

**South Moreton Presbytery**  
**Preaching Background Notes**

**GOSPEL LECTIONARY READINGS FOR OCTOBER**

Oct 4	2
Matt 21:33-46 – Parable of the Wicked Tenants The Cornerstone	
For the Preacher	3
Oct 11	5
Matt 22:1-14 – Parable of the Wedding Banquet	
For the Preacher	7
Oct 18	9
Matt 22:15-22 – Question of Paying Taxes	
For the Preacher	10
Oct 25	11
Matt 22:34-46 – The Greatest Commandment What do you think of the Messiah? Whose Son?	
For the Preacher	13

**PENTECOST 18 – 4<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 2020**  
**MATT 21:33-46 – PARABLE OF THE WICKED TENANTS**  
**AND THE CORNERSTONE**

This parable is the centrepiece of Jesus' three-part response to the leaders questioning his authority. Morris sets the cultural background for the story:

Jesus introduces this parable with an invitation to hear it, and proceeds to refer to *a householder who planted a vineyard*. From the subsequent description and happenings it is clear that this was an investment, not a project in which the man planned to take a personal part. Vineyards were an important feature of first-century Palestinian life; Jesus speaks of a process that would have been well known to his audience. This was a new vineyard, set up on new land. Being new, it involved some uncertainty as to how well it would work out, but the householder did all that he should have done to ensure a good vineyard. He fenced it off, which would protect it from wild animals and the like. He *dug a winepress*. This meant two basins cut out of rock, or if out of soil, lined with rocks and sealed with plaster; one would have been lower than the other, and they would have been connected by a channel. The grapes were thrown into the upper basin and trodden under foot, with the result that the juice flowed into the lower where it began the process of fermentation. He also *built a tower*, which would enable a watchman to survey the vineyard and the surrounding terrain so that he could take action against marauders, human or animal. Then he let the vineyard out to *vine growers*. That he *went abroad* does not necessarily mean that he went to another country (though that is not unlikely), but it certainly indicates that he was at quite a distance from his new investment.

... It was important that the owner make clear his position as owner by sending to receive the agreed amounts at the stated times. People could establish title to a vineyard if they could show that they had had undisputed possession of it for three years (Mishnah, *B. Bat.* 3:1). The owner was establishing his position by collecting his rent, even if it was no more than a nominal amount, during the years that the vineyard was being established. Indeed, the tenants might even claim that on balance he owed them money for such items as the purchase of stakes. The amount to be collected by the owner would not have been much, but it was important that it be collected, for unless this was done the people who were occupying the land and working it would be establishing a claim of their own to the land. So at *the time of fruit bearing* he *sent slaves to receive his produce*, the agreed share of what the vineyard had produced.<sup>1</sup>

It seemed as though the tenants had thought they would make the vineyard their own, and so they paid no rent, and mistreated those sent by the owner to collect it. Finally, the owner sent his own son thinking that he would not be treated so badly. Instead the tenants killed the son. They may have believed that the owner was now dead and so by killing the son they could take possession of the vineyard. Another possibility was that they thought that if they killed the son the owner would give up hope of reclaiming his vineyard.

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<sup>1</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 539–545.

Jesus asks the listeners to decide what the owner will do. They reply that he will deal with the tenants and allow new tenants to look after the vineyard.

Jesus now uses a quote from Psalm 118:22-23 to indicate the importance of the cornerstone. While knowledge of building in Jesus' day is limited it seems that the cornerstone could either be the foundation stone laid at the corner of two walls, thus setting the basis for the rest of the house. Alternatively, it could have been laid at the top of the walls, thus marking the completion of the builder's work. The former is more likely.

The Psalm speaks of an unexpected revolution: a stone that the builders thought they could not use—it was unsuitable and they rejected it—in due course became the most important stone in the building. ... We have moved now from the astonishing reversal to the truth that God is working his purpose out through it all. That it *is astonishing* to human eyes emphasizes the truth that created beings cannot understand the way the Creator works.<sup>2</sup>

There could be a wordplay on the Hebrew words for “stone” and “son” which sound similar. Thus the stone that is rejected causes the mind to think of the son who is rejected but then exalted above all others.

The context of the parable is the question of Jesus by the elders as to his authority (21:23). Jesus demonstrates what it is like for God, having already had his servants the prophets rejected, sending his only son. By what authority does Jesus operate? Despite his rejection which will be demonstrated in the next few days, Jesus comes with the full authority of the owner of the vineyard, God.

