

11 Temple versus king (Matthew 21–22)

Jesus now arrives in Jerusalem for his final week (Matthew 21–28). Crowds welcome him as their king, a festal procession waving palm branches to celebrate the return of a son of David.

But for the temple authorities, this is not a welcome sight. They see this “king” as a threat to their authority. This conflict between **temple** and **king** dominates the rest of Matthew's Gospel. In the end, the temple authorities hand over *the king of the Jews* to be crucified.

Why is this conflict the main story in Matthew 21–28?



The Palm Sunday path: from Mount of Olives to Jerusalem. Photo: Allen Browne.

Two anointed leaders with God's authority (Zechariah)

The prophet Zechariah provides a superb backdrop to this conflict. God had anointed two leaders for his people.

The Sinai covenant meant the LORD was Israel's king (Exodus 1–24). He asked them to build a house for him to live among them and lead them (Exodus 25–40). God's house had two rooms: a) the Holy Place where devoted servants (priests) served God; and b) the Most Holy Place, a private chamber set aside for the king.

The ark was the throne where their heavenly sovereign sat *enthroned between the cherubim* (1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Samuel 6:2; 2 Kings 19:15; Psalms 80:1; 99:1; Isaiah 37:16). Of course, God was enthroned in the heavens (Psalms 2:4; 123:1), so the ark was just the *footstool* of his throne (Isaiah 66:1; 1 Chronicles 28:2; Psalms 99:5; 132:7).

The **High Priest** was God's chief servant, anointed with oil to recognize his authority. He spoke for God, to ensure the nation fulfilled God's Law.

But Israel struggled without a human king. At one point they carried God's throne into battle so God could lead them, but the Philistines captured the ark (1 Samuel 4:11). They asked for a human king (1 Samuel 8:4–19). God anointed a **king** for them.

Now Israel had **two authorities** representing God's sovereign authority: the temple and the king. They were often in dispute. At times, the kings and the temple abused their God-given authority. Eventually God removed both the kings and the temple when Babylon invaded.

After the exile, some people returned. They rebuilt the temple, consecrating a man named Joshua as high priest in 515 BC. Under foreign rule, they could not appoint a king. Zerubbabel (a descendant of King David) was governor, not anointed as king.

In Zechariah's vision, two olive trees provided oil for the lampstand in God's house: “*These are the two who are **anointed** to serve the Lord of all the earth*” (Zechariah 4:14). But there was only an anointed high priest, not an anointed king.

Should Zerubbabel gather an army and fight as David had done? He was told to wait for God to restore the kingship: *“This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD Almighty.”* (Zechariah 4:6)

Since there was only one anointed leader, **the high priest served the kingly role too**. God told Zechariah to *“Take the silver and gold and make a crown, and set it on the head of the high priest.”* The high priest was to function as *the man whose name is the Branch*—a term for the Davidic king (Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15). In addition to his temple role, the high priest *will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne*. The two anointed roles—king and priest—were united in one person. (Zechariah 6:11-13)

That was a temporary arrangement. God promised that one day the kingship would be restored: *Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey* (Zechariah 9:9).

That’s what the crowds saw on Palm Sunday: Jesus riding into Jerusalem, the kingship returning in God’s Anointed.

But there’s a tragic twist. Zechariah also described God’s *shepherd being struck down* (Zechariah 13:7). It would feel like the fall of God’s nation all over again.

Yet, in Zechariah’s final vision, God’s reign was reestablished—not only for Israel but for all the peoples of the world: *The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name* (Zechariah 14:9).

When God’s anointed king arrived, the temple had been the sole authority for 500 years. The temple was not about to relinquish the regal authority to God’s anointed. That’s the reason for all the conflict between temple and king in Matthew 21–28.

11.1 The temple rejects the king (Matthew 21)

Riding into the capital on a donkey, Jesus is recognized as their long-awaited king:

Matthew 21:1-11 (my translation)

¹ As they came close to Jerusalem and reached Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples ² with instructions, “Make your way into the village ahead of you, and straightaway you’ll find a donkey tied up with her colt. Untie them, and bring them to me.

³ If anyone says anything, say, ‘The Master needs them.’ Immediately he will send them.”

⁴ This came about as the fulfilment of the word through the prophet,

⁵ “Say to the Daughter of Zion,
‘Look! Your king is coming to you,
unpretentiously arriving on a donkey,
on a colt, the son of a pack-animal.’” [Zechariah 9:9]

⁶ Going and doing as he commanded, ⁷ the disciples brought Jesus the donkey and colt. With their clothes arrayed on them, Jesus took his seat on them.

