

Homiletics Analysis: Matthew 22

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

Matthew 22 is a sustained confrontation chapter, the second of three consecutive conflict chapters (21–23) in which Jesus faces a gauntlet of opponents in the temple courts during the final week before the crucifixion. The chapter opens with the Parable of the Wedding Banquet (vv. 1–14), then moves through three adversarial exchanges: the Pharisees and Herodians on the poll tax (vv. 15–22), the Sadducees on resurrection (vv. 23–33), and a lawyer on the greatest commandment (vv. 34–40). The chapter closes with Jesus seizing the initiative and silencing all opponents with a counter-question about the identity of the Messiah — whose son is He? (vv. 41–46).

The content movement is from parable to interrogation to counter-interrogation. Each section escalates the confrontation and refines the underlying issue: Who is Jesus, and on what authority does He act? The parable exposes Israel's rejection and the radical inclusion of Gentiles. The three challenges attempt to trap Jesus within legal, theological, and ethical categories that His opponents control. The final question inverts the power dynamic entirely — Jesus is not subject to their categories; He is the one who defines and fulfills them.

This Text — Intent

God is using this chapter to accomplish at least three inseparable things: (1) to expose the bankruptcy of religion that performs without repentance and questions without submission — the invitation has been refused, and the consequences are severe; (2) to demonstrate that Jesus operates with an authority that transcends and judges all human religious frameworks, whether political, theological, or ethical; and (3) to press the reader toward the one unavoidable question that all the opponents fled — *Who do you say the Son of David is?* The chapter is structured so that everyone who comes to Jesus with a question leaves silenced, and the reader is left holding the only question that matters. The intent is not information but confrontation-into-decision: the Messiah has been identified, the invitation has been issued, and refusal has consequences.

Subject Sentence: The rejected King extends and defends His kingdom invitation against all challengers.

Primary Claim: God is pressing every reader toward the one question that silences all religious evasion — not “Which rules matter most?” or “How do we trap the teacher?” but “Who is this Son of David?” — and making clear that the answer to that question determines everything, including whether one is wearing wedding clothes or will be cast into outer darkness.

Interpretive Evaluation

The Parable of the Wedding Banquet (vv. 1–14)

The most significant interpretive divergence here is between those who read vv. 1–14 as a unified parable with one main point (the rejection of Israel and the inclusion of the Gentiles) and those who treat v. 11–14 (the man without wedding clothes) as a separate sub-parable with its own distinct claim about false discipleship within the church. Dispensational interpreters often emphasize the Israel/Church distinction sharply here, reading vv. 1–7 as referring to AD 70 and vv. 8–14 as a transition to the church age. This is not without textual basis — the two movements are real — but the sub-parable of the wedding garment is not an appendix; it serves the same claim as the whole: the invitation demands a fitting response, and the grace that invites also the judgment that evaluates. The wedding garment likely represents righteousness (cf. Rev. 19:8; Isa. 61:10) — not earned but received and worn. A Wesleyan reading that emphasizes free human response to grace and the possibility of final rejection for the un-repentant is partially warranted here — the text does not present a mechanical election that bypasses the necessity of response. However, the Reformed reading is preferred: the parable does not undermine unconditional election; rather, it presents the reality that the outward call produces both genuine and spurious responses, and that God’s judgment is perfectly calibrated to distinguish between them. The man without wedding clothes is not one who tried and fell short; he is one who entered the kingdom’s visible community without transformation.

The Poll Tax Question (vv. 15–22)

The Pharisees-Herodian coalition asks a trap question: paying the tax endorses Roman occupation and compromises Jewish identity; refusing it is sedition. Jesus’ answer — “Render to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s” — is among the most interpreted sentences in Scripture. Anabaptist and certain radical Reformation traditions have read this as a sharp dualism between two spheres, with Christians having primary (exclusive?) loyalty to God’s kingdom. Lutheran two-kingdoms theology reads it as legitimating civil authority within its proper sphere while maintaining spiritual authority in another. Roman Catholic social teaching has read it as grounding a political theology of natural law. The Reformed reading best accounts for the full verse: the question is not merely *whether* to pay but *whose image is on the coin* — and implicitly, whose image is on the human being (cf. Gen. 1:26–27). Caesar has a legitimate claim on what bears his image; God has a total claim on what bears His. This is not a neat secular/sacred division — it is a reminder that the questioners themselves bear the image of God and owe Him everything.

