often highly regarded.²¹

²⁰ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Eerdmans, 2007, p. 697-698.

²¹ "The stage was set, the lesson was most timely, and in the false pretense of the fig tree was to be found perfect typecasting. The moment now belonged to the Master Teacher, who used it to dramatize his power over nature and evidence once again his claim to Messiahship, while **making the fig tree a prophetic type of what befalls those who profess his authority and fail to bring forth good fruits**. Of such he has said that he will curse them

8. Jesus cleanses the temple (Matt. 21.12-16; Mark 11.15-19; Luke 19.45-48).

In the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), Jesus cleanses the temple in Jerusalem once. This event is recorded in all three synoptic gospels, with some variations in details.

According to the gospels, Jesus entered the temple and drove out the money changers and those selling animals for sacrifice, overturning their tables and saying, "My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of robbers" (Matthew 21:13, Mark 11:17, Luke 19:46).

This event is generally believed to have taken place during the final week of Jesus' life, shortly before his arrest and crucifixion.

There are some scholars and commentators who suggest that Jesus may have cleansed the temple in Jerusalem twice, based on apparent discrepancies in the Gospel accounts.

For example, John's Gospel records a similar event where Jesus drove out the money changers and sellers of animals from the temple, but this event takes place much earlier in Jesus' ministry, at the beginning of his public ministry (John 2:13-22). Some people believe that this may be a separate incident from the one recorded in the synoptic Gospels, and that Jesus cleansed the temple twice.

However, others argue that John's Gospel is using a different chronological framework than the synoptic Gospels, and that the event described in John 2 is actually the same event as the one recorded in the synoptic Gospels. They suggest that John may have placed this event at the beginning of Jesus' ministry as a way of highlighting Jesus' authority and his passion for the purity of the temple.

Ultimately, the question of whether Jesus cleansed the temple in Jerusalem once or twice is a matter of interpretation, and scholars and commentators may have different opinions on this issue. However, the majority of scholars agree that the event recorded in the synoptic Gospels is the most likely occurrence of this event during Jesus' ministry.

9. Jesus leaves the city. The 3rd day before Passover (Mark 11.19-20).

And when even was come, he went out of the city. And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots (Mark 11.19-20).

10. On his way into the city, the fig tree is withered (Matt. 21.20-22; Mark 11.20-26).

And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away! Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive (Matt. 21.20-22).

11. Priests challenge Jesus' authority (Matt. 21.23-27; Mark 11.27-33; Luke 20.1-8).

12. The parable of the two sons (Matt. 21.28-32).

'with the heaviest of all cursings.' (D&C 41:1.)" Joseph F. McConkie, *Studies in Scripture, Vol. 5: The Gospels*, ed. by Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet, 376, emphasis added.

The parable of the two sons in Matthew 21:28-32 is a story that Jesus tells to illustrate the difference between those who claim to follow God but do not obey him, and those who may initially resist God's call but ultimately repent and obey.

In the parable, a man asks his two sons to go and work in his vineyard. The first son initially refuses, but later changes his mind and goes to work. The second son agrees to go, but ultimately does not follow through. When Jesus asks his listeners which of the two sons did the will of their father, they respond that it was the first son, who ultimately obeyed.

The parable has several layers of meaning, but one of the primary messages is that actions speak louder than words. The religious leaders of Jesus' day claimed to be obedient to God, but in reality they were not. They talked a good game, but did not follow through with their actions. In contrast, many of the people that the religious leaders looked down upon, such as tax collectors, the poor, and those entrenched in sin, ultimately repented, believed, and many chose to follow Jesus in various ways.

Another message of the parable is that it is never too late to repent and follow the Savior. The first son initially refused to obey his father, but ultimately changed his mind and did what was asked of him. This serves as a reminder that even those who have strayed from truth can still turn back and receive forgiveness and grace through the atoning power of Jesus Christ.

Overall, the parable of the two sons emphasizes the importance of obedience to our Heavenly Father, and challenges listeners to examine their own lives to ensure that their actions are in line with their words.

13. The parable of the wicked husbandmen (Matt. 21.33-46; Mark 12.1-12; Luke 20.9-19).

Much of the rural Roman Empire, including parts of rural Galilee, was controlled by wealthy landowners, whose income from the land allowed them lives of complete leisure. Their estates were generally worked by tenant farmers, who were usually free peasants (as in Egypt), but sometimes by slaves (as in much of Italy). Although landowners gained great honor among the poor if they were benevolent, such landowners normally had little incentive to do so. They generally lived far away, often in cities, and had little personal contact with their workers. But the landowner in this parable is so benevolent that aristocrats would have considered him naive.

Jesus addresses those who fancy themselves rulers of Israel (Matt. 21:23), reminding them that they are merely custodians appointed by God (like the shepherds of Jer 23 and Ezek 34) over his vineyard. Jesus' description follows the normal way to prepare a vineyard, but he clearly alludes to Isaiah 5:1-2, where Israel is the vineyard.²²

14. The parable of the wedding of the king's son (Matt. 22.1-14).

The Parable of the Marriage of the King's Son (Matthew 22.1-14) is a recognized parable of Jesus that has been interpreted in various ways throughout history. Here are some of the interpretations as I have studied writings of scholars, prophets, and the early Christians in their tradition:

²² Keener, *Background, The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (IVP Bible Background Commentary Set), IVP Academic, 2014, p. 99.