The religious leaders see that Jesus has spoken the parable against them, with them abusing the authority they had working in the workplace of God. Those who do not produce the fruit, are shocked by the injustice and evil of the tenants of Jesus' parable, however now the tables are turned on them.

Hare adds this warning:

[This parable] ... must be treated with great care by Christians. What began as a prophetic critique designed not to damn Israel but to provoke repentance became in the course of Christian history an anti-Judaism which was sinfully perverted into anti-Semitism. Jews were reviled with the hated nickname “Christ killers.”<sup>3</sup>

### **For the Preacher**

Hare suggests two ways of interpreting the parable:

The first is to hear it as a piece of prophetic invective addressed by a Jew to fellow Jews. If we feel that Matthew has himself abandoned all hope of Israel's repentance, we must hold his pessimism in check by referring to Paul's optimism

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<sup>2</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 539–545.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew* (Louisville: John Knox, 1993), 250.

in Rom 11:25-36. The second approach is to focus attention not so much on what the passage has to say explicitly about Jewish leaders as what it implies about Christians. The 'others' to whom the vineyard is given over in verse 41 are also accountable to the owner. They too are charged with the heavy responsibility of producing the fruits of the kingdom (v. 43). The punishment of others is cause not for rejoicing but for fear (see Rom. 11:20-21).<sup>4</sup>

Who are we in the parable? How could we faithfully work in God's vineyard? What does it mean for our lives? What is the fruit that God calls from people?

Soards et al write:<sup>5</sup>

From a human point of view we can expect God to respond in kind: to kill rebellious humanity and to make a new start. Yet listen to the strange words of Jesus, 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes.' God does not simply get reasonable revenge; God's ways are not our ways. Humans may reject God's son, even killing him, but God is not bound by human actions. Indeed, God took the very one rejected by humankind and exalted him in a most amazing way. Humans may block, but God will parry and even advance his causes through the inadmissible human action. As God judges the rejection of the son unacceptable, God acts both to vindicate the son and to extend the riches of his provisions to those who will cooperate with God's purposes. ... Thinking first about the human condition or ourselves may cause us to be blind to the gospel in this text, but thinking first and foremost about God will give us an entrée into the lesson that yields abundant teaching about God and, in turn, about what it means to be human in relation to the divine.

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<sup>4</sup> Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew* (Louisville: John Knox, 1993), 250-251.

<sup>5</sup> Marion Soards, Thomas Dozeman, Kendall McCabe, *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary Year A After Pentecost 2* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992), 73.

## **PENTECOST 19 – MATT 22:1-14 – THE WEDDING BANQUET**

An equivalent parable appears in *Luke* however there are differences. France outlines the comparison:

There is a partial parallel to this parable in Luke 14:16–24, but the audience there is more general (fellow-guests at a dinner). There is the same essential story-line of a lavish feast to which those previously invited refuse to come when summoned, to be replaced by a motley collection of people from the streets, and the conclusion in Luke 14:24 similarly focuses on the exclusion of those previously invited. But the story is very differently told: Luke has no king or wedding, focuses at some length on the reasons for non-attendance to which Matthew alludes only briefly in v. 5, and has two waves of replacement guests brought in (perhaps to represent Jews and Gentiles). He has nothing about the ill-treatment of the (single) messenger, and his host takes no punitive action other than excluding the original invitees from the feast. And Luke's parable stops short when the hall is full; there is no second scene with the expulsion of one of the new invitees. Luke's story is thus essentially simpler than Matthew's, but stylistically more expansive. The situation is similar to what we will find with the parable of the talents in 25:14–30: a basically similar story-line but in a different setting in Luke, and so differently constructed that it seems more economical to assume that Jesus told two related but separate parables on different occasions than to explain the one as an extraordinarily radical and complicated editorial revision of the other. ...it is more responsible to read Matthew's story on its own terms, and in its own literary context, than to look for its meaning primarily in terms of how it differs from Luke's.<sup>6</sup>

The king's slaves, who normally would not be people who would be shunned by the potential guests, are sent to those already invited to tell them that the time for the banquet had come. Scholars see this privileged group as perhaps the chief priests and Pharisees who would be expected to be at the feast.

It was probably normal custom to send out two invitations, the second being much closer to the time of the banquet. However, in Jesus' shocking parable the invitees refuse to attend.

So, like the prophets of old, the messengers from the king are again refused and even mistreated and killed. It appears from the poor and vague excuses given that they simply did not care to attend the celebration.

The style of the language used here is reminiscent of Old Testament passages dealing with judgment.