Jesus does not resolve political tensions; He exposes the theological shallowness of the question by pointing to a prior and greater claim.

The Resurrection Question (vv. 23–33)

The Sadducees' question about levirate marriage and resurrection is a *reductio ad absurdum* designed to make resurrection look logically incoherent. Jesus' response addresses two errors simultaneously: (1) a misunderstanding of the nature of resurrection life (it is not a continuation of present social arrangements but a transformation), and (2) a failure to read their own Scripture (the present-tense "I AM" of Exodus 3:6 implies that the patriarchs are alive now — which only makes sense if there is a resurrection). No significant interpretive controversy divides orthodox traditions here, though the degree of discontinuity/continuity in resurrection bodies is debated (cf. 1 Cor. 15). The Reformed reading simply stays with the text: Jesus grounds resurrection hope not in philosophical argument but in God's character as revealed in the covenant name — He is the God of the living, which means the resurrection is guaranteed by His covenantal faithfulness, not merely asserted as a doctrinal position.

The Greatest Commandment (vv. 34–40)

All orthodox traditions agree that Jesus' summary — love God with all, love neighbor as self — is correct and comprehensive. The interpretive divergence concerns what the summary *does*. Some traditions (Wesleyan, liberal Protestant) treat vv. 37–40 as the core of Christian ethics, potentially replacing or superseding the rest of the law with a single love principle. Roman Catholic moral theology has historically read this as grounding natural law and the full moral law of the church. The Reformed reading is preferred: Jesus does not reduce the law to two commands as if the other 611 were optional; He identifies the *heart* of the law — the motivational architecture that makes all other commands coherent. All the Law and the Prophets "hang on" these two commands (v. 40) — they are the root from which the law grows, not a replacement for it. Love for God and neighbor is the character of the person in whom the Spirit is at work, not a standard achievable by moral effort. The Clowney anti-moralism principle applies here: to preach this passage as "love God and love people — that's what really matters" is to turn a word about the law's heart into a project for human performance.

The Messiah Question (vv. 41–46)

This passage has generated significant discussion about Psalm 110 and its Christological interpretation. The question "How can the Christ be David's son if David calls him Lord?" is resolved in the Reformed tradition by the doctrine of the two natures: Jesus is David's son according to the flesh (Rom. 1:3) and David's Lord according to His divine nature. Dispensational interpreters sometimes read Psalm 110 as pointing to a future millennial reign and read the present session of Christ at God's right hand as a holding pattern. The Reformed reading — that Christ is already and now exalted at the Father's right hand (Acts 2:34–36; Heb. 1:3), exercising His lordship and making His enemies His footstool through the gospel — is the better reading. Jesus does not merely pose a puzzle; He makes a claim

about His own identity that His opponents cannot answer. That they “dared not ask him any more questions” (v. 46) is the culminating judgment on human religious evasion.

Key Canonical Support

- **Psalm 110:1** — The divine oracle establishing the Messiah’s session at the right hand and His lordship over His enemies; Jesus’ direct exegetical warrant for the final counter-question.
 - **Isaiah 25:6–9** — The eschatological banquet the LORD prepares for all peoples on the mountain, swallowing up death forever; the background against which the Wedding Banquet parable makes its claim about inclusion and exclusion.
 - **Genesis 1:26–27** — The image of God in humanity; the implicit ground of Jesus’ answer on the poll tax — Caesar’s image is on the coin, but God’s image is on the person, and His claim is therefore total.
 - **Exodus 3:6, 14–15** — “I AM the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” — the present-tense covenant name that Jesus deploys as the scriptural proof of resurrection; God’s covenantal faithfulness guarantees resurrection life.
 - **Romans 1:3–4** — Paul’s summary of Christ as Son of David according to the flesh and Son of God according to the Spirit of holiness; the Christological resolution to the question Jesus poses in vv. 41–46.
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Aim: To demonstrate that Matthew 22 does not present a collection of useful teachings on church and state, commandments, and resurrection, but a single sustained confrontation that strips away every human religious evasion and lands every reader before the same unavoidable question: Who is this Son of David — and are you wearing His righteousness?