⁸ The large crowd spread their own clothes on the road.

Others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

⁹ The crowds preceding him and following him were shouting:

“Hosanna to the son of David.”

“Blessings to the one arriving in the name of the Lord.”

“Hosanna in the highest!” [Psalm 118:25-26]

¹⁰ His arrival at Jerusalem shook the whole city, with people saying,

“Who is this?” ¹¹ The arriving crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Jesus requisitions a donkey to make his entrance as Zechariah described. The crowds coming to Jerusalem for Passover recognize Jesus as the anointed son of David, arriving with the authority of YHWH. *Hosanna* is a plea for restoration:

Psalm 118:25-27 (NIV)

²⁵ LORD, save us [YHWH hôšî ‘â-nā]! LORD, grant us success!

²⁶ **Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.**

From the house of the LORD we bless you.

²⁷ The LORD is God, and he has made his light shine on us.

With **boughs in hand**, join in the festal procession ...

Did you hear what they proclaimed?

- a) *Hosanna to the Son of David!* — In this son of David, God was answering their call to be rescued as his people.
- b) *Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!* — In the arrival of King Jesus, God's authority (reign) was being restored to his people.
- c) *Hosanna in the highest heaven!* — The reign of heaven (kingdom of God) was arriving in God's Anointed. This is God saving his people.

Did you recognize that as the gospel? This crowd just proclaimed divine authority reconciling heaven and earth:

- a) Their first statement recognizes God's anointed king **on earth**.
- b) Their final statement recognizes God's authority **in heaven**.
- c) These two realms come together in *the one arriving in the name of the Lord*.

What a powerful proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom! In Christ, earth is saved from being overrun by evil, restored as a kingdom of heaven. The joyful answer to our pleas for God to save us arrives in the Christ, the anointed king who comes with the authority of the one who reigns in the heavens. Hallelujah!

But there's a problem (verse 10). While the crowds arriving from Galilee for Passover were singing Jesus' praises, the people in the capital were not ready for their king. “Who's this?” they ask. A prophet from Nazareth means nothing to them.

Conflict between king and temple (21:12-16)

Ever since Peter proclaimed him as the Christ, Jesus has been explaining that the Jerusalem authorities wanted to eliminate him (16:21; 17:23; 20:18). The king's first order of business is therefore to confront the temple leaders:

Matthew 21:12-13

¹² Jesus entered the temple area and ejected all those selling and buying in the temple. He overturned the tables of the money exchangers and the seats of those selling doves. ¹³ He said to them, "It is written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' [Isaiah 56:7] but 'you have made it a cave of thugs.'" [Jeremiah 7:10]

Jesus wasn't angry at those who provided the birds and coins to be offered as gifts at the temple. It wasn't like he expected it should be a place of quiet meditation.

Jesus quoted a text from Isaiah where God called his people to pray for the nations. Israel's calling was to represent God to the nations (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6; 51:4; 60:3). The temple should have been praying, "Your kingdom come." They should have been looking for the restoration of God's reign among the nations.

Instead, when the king comes riding into Jerusalem, they're thugs—plotting to rob him of his authority. It's not a house for the heavenly sovereign; it's *a den of robbers*.

That's the same accusation Jeremiah made when he declared that the temple would be destroyed by Babylon. Jerusalem's leaders were so confident in their own power that they could not believe Jerusalem could fall. Like Psalm 46:5 had said, *God is within her; she will not fall*. That's how they reacted to Jeremiah: "*This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.*" (Jeremiah 7:4).

Jeremiah said it was no longer God's house. They could not keep dishonouring God and expect God to stay there:

Jeremiah 7:9-11 (NIV)

⁹ "Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, ¹⁰ and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, "We are safe"—safe to do all these detestable things? ¹¹ Has this house, which bears my Name, become a **den of robbers** to you?"

God had vacated the house (Ezekiel 11:23). Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by Babylon (2 Kings 25). And Jesus said it was happening again: the temple would be destroyed again: "*Not one stone here will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down,*" he said (24:2).

He was right: in AD 70, the second temple was destroyed by Rome.