1. **The Jewish people's rejection of Jesus:** Some interpreters see the parable as an allegory for the Jewish people's rejection of Jesus as the Messiah and Savior of the world. In this view, the king represents God, the son represents Jesus Christ, and the invited guests represent the Jewish people who were called to receive the message of Jesus but refused to accept him and eventually had him crucified.²³
2. **The offer of salvation to all:** Others interpret the parable as a message of salvation offered to everyone, regardless of their social status, religious background, whether they were Israelite or not.²⁴ "He inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he remembereth the heathen; and **all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile**" ([2 Nephi 26.33](#)). The king's invitation to the wedding feast represents God's offer of salvation through Jesus, and the guests who were invited from the highways and byways represent people from all walks of life who are invited to receive the message of salvation.
3. **The importance of being properly clothed:** Another interpretation focuses on the importance of being properly clothed for the wedding feast.²⁵ In this view, the wedding garment represents the righteousness that is required to enter the kingdom of God. Just as the man without the wedding garment was thrown out, so too will those who are not clothed in righteousness be excluded from the kingdom of God.²⁶
4. **Visionaries of Ascent Literature:** In Hekhalot literature²⁷ (a type of Jewish mystical literature that describes visions of heavenly ascent), visionary mystics ascend through the various levels of heaven to come into the presence of God. In these visions, the mystic is often required to wear special clothing, such as a robe or a crown, that symbolizes their spiritual status and helps them to navigate the heavenly realms. The parable of the wedding garment can be seen as a similar metaphor for the importance of being spiritually prepared and clothed in the appropriate attire for the heavenly realm.

²³ Deity himself is the king in the parable; Jesus, his offspring and heir, is the king's son; and those first invited to 'the marriage of the Lamb' (D. & C. 58:11) are the chosen and favored hosts of Israel to whom the gospel had been offered in ages past. 'The remnant' who rejected the later invitation with violence and murder were Jewish descendants of ancient Israel; and it was their city, Jerusalem, which was violently destroyed. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1: 597.

²⁴ I read this as the invitation to the Gentiles to follow Jesus. This will come later, in the book of Acts. This is represented in the gathering of the people out from the highways, "all as many as they found, both bad and good..." see Matt. 22.10.

²⁵ Scholars have suggested a parallel with a later Jewish story in which a king invited guests to a feast without advance notice of the date. In this story, only the diligent subjects were dressed and ready at the door when the date came; the others had to wait outside in shame. Keener, *Background*, p. 101.

²⁶ In LDS theology, temple garments are worn as a reminder of covenants made in the temple and as a symbol of the individual's commitment to live a righteous life. The garment is seen as a form of protection and a physical reminder of the spiritual clothing that the individual should be wearing. The parable of the wedding garment can thus be seen as a metaphor for the importance of being spiritually prepared and clothed in righteousness, which is symbolized by the garment.

²⁷ See: [Hekhalot literature](#). For a general introduction see M. Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), and C. Rowland and C. Morray-Jones, *The Mystery of God: Early Jewish Mysticism and the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2009). P. Goeder, *Only the Third Heaven? 2 Corinthians 12.1–10 and Heavenly Ascent* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), surveys the scholarly literature and debates.

5. **The need to respond to the gospel invitation:** Some see the parable as a call to respond to the Savior's invitation to salvation. In this interpretation, the parable emphasizes the importance of accepting God's offer of salvation and the consequences of rejecting it.
6. **The judgment of God:** Finally, some interpret the parable as a message about the judgment of God. We read that "when the king heard (of the rejection to come to the marriage), he was wrath, and he sent forth his armies, and... burned up their city" (Matt. 22.7). The king's punishment of the uninvited guest represents the judgment that will come upon those who refuse to accept God's offer of salvation.

15. Tribute to Caesar (Matt. 22.15-22; Mark 12.13-17; Luke 20.20-26).

This scene is an attempt by Jesus' detractors to place Jesus in a [Kobayashi Maru](#), or no-win situation

The questioners in Matthew 22.15-22 were the Pharisees, who were a group of Jewish religious leaders. They asked Jesus a question about whether it is allowable that the Jews should be paying taxes to Caesar.²⁸ They did this in order to trap him and undermine his credibility with the people, as Herodians²⁹ and Pharisees were both present here at the temple.³⁰

The Pharisees were looking for a way to discredit Jesus and turn the people against him. They believed that if Jesus said it was right to pay taxes to Caesar, he would lose support among the Jewish people who resented Roman occupation and taxation. On the other hand, if Jesus said it was unjust to pay taxes to Caesar, he would be seen as a revolutionary and could be arrested by the Romans.