In verse 7 the story now seems to be going far beyond a realistic situation. France writes:

Most interpreters agree that this is a specific allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, when large parts of the city were burned by the conquering

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<sup>6</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 821–828.

Romans (Josephus, *War* 6.353–355, 363–364, 406–408). It is usually assumed that this must be a reflection by Matthew writing after the event. But it would not have been difficult for a politically astute observer in the sixties to see what was likely to happen, so that this is not necessarily an argument for a post-70 date for the gospel ... The phrase “their city” thus depicts the devastating result of the failure of Jerusalem’s current leadership; Jerusalem is now no longer God’s city, but “theirs,” and the community as a whole is implicated in their rebellion and its punishment, as had so often happened in the past when Israel’s sins had led to the city’s destruction by invading armies.

Notice in verse 10 the invitees from the streets are both good and bad. These would relate to those whom the Jewish rulers would consider as evil and unacceptable.

The nature of wedding customs at the time of Jesus in Palestine is largely unknown. It appears from this story that the host has given garments to those invited off the streets. (See Isa 61:10; Ezek 16:10). We are not told why one particular guest refused the grace of the king. It is apparently not important for the story.

France argues:

The symbolism is of someone who presumes on the free offer of salvation by assuming that therefore there are no obligations attached, someone whose life belies their profession: faith without works. Entry to the kingdom of heaven may be free, but to continue in it carries conditions. Even though this man belongs to the new group of invitees, he is one who produces no fruit, and so is no less liable to forfeit his new-found privilege than those who were excluded before him. As the parable of the sower has reminded us, there is many a slip between initial response to the word of God and ultimate fruitfulness.<sup>7</sup>

France continues:

[Verse 14] sums up the message of this parable, and indeed also of the two which precede it. It picks up the language of the parable: the first group of guests had all been “invited” (vv. 3, 4, 8), but that did not mean that they would enjoy the feast. So in their place others have been “invited” (v. 9), but now even one of them has failed to make the grade. Who then are the “chosen”? The term will recur in 24:22, 24 to designate God’s true people, threatened but protected through the time of trial, and in 24:31 for those summoned from all over the world to make up the new people of God after the failure of the old régime. It is a term with strongly ideological overtones deriving from the OT concept of Israel as God’s chosen people. But its use here and in 24:31 introduces a radically new element to that ideological concept: the true “chosen people” is not automatically identified with those who belong to the Israelite community, not even those who are its official leaders: these are the invited, but not necessarily the chosen. The “many” and the “few” speak of a weeding process, whereby many of those invited will not make it to the feast. The chosen are the new tenants who will produce the fruit, who, as we have seen in the last parable, may be Jewish or Gentile; their chosenness

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<sup>7</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 821–828.

does not depend on their racial origin but on their response to God's summons and their readiness to give God his due.<sup>8</sup>

The parable shares similarities with the previous two in *Matthew*. In each case people are given the opportunity to share in the privileges of God's Reign, however they don't take this up, instead perform evil deeds, which then allow a surprising group of people to be invited to undertake the tasks of God's Reign. Such parables raise the question of how much they are allegories. For example, some scholars see a historical progression from, say, the parable of the wicked tenants (21:33-41) to the parable of the wedding banquet.

In the first, so they argue, the son of the owner represents Jesus who is ultimately rejected and killed and so the earlier messengers of the owner would represent the earlier prophets. Following on from this, in the parable of the wedding banquet, the people receiving the original invitation were the Jews, and those finally invited represent the Christians who are invited in by grace. This line of interpretation then would have more meaning for Matthew's later community, than for the Jewish leaders to whom Jesus originally addressed the parable.

France, I believe, is correct in saying:

... certain features of the story may suggest caution in accepting this whole-sale allegorical reading. The king's son, whose wedding is mentioned in v. 2 as the setting for the story, plays no further part in it; the double invitation of vv. 3–4 fits the cultural pattern of the time (see below) and requires no allegorical explanation; the replacement guests of vv. 8–10 are apparently recruited from the king's own city, and are not described as foreigners. It may therefore be more prudent to read this parable more generally as a warning, as in the preceding two parables, that those who refuse God's call face ultimate exclusion and replacement, and to leave the specific application to the setting within which the story is read. Its message to the original hearers is not necessarily the same as that discerned by a later Christian reader.<sup>9</sup>

The shocking warning for all, is that not all who arrive at the feast will be allowed to stay.

### **For the Preacher**

Are there times where we shun the joy of God's Reign for the sake of our busyness? Do we consider too much our everyday affairs and ignore the invitation to take part in the banquet? Despite the fact that we often mouth the Lord's Prayer how much do we want God's Reign to come?

