



Pentecost 18 (Proper 21 A)
September 27, 2026

RCL: Ezekiel 18:1-4,25-32 , Psalm 25:1-8, Philippians 2:1-13, **Matthew 21:23-32**

Opening Prayer |

O God, you declare your almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity: Grant us the fullness of your grace, that we, running to obtain your promises, may become partakers of your heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Context |

Situated within the context of Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Matthew 21:23-32 is chiefly concerned with authority. Throughout Matthew 21, Jesus has been making his messianic identity and authority over the temple clear. As God's messiah, he has complete authority over the temple. The chapter begins with Jesus sending his disciples on a quest into the village. As soon as they enter the village, Jesus tells them that they will find a "donkey tied and a colt with her" (Matthew 21:2). This is the donkey that Jesus will mount and ride into Jerusalem to fulfil the prophecy from Zechariah 9:9. The prophecy foresees how the people will rejoice and shout as their king arrives victoriously riding on a donkey. Now Jesus enters Jerusalem on the donkey, and the people proclaim him as a king, fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy.

After entering Jerusalem, Jesus begins interfering with the regular business of the temple. He cleanses the temple, casts out the money changers, heals the blind and lame, and teaches in the temple.

Today's passage takes place as Jesus returns to the temple on the following day. Jesus's actions the previous day have upset the chief priests and the elders of the temple. The authorities want to know where Jesus received the authority to interfere with temple business.

At first glance, Jesus's responses to them seem evasive. He says, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism

of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin” (Matthew 21:24-25). Although this may seem like a cryptic response, Jesus is linking his actions and identity with that of John the Baptist. In the Bible, John is described as God’s agent in the spirit and power of Elijah. He is the one who prepares the way for Christ (Luke 1:13-17). Readers of Matthew know that John spoke of Jesus as greater than himself (Matthew 3:11). Being greater even than John establishes Jesus’s authority: He is the one with complete authority over heaven and earth.

Theological Reflection |

With Jesus’s authority now established by both his words and deeds, Jesus now speaks from that authority, teaching about the kingdom of God through a parable.

Jesus’s parable in this passage presents two sons. Both are asked to work in their father’s vineyard. The first son denies this invitation, then later changes his mind and goes into the vineyard after all. The second son accepts the invitation upfront, but does not do the work.

Jesus then identifies the chief priests and the elders with one of the sons from the story—the second son. Like the second son in the parable, they have said yes to serving in God’s vineyard, but have not actually carried out the work. Notice how Christ, the one with the highest authority in the temple, is asked in the temple by the religious leaders where he received his authority. Their assumed authority has blinded them to the One in their midst. They do not know that they are speaking with the one to whom the temple points.

“Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you,” Jesus tells them. This unlikely group to inherit the kingdom gains entrance by behaving as the first son does: repenting of the ways in which they are not following God. “For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him, and even after you saw it you did not change your minds and believe him.” By his authority, Jesus has used this parable to show that the kingdom of God is available to anyone who would repent and follow God.

Interestingly, the passage fails to mention a third possible reaction—a son who joyfully accepts his father’s call and does the work. This omission is intentional, as it points to the reality that Christ is the only perfect son of the Father.

By submission to the perfect son, the one with ultimate authority, the Church and her members will be transformed into children who can hear God’s call and obey. Getting to this point takes a lifetime of submitting authority and control to Christ. But we can arrive when we trust in Christ’s supreme authority.

The incarnation of God, Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Christ's authority can be trusted because it comes directly from God. Christ's self-emptying and obedience are the perfect expressions of true authority.

Later in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus will use his authority over heaven and earth to send his followers out into the vineyard. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20). Like the two sons in the parable, we are called into the vineyard. Christ's perfect authority grants us the grace to submit our will to his. Let us heed the call.

Reflection Questions |

- Submitting to authority can be challenging for many. Where might you need to practice submitting to authority in your life?
- How do you live out your trust in God's authority and control? In what ways do you struggle?
- Why do you think that the chief priests and the elders did not understand Jesus's identity and authority? What blinds us to the presence of Jesus in our minds today?
- Are there any parts of your life that you have not given over to God?
- When in your life have you heard God calling to you? Did you respond? Did you follow through?

Faith in Practice |

Experiences of misused authority can make it difficult for us to submit to God's perfect authority. Take sometime this week and reflect on what makes it difficult for you to submit your whole self to God. Invite God into those places in your times of prayer. You might picture your body as a temple and visualize God's presence filling those spaces. Or you might imagine those dark places or times in your life that you hold back as being with God's light and with love. Does it change anything within you?

***Jason Flack** is a transitional deacon in the Episcopal Diocese of Florida. He is finishing his final year of seminary at Nashotah House Theological Seminary in Wisconsin, where he lives with his wife and puppy. Upon graduation, he will be serving as Curate at Church of Our Saviour in Jacksonville, Florida. In his free time, Deacon Jason loves experimenting with specialty coffee and spending time with friends outside.*



Sermons that Work and Bible Studies that Work are a joint offering of Forward Movement and The Office of Communication at The Episcopal Church.

<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/bible-study/>

<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermons-that-work>