By posing this question to Jesus, the Pharisees hoped to put him in a no-win situation and expose him as a false teacher. However, Jesus responded with his famous statement, "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, and unto God that which is God's," which both acknowledged the Roman government's

²⁸ εἰπέ οὖν ἡμῖν τί σοι δοκεῖ· ἔξεστιν δοῦναι κῆνσον Καίσαρι ἢ οὐ· "So tell us, what do you think? Is it allowable to give tribute to Caesar or not?" (Matt. 22.17, my translation). ἔξεστιν can be translated various ways. In Classical Greek literature, ἔξεστιν (exestin) was commonly used to express permission or authorization. It could be used to indicate whether something was permitted or allowed according to a particular law, custom, or authority. ἔξεστιν can also be used to express the idea of what is appropriate or fitting in a particular context, and it can be used in a more general sense to indicate what is possible or feasible. From my reading of the Greek, I would not necessarily translate this question as to whether it was just, (meaning fair, or just in the sight of God) rather I would say that Jesus' questioners want to ask Jesus whether this is permitted, or fitting.

²⁹ The Herodians were a political group in Judea during the time of Jesus. They were supporters of the Herodian dynasty, which ruled over Judea under Roman occupation. In Matthew 22.15-22, the Pharisees are mentioned as being the ones who posed the question to Jesus about paying taxes to Caesar. However, in Mark 12.13-17 and Luke 20:20-26, the Herodians are mentioned as being present with the Pharisees and asking Jesus the same question. It is possible that the Pharisees and the Herodians joined forces in asking Jesus this question, despite their differing political views, in order to trap him and discredit him with the people. ***The Pharisees may have hoped to undermine Jesus' religious authority, while the Herodians may have hoped to implicate him in revolutionary activities against Rome.*** Jesus' response to their question, however, was a clever and profound statement that demonstrated his understanding of both political and spiritual authority. By saying, "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, and unto God that which is God's," Jesus acknowledged the authority of the Roman government while also affirming the ultimate authority of God.

³⁰ The location of these verses is that of the temple. See: Matt. 21.23. From Matt. 21.23 to this account in Matt. 22.15-22, Jesus is engaged in discussions with Jewish leaders at the temple.

authority and affirmed the ultimate authority of God. Jesus' response was so wise and astute that it left the Pharisees unable to respond, and they were amazed by his answer (Matthew 22:22).

Interpretations

The following are common interpretations of this story:

1. **The duty of Christians to obey worldly governments:** Some interpret Jesus' response as a call for Christians to obey the laws and pay taxes to their secular rulers. In this view, Jesus acknowledges the authority of the Roman government and emphasizes the importance of respecting secular laws.³¹
2. **The separation of church and state power:** In this view, Jesus affirms that there are separate spheres of authority, with the state having jurisdiction over political and economic matters, while God has authority over spiritual matters.
3. **The distinction between material and spiritual goods:** Some see Jesus' response as a call to prioritize spiritual goods over material ones. In this view, the phrase "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's" emphasizes the limited importance of material possessions, while the phrase "Render unto God that which is God's" emphasizes the ultimate value of spiritual goods.
4. **A critique of imperial power:** Others see Jesus' response as a subtle critique of Roman imperialism. In this view, the phrase "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's" acknowledges the Roman emperor's authority but also implies that Caesar's power is limited and ultimately subordinate to God's authority.³²
5. **A call to balance religious and secular obligations:** Finally, some interpret Jesus' response as a call to balance religious and secular obligations. In this view, Jesus affirms the importance of both paying taxes and fulfilling religious obligations, emphasizing that Christians have obligations that extend to both God and Nation.
6. **The need to prepare to meet the demands of the world:** In the words of President Hinckley, "The world will largely pay you what they think you are worth."³³ Because of this, we must render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, meaning, we must prepare to meet the world and make the necessary preparations to pay for the demands of surviving in this material world. This means getting an education and training, whatever is necessary for us to provide for our families and be self-reliant in an ever changing world.

A Revolutionary Interpretation

Another view on this passage is worth mentioning here. Although I disagree with many of his conclusions in his book, Reza Aslan presents another way to view this exchange between Jesus and his questioners. Although it is somewhat lengthy, I find this to be provocative, portraying the possible nuance of Jesus' response here at the Jerusalem temple shortly before his crucifixion:

³¹ This message was vital in the first few centuries after Christ's death, as the fledgling Christian church had to survive in imperial Rome. If their message was one of rebellion, it probably would have been eliminated by the Romans fairly early.

³² I see this as a subtle dig on Roman authority. See Reza Aslan's comments below.

³³ ["Be Smart," New Era, 2002](#). President Hinckley continued, "“And your worth will increase as you gain education and proficiency in your chosen field.”"

The Temple authorities also recognize Jesus's zeal and hatch a clever plot to trap him into implicating himself as a zealot revolutionary. Striding up to Jesus in full view of everyone present, they ask, "Teacher, we know that you are true, that you teach the way of God in truth, and that you show deference for no man. Tell us: Is it lawful to pay the tribute to Caesar or not?"

This is no simple question, of course. It is the essential test of zealotry. Ever since the uprising of Judas the Galilean, the question of whether the Law of Moses permitted paying tribute to Rome had become the distinguishing characteristic of those who adhered to zealot principles. The argument was simple and understood by all: Rome's demand for tribute signaled nothing less than a claim of ownership over the land and its inhabitants. But the land did not belong to Rome. The land belonged to God. Caesar had no right to receive tribute, because he had no right to the land. In asking Jesus about the legality of paying tribute to Rome, the religious authorities were asking him an altogether different question: Are you or are you not a zealot?