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
1–2	Jesus begins the parable: the kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son	Kingdom parable addressed to “them” — the religious leaders still present from ch. 21
3–4	The king sends servants to call the invited guests; they refuse to come; servants sent again with fuller invitation	Double refusal; “invited” implies prior covenant relationship — Israel
5–6	The invited guests ignore the call; some seize and kill the	Escalation from rejection to violence; the killing of

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	messengers	messengers echoes Israel's treatment of prophets
7	The king sends armies, destroys the murderers, and burns their city	Widely read as anticipating AD 70; judgment on those who refused the Son's wedding
8–10	The king declares the invited unworthy; servants go to the street corners and invite all they find — good and bad — filling the hall	Radical inclusion of the undeserving; anticipates Gentile mission; “good and bad” is significant — mixed community
11–12	The king enters, sees a man without a wedding garment, questions him; the man is speechless	The grace that invites also evaluates; the wedding garment is not optional; silence = no defense
13–14	The man is bound and cast into outer darkness; “many are called, few are chosen”	Judgment within the visible community; election language; chosen = those who respond with fitting transformation
15–17	Pharisees and Herodians form a coalition; ask trap question: is it lawful to pay the poll tax to Caesar?	Political trap; either answer appears to compromise Jesus
18–19	Jesus exposes their malice; asks for the coin; asks whose image and inscription it bears	Jesus names the trap (“malice/testing”); the question about the coin redirects everything
20–21	They answer “Caesar’s”; Jesus: “Render to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s”	The image principle: the coin bears Caesar’s image; humanity bears God’s image; God’s claim is therefore total
22	They marvel and leave	The trap has been completely inverted; no rebuttal possible
23–28	Sadducees (who deny resurrection) present a levirate marriage scenario: seven brothers, one wife —	Designed as a logical trap to make resurrection look absurd

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	whose wife in the resurrection?	
29	Jesus: “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God”	Double diagnosis: scriptural ignorance and theological poverty
30	In the resurrection people neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels	Resurrection is transformation, not mere continuation
31–32	Scripture proof: “I AM the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” — God is not the God of the dead but of the living	Present-tense covenant name implies the patriarchs are alive; resurrection secured by God’s covenantal character
33	The crowds are astonished at His teaching	Repeated crowd response pattern in Matthew; astonishment = authority recognized
34–36	Pharisees regroup; a lawyer asks which commandment is greatest — a test	The third trap; moves to ethical/legal territory
37–38	Jesus: “Love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, and mind — this is the greatest and first commandment”	Deuteronomy 6:5 — the Shema; total, integrated love of God
39–40	“And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. On these two all the Law and Prophets hang”	Leviticus 19:18; the law’s summary, not its replacement; “hang” = all derive from and cohere in these
41–42	Jesus asks the Pharisees: “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?”	The counter-question; Jesus now controls the interrogation
43–45	Their answer: “David’s son.” Jesus quotes Psalm 110:1 — David calls him Lord; “how then is he his son?”	Two natures implied: David’s physical descendant and David’s divine Lord

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
46	No one could answer Him; from that day no one dared question Him	Complete silencing; the question about Jesus’ identity stands unanswered by opponents, demanding the reader’s answer

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	1–14	The Parable of the Wedding Banquet: Invitation Refused, Invitation Extended, Invitation Evaluated
2	15–22	The Poll Tax Question: Whose Image?
3	23–33	The Resurrection Question: Whose Power?
4	34–40	The Greatest Commandment: Whose Heart?
5	41–46	The Messiah Question: Whose Son?

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: The rejected King extends and defends His kingdom invitation against all challengers.

Primary Claim: God is pressing every reader toward the one question that silences all religious evasion — not “Which rules matter most?” or “How do we trap the teacher?” but “Who is this Son of David?” — and making clear that the answer to that question determines everything, including whether one is wearing wedding clothes or will be cast into outer darkness.

Applications (Five)

1. Examine whether your religious engagement is designed to control Jesus or submit to Him. (*Mind/belief*)

Every challenger in Matthew 22 comes to Jesus with a question, and every question is designed not to learn but to win — to expose a flaw, to catch Him in a political trap, to make Him look foolish. This is the posture of religious sophistication without submission. The warning of this chapter is that it is entirely possible to ask sophisticated theological and ethical questions while being fundamentally opposed to the King. Ask yourself: when you bring your objections, your doubts, your questions to Jesus, are you genuinely open to being answered — or are you testing Him to see if He passes your examination? The chapter ends with everyone silenced. The one who comes to Jesus on Jesus' terms finds wisdom; the one who comes to interrogate finds that the interrogation turns around.