In summary, the people welcomed their king, while the temple authorities rejected his authority:

Matthew 21:14-16

¹⁴ Blind and lame people came up to him in the temple complex, and he healed them. ¹⁵ But as the chief priests and Bible scholars saw the marvellous things he did, and the children calling out in the temple, "Hosanna to the son of David," they were outraged ¹⁶ and they said to him, "Do you hear what they're saying?"

Jesus replies, "Oh, yes. Have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of tiny tots and babies you orchestrated acclamation!'" [Psalm 8:2]

The fruitless tree (21:17-22)

Sometimes prophets did more than declare God's message. They enacted it:

- Isaiah stripped like a captive (Isaiah 20).
- Jeremiah smashed a pot, and paraded in rotten garments (Jeremiah 13, 18).
- Ezekiel lay like a dead body beside a model of a besieged Jerusalem (Eze. 4).

That's why Jesus overturned the temple: enacting what Rome would do to it.

Denouncing the fruitless tree was another enacted prophecy. The city that rejected its heaven-sent king would fall:

Matthew 21:17-22

¹⁷ Leaving them behind, he went out of the city to Bethany and slept there. ¹⁸ Next morning, on the way back to the city, he was hungry.

¹⁹ Spotting a fig tree in the distance, he went to it and found nothing on it—only leaves—and he said to it, "No more fruit will come from you ever." Straightaway, it withered.

²⁰ Seeing what happened, his followers were astonished, asking "How come the fig tree withered so quickly?"

²¹ In reply, Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth. If you [plural] have faith without doubting, you'll not only do this to the fig tree but you could also say to this mountain, 'Be uprooted and thrown into the sea,' and it will be so. ²² And whatever you might ask for in prayer believing you will receive."

What was the most significant mountain in view? Metaphorically, the temple mount would be uprooted like a tree that bears no fruit. It would be thrown down in AD 70 because it rejected God's authority.

To the disciples that looked impossible. Which looked more secure? The temple that had stood there for five centuries, or the "king" who is about to be crucified?

The disciples need to know their security is not based on what has been established on earth, but on what has been established by heaven. Jesus calls them to trust and receive the authority God gives to his anointed. The temple was going down.

Challenging the Christ's authority (21:23-27)

The temple now challenges the anointed king's authority:

Matthew 21:23-27

²³ Since he'd entered the temple complex and was teaching, the chief priests and elders of the people asked, "By what kind of **authority** are you doing these things? Who gave you this **authority**?"

²⁴ In reply Jesus said to them, "And I'll ask you one thing: tell me, and I'll tell you by what kind of **authority** I do these things. ²⁵ John the Baptizer: where was his from? From heaven, or from people?"

They discussed it among themselves saying, "If we say, 'From heaven' he'll ask us, 'Then why didn't you believe him?'" ²⁶ But if we say, 'From

people'—we fear the crowd's reaction, for they hold John to be a prophet.'" ²⁷ They answered Jesus, "We don't know."

²⁸ So he himself said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what kind of **authority** I do these things."

It's a clever response. Did John have authority from heaven to declare that the kingdom of God was about to be restored? (3:2) Had God decreed the dead branches of his nation would be cut down and thrown in the fire (3:10)? Or was John nothing more than a popularist prophet telling people what they wanted to hear?

If John's message was from God, the temple should join with the crowds in affirming Jesus' authority: "*Hosanna to the son of David ... the one arriving in the name of the Lord*" (verse 9). But if they rejected John also, it might start a riot. Passover was a particularly emotional time: recalling Israel's liberation from foreign rulers (Pharaoh), Passover stirred their hope of being restored as God's kingdom.

To avoid a riot, they cannot reply. Effectively, Jesus' final answer in verse 28 is: "You couldn't recognize God's authority if it was staring you in the face."

Stories of the Son (21:28-41)

The king entered Jerusalem to challenge the temple. His parables are about his authority. Remember the two anointed authorities in Israel? Which one is serving the Heavenly Father here? The temple, or the king?

Matthew 21:28-32

²⁸ "What do think? A man had two offspring. He approached the first and said, 'Work in in the vineyard today.' ²⁹ He replied, 'I don't want to.' Later, he changed his mind and did it.

³⁰ "He approached the other, and said the same thing. He replied, 'Indeed, I will,' but he took off. ³¹ Which of the pair did what the father wanted?"

They say, "The first."

Jesus says to them, "I tell you the truth that tax collectors and prostitutes are making their way into the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³² For John came to you with the way of righteousness and you didn't believe him, but the tax collectors and prostitutes believed him. Even when you saw that, you did not change your mind later and believe him."