"Show me a denarius," Jesus says, referring to the Roman coin used to pay the tribute. "Whose image is this and whose inscription?"

"It is Caesar's," the authorities reply.

"Well, then, give back to Caesar the property that belongs to Caesar, and give back to God the property that belongs to God."

It is astonishing that centuries of biblical scholarship have miscast these words as an appeal by Jesus to put aside "the things of this world"—taxes and tributes—and focus one's heart instead on the only things that matter: worship and obedience to God. Such an interpretation perfectly accommodates the perception of Jesus as a detached, celestial spirit wholly unconcerned with material matters, a curious assertion about a man who not only lived in one of the most politically charged periods in Israel's history, but who claimed to be the promised messiah sent to liberate the Jews from Roman occupation. At best, Jesus's response has been viewed as a milquetoast compromise between the priestly and zealot positions—between those who thought it lawful to pay the tribute to Rome and those who did not.

The truth is that Jesus's answer is as clear a statement as one can find in the gospels on where exactly he fell in the debate between the priests and the zealots—not over the issue of the tribute, but over the far more significant question of God's sovereignty over the land. Jesus's words speak for themselves: "Give back (*apodidomi*) to Caesar the property that belongs to Caesar ..." The verb *apodidomi*, often translated as "render unto," is actually a compound word: *apo* is a preposition that in this case means "back again"; *didomi* is a verb meaning "to give." *Apodidomi* is used specifically when paying someone back property to which he is entitled; the word implies that the person receiving payment is the rightful owner of the thing being paid. In other words, according to Jesus, Caesar is entitled to be "given back" the denarius coin, not because he deserves tribute, but because it is his coin: his name and picture are stamped on it. God has nothing to do with it. By extension, God is entitled to be "given back" the land the Romans have seized for themselves because it is God's land: "The Land is mine," says the Lord (Leviticus 25:23). Caesar has nothing to do with it.

So then, give back to Caesar what is his, and give back to God what belongs to God. That is the zealot argument in its simplest, most concise form. And it seems to be enough for the authorities in Jerusalem to immediately label Jesus as *lestes*. A bandit. A zealot.

A couple of days later, after sharing a secret Passover meal, Jesus and his disciples head out in the dark of night to the Garden of Gethsemane to hide out among the gnarled olive trees and the quickset shrubs. It is here, on the western slope of the Mount of Olives, not far from where, some years later, the Roman general Titus would launch his siege of Jerusalem, that the authorities find him.

“Have you come out here with swords and clubs to arrest me like a bandit [*Iestes*]?” Jesus asks.

That is precisely how they’ve come for him. John’s gospel claims a “cohort” (*speira*) of soldiers marched to Gethsemane—a unit that would comprise between three hundred and six hundred Roman guards—along with the Temple police, all of them carrying “torches and weapons” (John 18:3). John is obviously exaggerating. But the gospels all agree it was a large and heavily armed arresting party that came for Jesus in the night. Such a show of force may explain why, before heading off to Gethsemane, Jesus made sure his followers were armed as well.

“If you do not have a sword,” Jesus instructs his disciples immediately after the Passover meal, “go sell your cloak and buy one.”

“Master,” the disciples respond, “here are two swords.”

“It is enough,” Jesus says (Luke 22:36–38).

It would not be. After a brief but bloody tussle with his disciples, the guards arrest Jesus and bring him to the authorities in Jerusalem, where he is charged with sedition for, among other things, “forbidding the paying of tribute to Rome,” a charge that Jesus does not deny (Luke 23:2).

Declared guilty, Jesus is sent to Golgotha to be crucified alongside two other men who are specifically called *Iestai*, bandits (Matthew 27:38–44; Mark 15:27). As with every criminal who hangs on a cross, Jesus is given a plaque, or titulus, detailing the crime for which he is being crucified. Jesus’s titulus reads KING OF THE JEWS. His crime: striving for kingly rule; sedition. And so, like every bandit and revolutionary, every rabble-rousing zealot and apocalyptic prophet who came before or after him—like Hezekiah and Judas, Theudas and Athronges, the Egyptian and the Samaritan, Simon son of Giora and Simon son of Kochba—Jesus of Nazareth is executed for daring to claim the mantle of king and messiah.

To be clear, Jesus was not a member of the Zealot Party that launched the war with Rome, because no such party could be said to exist for another thirty years after his death. Nor was Jesus a violent revolutionary bent on armed rebellion, though his views on the use of violence were far more complex than it is often assumed.