2. Let the love-summary of vv. 37–40 diagnose the actual condition of your heart rather than reassure you about your religious performance. (*Affections/worship*)

“Love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, and mind” is among the most familiar and least felt sentences in the New Testament. Familiarity has immunized most churchgoers against its force. This command does not describe a level of devotion to aim for — it describes the totality of what God deserves and what the human heart, in its natural condition, fails to render. The proper response to vv. 37–40 is not “yes, I agree that love is central” but a recognition of how far short we fall and how desperately we need the one who loved God with all His heart in our place. Let this summary function as diagnosis before it functions as aspiration — and let the diagnosis drive you to the Mediator who fulfilled it perfectly.

3. Stop treating “render to Caesar” as permission for secular compartmentalization; let it press you toward total consecration. (*Mind/belief*)

The popular reading of v. 21 treats it as a tidy two-sphere settlement: here is your civic life (Caesar's domain) and here is your spiritual life (God's domain). But the implicit logic of Jesus' answer moves in exactly the opposite direction. If the coin belongs to Caesar because it bears Caesar's image, then the person — who bears God's image — belongs to God entirely and without reserve. There is no secular compartment in a human life made in the image of God. Every vocation, every dollar, every relationship, every vote, every ambition is in the domain of “what belongs to God.” This is not a burden but a liberation — it means there is nothing in your life that is too small or too ordinary for the kingdom's logic to reach.

4. Allow the wedding garment warning (vv. 11–14) to provoke genuine self-examination about the difference between belonging to the visible church and wearing the righteousness of Christ. (*Will/behavior*)

The man without wedding clothes is inside the banquet hall — he made it through the door — and yet he is cast out. He represents the person who occupies the visible Christian community without the interior transformation that belongs to it. The wedding garment is not self-manufactured righteousness; it is the righteousness of Christ received by faith and expressed in a life that has genuinely been turned. The practical question this raises is not “am I a good enough Christian?” but “is there evidence that I have actually received what

the King is offering, or have I simply shown up?” Self-examination is not the same as self-salvation — but the text demands it. Examine your life: not for performance metrics, but for the presence of a heart that has been captured by this King.

5. Sit with the unanswered question of v. 42 — “What do you think about the Christ?” — and refuse to move until you have answered it from the whole of this chapter.

(Affections/worship)

Jesus’ counter-question is not a clever rhetorical device to silence His opponents. It is the question the entire chapter has been building toward, and it is addressed to every reader. The invitation in vv. 1–14 is extended in the name of the King’s Son — the banquet is for His wedding. The poll tax answer points to One whose claim is total. The resurrection argument grounds hope in God’s covenant faithfulness. The love-summary names the law that only Christ fulfilled. And the Messiah-question reveals that He is not merely a great teacher or a Davidic hero but David’s Lord — the one at the Father’s right hand. What do you think about the Christ? That question is not left open for academic discussion. It demands a posture — a bowing of the knee or a walking away. The chapter ends with silence from those who refused to answer. Do not be among them.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Matthew 22 teaches that Jesus Christ is not a figure within human religious and political categories but the one before whom all categories are exposed and judged. He is simultaneously the King’s Son whose wedding is being held, the one who bears total claim on image-bearing humanity, the one who grounds resurrection in the covenantal character of God, the one who summarizes the entire moral law, and the one who is David’s Lord rather than merely David’s son. The chapter dismantles the assumption that theological sophistication, political realism, or ethical seriousness can substitute for submission to the Son. It teaches that God’s grace in the gospel invitation is genuine and wide — extending to those in the byways who were never “invited” by prior covenant relationship — but that the grace that invites also the grace that evaluates, and that entering the kingdom’s visible community without the righteousness of Christ is not safety but a different kind of peril.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: This chapter is exegetically foundational for Reformed understandings of election (“many are called, few are chosen,” v. 14), the two natures of Christ (vv. 41–46; Christ is both David’s son and David’s Lord), and the third use of the law (the love-summary reveals the law’s heart, exposing sin’s depth and driving the believer toward Christ rather than toward self-improvement). The wedding garment imagery grounds the Reformed insistence that justification involves the imputation of

Christ's righteousness — the garment is not woven by the banquet guest but provided for and received from the King. The "render to Caesar" passage does not teach a secular/sacred split but confirms the total lordship of God over image-bearing humanity, which is the foundation for Reformed engagement in culture and vocation. The final Christological question (whose son? whose Lord?) is the question behind every other question in Reformed theology: all of it — election, covenant, justification, sanctification, eschatology — depends on who Jesus actually is, and Matthew 22 presses that question with inescapable force.