It's not too late to change their mind. Despite their evil intentions towards Jesus, they could turn—as the tax collectors and prostitutes did when they listened to John.

In Jesus' next story, Jesus is the son, whereas the temple leaders are merely tenants on God's farm:

Matthew 21:33-41

³³ "Listen, another parable. This person was a landholder. He established a vineyard, set up a protective hedge, dug a winepress, built a lookout, leased it to tenants, and went elsewhere.

³⁴ "As harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. ³⁵ The tenants took hold of his servants and they beat,

killed, or stoned them. ³⁶ Again, he sent other servants, more than the first lot. They treated them the same way. ³⁷ Finally, he sent his son to them saying, 'They'll show respect to my son.'

³⁸ "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come on, let's **kill** him so we can have his inheritance!'

³⁹ And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and **killed** him.

⁴⁰ "So when the lord of the vineyard comes home, how will he treat those tenants?"

⁴¹ They say to him, "Those bad guys are in serious trouble! He'll wipe them out! And then he will lease out his vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons."

The one message we've heard directly from God has been: "*This is my Son*" (3:17; 17:5). It's what God said to the son of David (2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 2:7). This is not something God said to the high priest.

The temple is not serving God if it plans to *kill* the son (verses 38-39). That's what this confrontation between king and temple is all about.

Even if they get rid of the Son, the temple leaders will not keep their power, since authority comes from the Architect of history:

Matthew 21:42-46

⁴² Jesus says to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures? 'A stone, rejected by the builders, was raised up as the chief architectural stone. This came about through the Lord's action, and it is astounding to watch.' [Psalm 118:22-23]

⁴³ "The point I'm making is that the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation that produces its fruit.

⁴⁴ The one who falls over this stone will fall to pieces; the one on whom it falls will be crushed."

⁴⁵ As the chief priests and Pharisees heard his parables, they knew he was talking about them. ⁴⁶ While they were looking for a way to restrain him, they were afraid of the crowds who held him to be a prophet.

The context of the Psalm 118 quotation is amazing:

- The leader of the procession to the temple was confronting death, but not abandoned to death (118:17-18),
- The LORD vindicated and saved him (118:19-21).
- The rejected stone was raised up as the chief stone (118:22-23),
- The crowds shouted, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who arrives in the name of the LORD" as they waved palm branches in festal procession (118:25-27).

There's a wordplay between two similar sounding words: *ěběn* (stone) and *bēn* (son). Those who trip over the stone (Son) will see God raise up the rejected stone (Son) looming large over them (verse 44).

The temple leaders understood that Jesus was talking about their failure to recognize his regal sonship authority (verse 45).

11.2 The temple questions the king (Matthew 22)

The public confrontation between the king and temple continues:

- His story warns that rejecting his authority will not end well (verses 1-14).
- Factions pose trap questions to undermine Jesus' credibility (verses 15-40).
- Jesus challenges them to ponder the authority God gives the Messiah (41-46).

The wedding of the king's son (22:1-14)

Do we have any royal watchers? Royal weddings tend to grab our imagination:

Matthew 22:1-7

¹ Jesus' reply in parables continued with this one:

² "The kingdom of heaven could be compared to a human king who arranged a **wedding for his son**. ³ He sent out his servants to call the ones he had called to the wedding, but they didn't want to come.

⁴ "Again, he sent out other servants, 'Tell the ones who have been called, "Look, I have prepared my meal, killed the beef and prime meats, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding.'"

⁵ "Taking no notice, his guests went off to do their own thing, working in their own field, trading at their business. ⁶ The remaining guests captured his servants, mistreated them, and killed them. ⁷ The king was enraged, commanding his troops to destroy those murderers and burn their city."

Jesus wants them to consider how an earthly king would react if the people of the capital rebuffed his son. Verse 2 literally says "a human king" (*anthrōpos basileus*), though English translations tend to miss this. The point is to get the temple leaders to recognize the dishonour they're showing, and realize how God might respond.

A royal wedding is a special occasion. It's an apt metaphor. The son of the heavenly king is "marrying" the city. Heaven and earth are united in this heaven-sent king—assuming they're not too busy seeking their own power and prosperity instead.

If a human king (Herod or Caesar) had his messengers mistreated and killed, he would send his troops to destroy the city. How will Israel's heavenly sovereign respond to the city that dishonours his son?