But look closely at Jesus’s words and actions at the Temple in Jerusalem—the episode that undoubtedly precipitated his arrest and execution—and this one fact becomes difficult to deny: Jesus was crucified by Rome because his messianic aspirations threatened the occupation of Palestine, and his zealotry endangered the Temple authorities. That singular fact should color everything we read in the gospels about the messiah known as Jesus of Nazareth—from the details of his death on a cross in Golgotha to the launch of his public ministry on the banks of the Jordan River.³⁴

While I do not agree with all of his conclusions, I do find Aslan’s take on Jesus’ response regarding Roman occupation provocative. The land was not Rome’s, it was God’s. Jesus’ answer here could be read in the

³⁴ Reza Aslan, [Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth](#), Random House, 2014, p. 76-79

light that Aslan is presenting, and would add another layer to the meaning of his statement “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's” (Matt. 22.21).³⁵

16. Sadducees question about marriage and resurrection (Matt. 22.23-33; Mark 12.18-27; Luke 20.27-38).

In ancient Judaism the *Sadducees were especially notorious for not believing in resurrection*; later rabbis who considered themselves successors of the Pharisees often classified Sadducees as heretics for this view (although the Sadducees, who vanished in the years after AD 70, were probably no longer around to respond).

The Sadducees’ question concerns the law of levirate marriage, a custom practiced in many cultures both in antiquity and today (see Deut 25:5). It provides economic and social protection to widows in certain kinds of family-oriented societies where women cannot earn adequate wages. Students of Jewish law were still expounding this Old Testament principle in Jesus’ day and afterward, though rabbinic rules differed from the Old Testament in some respects (e.g., the brother married the widow and the children she bore him were now his own).

The Sadducees borrow the story line from the Jewish book of Tobit, where righteous Sarah’s first seven husbands died, slain by the jealous demon Asmodeus. Some second-century rabbis proposed that a two- or three-time widow should not marry again, lest she bring harm on her next husband too (cf. Gen 38:11).³⁶

He is not the God of the dead, but of the living! (Matt. 22.32)

Arguing against their Sadducean opponents, the Pharisees commonly tried to prove the resurrection from the law of Moses (one rabbi even suggested that the resurrection was taught in every passage in the law; cf. also 4 Maccabees 7:18-19; 16:25; 18:19). *Jesus here does the same. He argues that God would not claim to be the God of those who no longer exist*; indeed, his faithfulness to his covenant demands that if he is their God after death, death is not the final word for them. Some other ancient Jewish writers used similar arguments to show that the patriarchs remain alive. One of the most common Jewish prayers of the period recites God’s faithfulness to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as a living reality for their own time.³⁷

Joseph F. Smith taught:

"They did not understand the principle of sealing for time and for all eternity; that what God hath joined together neither man nor death can put asunder. (Matthew 19:6); they had wandered from that principle. It had fallen into disuse among them; they had ceased to understand it; and consequently they did not comprehend the truth; but Christ did. She could only be the wife in eternity of the man to whom

³⁵ Ἀπόδοτε οὖν τὰ Καίσαρος Καίσαρι καὶ τὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ τῷ Θεῷ “Then give back to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s” (my translation).

³⁶ Keener, [Background](#), p. 102.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 102.

she was united by the power of God for eternity, as well as for time; and Christ understood the principle but He did not cast His pearls before the swine that tempted Him."³⁸

Robert Millet added this insight:

"The modern equivalent would be for a woman who does not believe in Christ, in his redemptive mission, or in resurrection, to ask a modern prophet which of the seven men to whom she had been married will be her husband in the world to come. The answer, obviously, is none of them. Because one unbeliever has been told that she has no claim on spouse or family in the world to come certainly is not to say that those who prove worthy of the full blessings of the Lord, including the blessings of eternal marriage, have no such promise. Thus the Doctrine and Covenants specifies that those who neither marry nor are given in marriage in the hereafter are those whose marriages are not performed by the sealing authority of the priesthood (D&C 132.15-18)."³⁹

17. The First and Great Commandment (Matt. 22.34-40; Mark 12.28-34).

Joseph Fielding Smith taught, "If we will observe this first law, the second naturally will follow, and in fact, as the Savior has pointed it out, we will not be guilty of a breach of the law and the prophets in anything else."⁴⁰

18. How is Christ both Lord and also David's son? (Matt. 22.41-46; Mark 12.35-37; Luke 20.39-44).

Jesus is asserting his authority as the Messiah. By asking the Pharisees whose son they think the Messiah is, Jesus is leading them to the realization that the Messiah is not just the son of David, but is also divine.⁴¹ This assertion of his own identity as the Messiah and his divine nature is a key element of Christian theology. The passage emphasizes the importance of understanding the Messiah in the context of Jewish scripture. Jesus quotes from Psalm 110 to support his argument that the Messiah is more than just a human king descended from David; he is also divine and has been appointed by God.⁴²

³⁸ Joseph F. Smith, *Conference Report*, April 1912, Afternoon Session.

³⁹ Robert L. Millet, *The Mormon Faith: A New Look at Christianity*, Shadow Mountain Publishers, 1998, 174-175.

⁴⁰ Joseph Fielding Smith, *Conference Report*, October 1947, Afternoon Meeting.

⁴¹ By definition, the Christ, or anointed one, was the royal descendant of David (Is 9:7; 11:1; Ps 2; 89; 132). Yet people typically thought of a son as a subordinate, a perspective inappropriate concerning Jesus. The one who would reign in God's kingdom was David's "Lord," not merely his descendant; he would thus be greater than the resurrected David. Keener, *Background*, p. 103.