Main Takeaway

Every challenge in this chapter — the political trap, the resurrection puzzle, the ethical test — is a form of the same evasion: using religious questions to avoid the religious question. Jesus answers them all and then turns the whole chapter toward the one question that has no evasion available: *Who is this Son of David?* He is the one whose wedding banquet is open to all, whose claim on you is total because you bear His Father's image, whose resurrection power is guaranteed by the same covenant faithfulness that kept Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — and He is David's Lord, seated at the right hand until every enemy is made His footstool. You are either wearing His righteousness at His table, or you are not. That is the only question this chapter leaves standing.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Preaching Matthew 22 as a collection of five disconnected teachings.** The most common homiletical failure with this chapter is treating it as an anthology — a useful passage on church-and-state, followed by a useful passage on resurrection, followed by a useful passage on love, etc. The chapter has a single dramatic architecture: every exchange is a challenge to Jesus' authority, every exchange ends with His challengers silenced, and the chapter ends with the one question that cannot be evaded. To preach it as a topic-by-topic survey is to miss the cumulative rhetorical effect Matthew has constructed and to dissolve the Primary Claim into a series of unrelated sub-points.
- **Reducing "render to Caesar" to a civic theology.** Almost every political sermon from the right or left reaches for v. 21 as a proof text for whatever relationship between church and state the preacher wishes to endorse. This is a misuse of the passage. Jesus is not resolving political theory — He is exposing the questioners' theological shallowness by pointing to the image of God in humanity, which places every person entirely within the domain of God's claim. To preach v. 21 as settling the question of Christian political engagement is to ignore the verse's own internal logic.

- **Preaching vv. 37–40 as the simple heart of Christianity without the diagnostic force.** “Love God and love people” has become a cultural motto — often deployed to suggest that doctrine, church discipline, and theological precision are secondary concerns that get in the way of the “real thing.” But Jesus is not relaxing the law’s demands; He is intensifying them by revealing their root. To preach this passage without making clear that no one renders this love naturally or sufficiently — and that Christ alone fulfilled it — is to turn a word about the law’s depth into a project for human effort, which is precisely the moralistic error this framework is designed to prevent.
- **Ignoring the man without wedding clothes (vv. 11–14) or treating him as theologically awkward.** Preachers who are concerned not to appear works-oriented sometimes rush past the wedding garment scene because it seems to introduce a performance criterion into grace. This is a false concern. The garment is not earned — it is the righteousness of Christ received by faith and evidenced in transformation. To skip this section is to leave the congregation with an incomplete gospel: grace that invites without a grace that transforms is not the gospel of Matthew 22. The warning is real and it belongs in the exposition.
- **Treating vv. 41–46 as merely a clever rhetorical move rather than the Christological climax of the chapter.** The question about David’s son is not a debate-winner’s flourish. It is the question on which the entire chapter turns — and, in Matthew’s structure, the question that bridges the confrontation material of chapters 21–22 with the woes of chapter 23 and the Olivet Discourse of chapters 24–25. To preach it as “Jesus silenced them — good for him” without pressing the question to the congregation (“and what do *you* think about the Christ?”) is to perform the same evasion as the Pharisees: acknowledging the question intellectually while refusing to let it land personally.
- **Using “many are called, few are chosen” (v. 14) to preach a passive or fatalistic doctrine of election without the active urgency of the invitation.** The sentence concludes a parable about an invitation that was refused — it is a warning, not a comfort for the indifferent. The Reformed doctrine of election does not produce passivity in the hearer; it produces urgency in the preacher (the call is real; respond now) and assurance in the believer (God’s purpose will not fail). To preach v. 14 in a way that reduces evangelistic urgency or encourages the listener to assume they are among the chosen without self-examination is to invert the sentence’s function in the text.