Astoundingly, the king in Jesus' story gives his people another chance:

Matthew 22:8-10

⁸ "Then he says to his servants, 'Seriously, the wedding is ready, but the ones who've been called were not worthy. ⁹ So head out to where people meet as they travel and call as many as you can find to the wedding.'

¹⁰ "The servants headed out and rounded up everyone they found—both the bad and the good! That's how the seats at the wedding were filled."

Verse 10 is incredibly controversial. How can God include *the bad and the good* in his restored kingdom? The Sinai covenant was based on a justice system that gave people what they deserved. Even John the Baptist expected the Messiah to separate the wheat from the chaff and burn the chaff (3:12).

But when God finds Jerusalem's leaders unworthy—because of how they treat his son—God responds by opening up the call to anyone who will come and honour his son. That's how the new-covenant kingdom of God is populated.

Doesn't that cheapen God's grace? Has Jesus reduced the gospel to "free board and lodging for rascals" as missiologist Lesslie Newbigin put it?

Jesus says no. The heavenly sovereign calls all his people to celebrate his son. But turning up for the wedding in dusty farm clothes is not recognizing his son:

Matthew 22:11-14

¹¹ "When the king came in to check on his guests, he saw someone who had not dressed for the wedding. ¹² He says to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without dressing for the wedding?' He had no answer.

¹³ "Then the king said to his attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him out where it's utterly dark, where there's anguish and remorse. ¹⁴ For many are called, few chosen.'"

The gospel is God's announcement that his son is our king. He calls us to recognize his Christ as our Lord. That call goes out to everyone—good and bad. God evaluates who are truly the people of his reign based on our response to his Son. Those who do not honour God's Christ do not receive a place at his table, under his kingship.

The immediate target of this parable is the Jerusalem leaders who will reject the Son and hand him over to be crucified before the week is out. Your thoughts?

Which king should we recognize with our tribute? (22:15-22)

Taxation is always unpopular. To pay tax is to recognize the authority of a ruler.

Israel was asked to pay tribute (tax) to the temple (Numbers 31). They were forced to pay tribute when other kings conquered them (Judges 3:15-18; 2 Kings 17:3-4; 23:33).

The question is a trap. If Jesus says to pay tribute to Caesar, he cannot be the king people said he was on Palm Sunday. If he says not to pay, the Herodians (supporters of Herod) will have him arrested for treason—inciting rebellion against Rome:

Matthew 22:15-22

¹⁵ Then the Pharisees put their heads together to trap him with his words.

¹⁶ They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians to say, "Teacher, we know you're authentic, and you teach God's way with authenticity. You don't care what anyone thinks, or look for people's approval.

¹⁷ So, tell us what you think: should we pay tribute to Caesar or not?"

¹⁸ Aware of their evil intent, Jesus said, "Why are you testing me, you play actors? ¹⁹ Show me the tribute coin." They offered him a denarius.

²⁰ He says to them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?"

²¹ "Caesar's" they replied.

Then he said to them, "Return to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God."

²² His response astounded them. They took their leave and departed.

They're already compromised by using Caesar's coins. They acknowledge they belong to Caesar by trading with his image and inscription:

- The **image** on Caesar's coin violated God's authority:
"Do not make an image of anything on earth, because I, the LORD, am in charge of you" (abbreviation of Exodus 20:4).
- The **inscription** on Caesar's coin violated God's authority:
A denarius of Tiberius would carry his garlanded portrait surrounded by the inscription "Ti[berius] Caesar Divi Aug[usti] F[ilius] Augustus;" on the reverse would be "Pontif[ex] Maxim[us]." He is thus proclaimed to be not only son of the divine Augustus, but also a high priest; the two titles together could hardly be more calculated to offend Jewish piety.¹⁹

"Son of a god" on the front.

"High Priest" on the back.

These were the two anointed roles in Israel. Wouldn't the temple be better to recognize God's Christ?

Temple and king could then work together to give back to Caesar the thing he created in his image to represent his glory (Genesis 1:26-27).



Caesar's coin: a denarius (front and back)

Note: Christians have sometimes taken verse 21 to mean that we belong to two kingdoms—a worldly one and a heavenly one—as if Jesus was supporting a separation of church and state. That approach would have made no sense in Jesus' world or in ancient Israel. Christians have one primary allegiance, to Christ as king. Anything else is secondary and temporary.