⁴² **Three times in the New Testament, this scripture is quoted to show that Jesus, who was a descendant of David, was also the "Lord" (i.e. Jehovah) whom David worshiped. Two are in the gospels:**

35 And Jesus answered and said, while he taught in the temple, How say the scribes that Christ is the Son of David?
36 For David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool.

37 David therefore himself calleth him Lord; and whence is he then his son? And the common people heard him gladly (Mark 12:35-37).

42 Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David.

43 He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying,

44 The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool?

45 If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?

46 And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions (Matthew 22:24-46).

By quoting Psalm 110, Jesus is inviting his hearers to ponder what was going on in these verses. In the first verse of Psalm 110, the words, “sit thou at my right hand,” was literally an invitation to the king in ancient Israel to sit next to God, implicitly to sit upon the throne of God. The invitation was proffered here in conjunction with the ordination to the Melchizedek priesthood, but would not be realized until near the conclusion of the drama when the king would be crowned. In doing this, the king would be symbolically sitting next to God/Yahweh (Ps. 110.5 – “The Lord at thy right hand”). So here in Jesus’ day, we have Jesus asking, “If David calls him (meaning me – Jesus, Yahweh in the flesh) Lord, how is he his son?”

They could not answer. But Latter-day Saints can. Jesus is David’s son due to the fact that he has come to earth as a mortal, born of Mary (a descendant of David) and as a son of God the Father. He is both Lord and Son in these passages, and Jesus is emphasizing that he is literally the “Lord” that the kings of ancient Israel symbolically sat next to during their enthronement ceremonies long ago.⁴³

“And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions” (Matt. 22.46)

Jewish people agreed that the Holy Spirit inspired the Scriptures (22:43). When Jewish teachers challenged their hearers to resolve apparent discrepancies in Scripture, they assumed that both texts were true (in this case, Jesus knows that he is both David’s son and David’s Lord; Mt 1:1) and were simply asking how to harmonize them. Jesus’ opponents apparently have no answer to his question, perhaps because Jewish interpreters did not apply Psalm 110:1 to the Messiah. Those silenced by a speaker’s wisdom had been publicly shamed and would be careful before engaging in such a public battle of wits with the speaker again. When contemporary literature reports hearers being overawed by a wise speaker’s (usually the protagonist’s) wisdom, the readers are meant to respect the speaker’s wisdom too (e.g., 1 Esdras 4:41-42).⁴⁴

19. Jesus publicly shames his enemies at the temple (Matt. 23.1-36; Mark 12.38-40; Luke 20.45-47).

[Matthew 23](#) contains a scathing denunciation of the Pharisees by Jesus, in which he accuses them of hypocrisy, self-righteousness, and a failure to live up to the teachings of the Jewish scriptures. Jesus’ words are harsh and condemnatory, and would likely have been deeply humiliating and damaging to the Pharisees’ reputations.

Paul also used it as part of the whole series of kingship scriptures about the Savior that he quoted in the first chapter of Hebrews:

13 But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?
14 Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation? (Hebrews 1:13-14).

⁴³ See Baker and Ricks, p. 240 and 403. On p. 403, they emphasize, “In the very old Psalm 110 Yahweh is the king, sitting on his throne and offering to his ‘son’, the earthly king, the seat of honor at his right side. In the likewise very old Psalm 68 the worshiper calls Yahweh ‘his king and his god.’”

⁴⁴ Keener, *Background*, p. 103.

In Jewish culture, honor and shame were incredibly important, and public shame was a powerful tool for exerting social control.⁴⁵ The Pharisees would have been keenly aware of the shame that Jesus was directing towards them, and it is likely that this would have fueled their desire for revenge against him.

Moreover, Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees would have been particularly galling to them because they were religious leaders and experts in Jewish law, and they considered him to be beneath even the peasantry.⁴⁶ For Jesus to publicly call them out on their hypocrisy and failings would have been a direct challenge to their authority and credibility, and would have been deeply threatening to their sense of self-importance and status.

In addition, the Pharisees were already suspicious of Jesus because of his teachings and the popularity he had gained among the people. They saw him as a potential threat to their own power and influence, and may have been looking for an opportunity to discredit or eliminate him.

Overall, it is likely that Jesus' public shaming of the Pharisees in [Matthew 23](#) played a significant role in their desire to have him publicly shamed and crucified. The power of shame and the importance of honor and status in Jewish culture, combined with the Pharisees' sense of their own importance and their fear of Jesus' influence, would have made Jesus' words a potent and dangerous weapon against them.

Straining gnats and swallowing camels (Matt. 23.24)

The hyperbole here is humorous and would certainly catch ancient hearers' attention. Wanting to avoid the impurity caused by a dead insect in their drink, Pharisees would strain out any insect larger than a lentil before it could die in order to preserve the fluid (cf. Lev 11:32, 34). Pharisees considered gnats, which were smaller than lentils, exempt from this impurity, but the scrupulous Pharisee of Jesus' hyperbole would not have taken any chances. Yet Jesus charges hyperbolically that they would leave a camel (the largest animal in Palestine and also ritually unclean, Lev 11:4) in the cup and gulp it down. Their attention to the law's details was fine, but they had missed the main point (Mt 23:23). (The similarity between the Aramaic terms for camel [*gamla*] and gnat [*kamla*] may have also caught their attention.)⁴⁷

20. The Widow's mite (Mark 12.41-44; Luke 21.1-4).

⁴⁵ See Muller, [Honor and Shame in a Middle Eastern Setting](#), accessed 2.22.23.