Will the dead be raised? (22:23-33)

Unlike Jesus and the Pharisees, the Sadducees who controlled the temple did not believe in the resurrection. If they're right, then Jesus mission is hopeless: if they kill him, he will not be raised up as he expects (16:21; 17:9, 23; 20:19).

Matthew 22:23-28

²³ That same day, Sadducees approached him to say there's no resurrection. ²⁴ "Teacher, Moses said that if someone died without having children, his brother is to marry the woman and raise up offspring for his brother.

²⁵ "Among us, there were seven brothers. Since the first married and died without offspring, he left his wife to his brother. ²⁶ The same thing happened to the second, and the third, ... the whole seven. ²⁷ Last of all, the woman died. ²⁸ In the resurrection, whose of the seven will the woman be? For they all had her."

¹⁹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 833.

The Levirate Law required a man whose brother had died without offspring to take his brother's widow and raise up children through her (Deuteronomy 25:5-6). That way the deceased brother's family line would live on. That's how future generations were to be "raised up," rather than through resurrection. The Sadducees focused on the Torah which doesn't mention resurrection. (Resurrection comes later in the Psalms and the Prophets.)

This story was designed to undermine the reason people often yearn for life hereafter. If you've lost a loved one, the resurrection is your hope of seeing your loved one again. But what if your spouse remarried after you died? Would you still have the hope of your precious relationship again one day?

Matthew 22:29-33

²⁹ In reply, Jesus said to them, "You are misguided. You don't know the Scriptures or God's power. ³⁰ In the resurrection, there's no marrying or being given in marriage—just like the angels in the heavens.

³¹ But regarding the resurrection of the dead, haven't you read how God spoke to you, ³² 'I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob?' [Exodus 3:6]

He is not the God of those who are dead, but of those who are living."

³³ On hearing this, the crowds were astounded at his teaching.

Look what Jesus did! He could have found texts to argue from, such as, *Your dead will live* (Isaiah 26:19) or *Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake* (Daniel 12:2). Instead, he chooses a text from the Torah.

If the I AM says, "*I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob*" then God has not lost the patriarchs. God's divine life ensures they are not lost. If I AM, they are.

Once again, Jesus is hearing Scripture in light of relationship with God. This is not a conclusion you can deduce from logic. It's a relational hermeneutic—something we know in relationship to God, because we're living in God's story.

We must hear Scripture out of relationship with God, because Scripture is a revelation of God. If we don't, we've missed the point: *knowing neither the Scriptures nor the power of God* (verse 29). Scripture leads us to live in God's story.

That's why Scripture is life-giving: it leads us into relationship with God, participating in his eternal life.

Which law is foundational? (22:34-40)

This test was designed to trap Jesus into sidelining the Law or choosing something minor. He doesn't fall for it. Most of his listeners would have agreed with his response (as in Luke 10:26-27).

Matthew 22:34-40

³⁴ When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they were gathered together for the same purpose. ³⁵ One of this group, a Law-expert, pressured him by asking, ³⁶ "Teacher, which is the great command in the Law?"

³⁷ Jesus replied, "'Love the Lord your God with your whole being, your whole life, your whole thinking.' [Deuteronomy 6:4]

³⁸ “This is the great and leading command. ³⁹ The second is similar:
‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ [Leviticus 19:18]

⁴⁰ “On these two commands hang the whole Law. And the Prophets.”

Deuteronomy 6:4 is the *Shema*. Observant Jews repeat this every day, promising to hear God's command that they love him. Loving God is not a feeling or an ideal. When we honour God, God's character reflected in us for God is love.

Loving God means loving what God loves. God loves people. We're formed in his image. When we recognize God's image in each other, we cannot harm each other. Loving people flows out of loving God.

Everything else—such as caring for the animals and the earth itself—comes out of loving God and loving people. The whole realm is God's kingdom, so we all live well when we love God, and care for each other.

Greater than David? (22:41-46)

Their attempts to undermine Jesus' authority have failed. The king now poses a question for them to consider. It's about the authority of the Christ:

Matthew 22:41-46

⁴¹ While the Pharisees were gathered, Jesus put a question to them.

⁴² “What do you think about the Anointed? Whose son is he?”

They answered, “David's.”

⁴³ He replied, “Then how come David, in the Spirit, calls him, *lord*?

He says, ⁴⁴ ‘The Lord said to my lord, “Be seated on my right, until I place your enemies beneath your feet.”’ [Psalm 110:1]

⁴⁵ So, if David calls him *lord*, how could he be his son?”