⁴⁶ Inter-status challenges are depicted abundantly in the New Testament, namely, in the Gospel depictions of Jesus being challenged by and shaming his elite Judean interlocutors, variously depicted as Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes. While historical reconstruction of these events is complicated, ***we can say with certainty that Jesus did not share status equality with his opponents as depicted in the Gospels.*** Crossan, K. C. Hanson, and Douglas E. Oakman all agree that ***Jesus was most likely a peasant farmer and artisan.*** Richard Rohrbaugh strives for greater specificity, arguing that ***artisans were below even peasants in social stratification***, for peasants at least were landed, while artisans were not. He places only "the degraded and expendables" (prostitutes, tanners, blind, lame, etc) below artisans. By all accounts Jesus was non-elite, while many of his opponents would have been elite: the Sadducees, the scribes, and the high priests. Zeba Crook, Honor, Shame, and Social Status Revisited, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Fall, 2009, Vol. 128, No. 3, p. 601, emphasis added.

⁴⁷ Keener, *Background*, p. 105.

"No word was spoken to the sorrowing widow who in her penury had sacrificed her all, nor did she then so much as know that the Judge of all had weighed her gift in the eternal scales and found it of more worth than the wealth of kings."⁴⁸

A Widow's Mite

After the dedication of the temple site at Bern, Switzerland, the spectators gathered around father [David O. McKay] to shake his hand and to ask for his autograph.

One sweet, old lady came up to him and placed a small purse in his hand. Father beckoned to me to act as interpreter. With tears in her eyes, she said: "President McKay, ever since I learned that a temple was to be built in my land, I have saved a ten-centime piece each week. I am quite ill and very old, so I shall never be able to do work in the temple when it is built, but I wish to do my part in helping the great cause."

The actual amount in the purse, figured in dollars and cents, was not much, but each week's savings meant less food for that dear, old soul. She was giving all she could with a deeper sincerity than is perhaps felt by many others who offer more—and even when she knew that no return in the use of the temple would ever come to her, she was happy in the thought that she was helping her fellow men.

This is why, I am sure, that father put his arm around her, and with tears in his eyes, thanked her in behalf of all her fellow Church members throughout the world, and added: "You are true gold; I am sure God is pleased with your sincere heart and worthy soul; and in behalf of the Church I accept this gift in the spirit in which it is given!"

The old sister hobbled away, lame and decrepit in body, but with a smile which reflected the happy sparkle in her eyes and of her beautiful soul!⁴⁹

21. Greeks who have come to Passover at the temple seek Jesus (John 12.20-22).

22. Jesus speaks of the Son of Man, his Father, and the Father speaks of Jesus' glorification (John 12.23-50).

The people do not believe, some rulers believe but will not follow Jesus (John 12.37-43)

John quotes Isaiah 53.1 in John 12.38

מי האמין לשמענו וזרוע יהוה על מי נגלתה

"Who has trusted what we have heard? And to whom will the arm⁵⁰ of the Lord be revealed" (Isa. 53.1, my translation). This question is the root of what John is driving at here in John 12.

This part of John 12 is the last of Jesus' public discourse, at least as they are found in John's gospel. Overall, there are multiple things we can draw from this final discourse:

⁴⁸ Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary*, 4 vols. Deseret Book, 1979-1981, 3: 410.

⁴⁹ Llewelyn R. McKay, comp., *Home Memories of President David O. McKay*, 158-59. See also: Jay A. Parry, Jack M. Lyon, and Linda Ririe Gundry, *Best-Loved Stories of the LDS People*, volume 2, Deseret Book, 2001.

⁵⁰ זרוע ז'רוע can mean arm or it can also mean force or strength. At issue here is who will be able to see the force/might/strength of the Lord?

1. **We see the struggle between belief and unbelief in the hearts of the people who are listening to Jesus.** In this passage, Jesus refers to the people's unbelief despite the signs he has performed (John 12.37). At the same time, there are those who believe, but are afraid to stand up for what they believe about Jesus (John 12.42). This can be interpreted as a commentary on the state of the Jewish people at the time, who were unable to recognize Jesus as the Son of God despite his miracles.⁵¹
2. **The certainty of Jesus' impending death:** Jesus acknowledges that his hour has come and that he must be lifted up (John 12.23). This can be interpreted as a reference to his imminent crucifixion, which is both necessary for the salvation of the world and a demonstration of his unwavering obedience to his Heavenly Father.
3. **The judgment of the world:** Jesus states that he did not come to judge the world, but rather to save it (John 12.47). However, he also acknowledges that his words will be used to judge those who reject him, knowing who he really is.
4. **The unity and special relationship between Jesus and Heavenly Father:** Jesus emphasizes his close relationship with God and that his words and actions are in complete alignment with God's will (John 12.49-50). Jesus prays to his Father, asking that his name be glorified. His Heavenly Father responds by saying "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again!" (John 12.28)
5. **The role of belief (*pistis*):** Throughout his discourse in John 12, Jesus emphasizes the importance of belief in him as the Son of God. Those who believe in him will not remain in darkness but will have eternal life. This can be interpreted as a call to faith and a reminder that salvation is only possible through belief in Jesus (John 12.38, 42, 44, 46-47).