⁴⁶ No one could answer him a word. That was the day they lost the nerve to question him anymore.

Jesus quotes an iconic promise that God would restore the kingship:

Psalm 110:1 (NIV)

Of David. A psalm.

¹ **The LORD** says to **my lord**: “Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”

Identify who this verse is about:

- The LORD (block letters) is YHWH, the one who reigns over heaven and earth.
- The *lord* is his anointed ruler, the one who represents God's reign on earth.
- But, who is *my*?

Again, Jesus interprets Scripture based on the relationships:

1. **David**: It's David's voice we're hearing because of God's commitment to David.
2. **The LORD**: YHWH is speaking through David prophetically (*in the Spirit*).
3. **David's Lord**: the Messiah receives the kingship without human intervention.

David was long dead, but his prophetic voice in the Psalm declared the restoration of the kingship for the people of God.

But why does David bow to this coming king as “My Lord”? Is he really greater than David himself, the fountainhead of all the kings? When God restores the kingship, is David giving allegiance to the coming Messiah? Psalm 110 reads as if something greater than David is here (compare 12:42).

Astoundingly, this Psalm gave the priesthood to David's son, as well as the kingship! The Messiah receives the authority of both the king and the temple:

Psalm 110:4 (NIV)

⁴ The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind:

“You are a **priest** forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”

Melchizedek was a king/priest in Canaan in Abraham's time (Genesis 14:18). This royal priesthood predates the Levitical one. Would God really take the priestly authority from the temple and give it to the king?

If the temple rejects the son, that might be the only resolution.

No wonder they lost the nerve to keep pursuing him with questions!

11.3 Conclusion

The conflict has begun. On one hand, we have the king to whom God has promised the kingship. On the other hand, we have the temple that used to be God's house but is now a den of robbers who will kill to keep their authority rather than recognize his.

That conflict dominates all the remaining chapters of Matthew's Gospel. In a sense, this is the history of the world that long ago rebelled against its heavenly sovereign. And now that conflict is playing out in Jerusalem, in the person of God's Anointed.

For more detail on Matthew 21–22, see:

- Mat 21 [The authority of stories \(Matthew 21\)](#)
- Mat 21 – 28 [Two powers \(Matthew 21–28\)](#)
- Mat 21:1-9 [The king who comes in peace \(Matthew 21:1-9\)](#)
- Mat 21:6-9 [Hosanna: the king who saves his realm \(Matthew 21:6-9\)](#)
- Mat 21:10-11 [Who's this? \(Matthew 21:10-11\)](#)
- Mat 21:12-13 [Why did Jesus overturn the temple? \(Matthew 21:12-13\)](#)
- Mat 21:14-16 [Defective and immature people in God's house? \(Matthew 21:14-16\)](#)
- Mat 21:16 [Jesus in the Psalms? \(Psalm 8\)](#)
- Mat 21:16 [How majestic! \(Psalm 8\)](#)
- Mat 21:17-22 [The end of unfruitfulness \(Matthew 21 :17-22\)](#)
- Mat 21:23-27 [Who's in charge? \(Matthew 21:23-27\)](#)
- Mat 21:28-32 [Who's the obedient son? \(Matthew 21:28-32\)](#)
- Mat 21:33-44 [Tenants in God's vineyard \(Matthew 21:33-44\)](#)
- Mat 21:40-46 [Is Israel God's kingdom today? \(Matthew 21:40-46\)](#)

- Mat 22:1-7 [The wedding of the king's son \(Matthew 22:1-7\)](#)
- Mat 22:8-14 [Called or chosen? \(Matthew 22:8-14\)](#)
- Mat 22:15-18 [Personal identity and social influence \(Matthew 22:15-18\)](#)
- Mat 22:21 [Should Christians pay tax?](#)
- Mat 22:23-33 [Can there be a resurrection when our relationships are so messy? \(Mt 22:23-33\)](#)
- Mat 22:31-32 [The God who raises the dead \(Matthew 22:31-32\)](#)
- Mat 22:34-40 [Loving God and people \(Matthew 22:34-40\)](#)
- Mat 22:41-46 [David's Lord \(Matthew 22:41-46\)](#)
- Mat 22:44 [Three decrees that gave Christ authority \(Psalm 110\)](#)

The links are from <https://allenbrowne.blog/scriptureindex/>

In preparation for next week, read Matthew 23–24. Please remember to read these chapters in the context of the conflict between temple and king.