"They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (John 12.43)

Elder Neal A. Maxwell taught:

"...we cannot say to the Lord that we are willing to surrender but only on our terms. There are no conditions in unconditional surrender! Even with all of its interior consistency, however, the plan cannot bring true happiness to anyone whose life is grossly inconsistent with its standards. It cannot fully enfold him who is too worried about being taken in. It has no place of honor for one too concerned with losing his place in the secular synagogue. (See John 12:42-43.)"⁵²

Jesus and his Father (John 12.36, 44-50)

"I came not to judge the world" (John 12.47)

Hugh Nibley⁵³ gave this commentary about this idea:

He that rejecteth me . . . hath one that judgeth him [lit. "one to judge him"]: the word I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:47-48). **No judgment now**, but "in the last day."

"Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come," writes Paul (1 Corinthians 4:5), "who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts:

⁵¹ It can also be read as a commentary by the Johannine community about the state of relations between the Jews and Christians shortly after the destruction of the temple. See: Raymond Brown, [*The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times*](#), Paulist Press, 1978.

⁵² Elder Neal A. Maxwell, "The Great Plan of the Eternal God," *Ensign*, May 1984.

⁵³ Hugh Nibley, "The Way of the Church," [*Mormonism and Early Christianity*](#), Deseret Book, 1987, emphasis added.

and then shall every man have praise of God. ***The time of Christ and the apostles was not to be the time of judgment, but of testing***; without the opportunity of freely accepting or rejecting, there could be no judgment: 'If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now they have both seen and hated both me and my Father' (John 15:24). That was the purpose of his preaching to them—to give them the chance, not to convert them no matter what—'That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? . . .

"Therefore they could not believe" (John 12:38-41); 'their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted' (Matthew 13:15). The world is not going to be converted, but it is going to be judged. The first act of the drama is all a preparation, not for the second act, but for the last one—the second coming and the judgment; on that time and event all the apostles fix their gaze as the reward and vindication of all they are doing. In between lies the dark and dismal interlude of the second act about which the Lord and the apostles have a great deal to say."

Having been as completely as possible rejected by the world—cast out of the vineyard and slain—the Lord was to depart thence and leave the stage clear to the adversary for the gloomy second act. This is a long period in which people go about seeking the Lord in vain and falsely but loudly proclaiming themselves to be the true heirs of the vineyard. First, the departure of the Lord, in no happy mood: "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you, and suffer you?" (Luke 9:41). He is going to rise up and "shut the door" (see Luke 13:25). "The days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast" (Matthew 9:15). "Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me" (John 14:30).

Then, surprisingly enough, once he is gone, everyone, the wicked as well as the righteous, will desire Christ and seek after him—but in vain. Just as the wicked world venerated the prophets and painted their tombs after they had been safely put to death (Matthew 23:29-33), so they would worship Christ—at a safe distance.

Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me. Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come (John 7:33-34).

I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come (John 8:21).

Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say unto you" (John 13:33).

The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see it. And they shall say to you, See here; or, see there: go not after them, nor follow them (Luke 17:22-23).

In these speeches the Lord is addressing not the wicked but his followers; even for them the quest will be vain; plainly there are conditions and time limits attached to the promise "Seek and ye shall find," and "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20). In their search they are warned not to follow after any of the groups claiming to be the church—to have found Jesus. Those who are looking admit they have not found him—they are not the church; and all the rest are impostors! Once he has risen up and has shut the door, then all will call upon his name and clamor to be numbered

among his followers—but then it will be too late: he will refuse to recognize them (see Luke 13:25-27). "In vain do they worship me" (Matthew 15:9) is not a denunciation of idolatry, but of those marching under the banner of Christ. There is a point of no return after which even repentance comes too late, as Esau learned to his sorrow: "For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no chance to repent [*metanoias topon*, 'place of repentance'], though he sought it carefully with tears" (Hebrews 12:17). He wants to repent sincerely and makes every effort to be reinstated in his inheritance, but it is too late; he is "rejected" even as those will be rejected who cry "Lord! Lord!" and try to get into the kingdom of Christ (Matthew 7:21). The time is coming when vast numbers shall claim Christ for their own, and when that time comes, "if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not" (Matthew 24:23). And that time is not far off: "the time draweth near [when many shall come in my name]; . . . go ye not therefore after them" (Luke 21:8). It is true, the real church is going to be there for a time, but the story is one of constantly deepening gloom until, to use Polycarp's famous phrase, after the apostles "the light went out."

The beautiful and much-quoted words "I am the light of the world" are rarely given in full, since their purpose is to make clear that the light is not going to remain in the world:

I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world (John 9:4-5).⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Hugh Nibley, "The Way of the Church," [Mormonism and Early Christianity](#), Deseret Book, 1987, emphasis added.