How are we meant to respond to God's invitation? What do the right wedding clothes mean for us? The person invited to the wedding would not have been well-dressed

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<sup>8</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 821–828.

<sup>9</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007), 821–828.

when he was invited, but would have been offered good clothes for the celebration. He seemed to be refusing to accept the grace offered to him. Can we refuse God's grace?

The preacher may choose to explore the difficulties we may have of accepting the concept of grace.

**PENTECOST 20 - 18<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 2020**  
**MATT 22:15-22 – QUESTION OF PAYING TAXES**

In this passage we find that the Pharisees have been seeking a way to trap Jesus. Their point of focus appears here to be what Jesus **says**, rather than how he **acts**. They do not approach Jesus but send their disciples along to do the dirty work. Here they are joined by another mysterious group called the Herodians. Nothing is known about this group unless something can be deduced from their name. The suggestion is that they have supported the Herodian dynasty, were therefore probably pro-Roman, and perhaps were interested in any political comments from Jesus' teaching.

The party approaches Jesus with smooth talk, expressing how they see Jesus as someone who is able to speak truth regardless of what people may think of him, and that he is no respecter of people's status.

In verse 17 their question to Jesus could be either "Is it lawful to ..." or "Is it proper to ...". The first question may have been prompted by a concern whether it was within their Law for Jews to pay taxes to Gentiles (see Deut 17:15). More likely is the nuance of the question of "is it proper to pay taxes". No-one liked paying taxes to a foreign power. If it were argued that the tax was important for good government, many would argue that they didn't want to be ruled by the Gentile Romans anyway. If Jesus were to reply in the negative there would be grounds for charging Jesus with political unrest, something the questioners were keen to use as a lever to get rid of Jesus.

The question is a double-edged sword. If Jesus answers "yes" the Herodians would be happy but many of the Pharisees wouldn't. If he answers "no" then the situation would be reversed. Jesus sees through the hypocrisy of their flattery and turns the question back to them, a device which Jesus often uses in *Matthew*. This encourages the questioners to consider their own position more deeply.

Now having asked to see the Roman coin used to pay the tax (and notice they had to go and get one) Jesus replies with directive: "pay what is owing"<sup>10</sup> to Caesar. Probably the coin had on one side the head of the Emperor and on the other an inscription such as "Tiberius Caesar, Son of the Divine Augustus, Pontifex Maximus", in other words, high priest of the Roman religion.<sup>11</sup>

Whatever is due to the emperor must be paid. But Jesus did not say only that. He reminded his hearers that in addition to their obligations to the state they had obligations to God, and those, too, must be rendered. We are at one and the same time citizens of some earthly state and citizens of heaven; the obligations of neither may be neglected. And as we reflect on what Jesus said, we are made to realize that there are limitations to *the things that are Caesar's*. People must never allow their obligations to the civil state to encroach on their payment of *the things that are God's*. For serious-minded people this is an important limitation on the rights of the state. The most significant part of life is that which belongs to God; rendering to God what is God's is accordingly the most important duty we have.

<sup>10</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 554–558.

<sup>11</sup> Douglas R.A. Hare, *Matthew* (Louisville: John Knox, 1993), 253-254.

We should be clear, too, that Jesus is not saying that we can divide life into separate compartments so that God has nothing to do with that section which belongs to Caesar. The obligation to God covers all of life; we must serve Caesar in a way that is honoring to God.<sup>12</sup>

### **For the Preacher**

Jesus' answer to the question of paying taxes of course begs the question: "what is owing to "Caesar" (or the Government) and what is owing to God?" The preacher may choose to explore these questions and how the second part of the command may influence the first.

The second part of Jesus' command is far more demanding than the first part. What is owing to God asks for our whole life and will.

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<sup>12</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 554–558.

**25<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 2020 – PENTECOST 21**  
**MATT 22:34-46 – THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT**  
**WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE MESSIAH?**

This passage is in the middle of a questioning time with the religious leaders with the focus being on trying to trap Jesus. Jesus will finish off this series with a question of his own to the questioners. Now we begin with Pharisees asking: What is the greatest commandment?

Jesus' reply was love: love for God and love for our neighbour.

Nolland writes:

... the command to love God, with support from the command to love one's neighbour, goes to the heart of the Law. Instead of being shown up as inadequate, Jesus with his answer illuminates both the primary thrust of the Law and the challenge of his own proclamation of the kingdom. As in 22:15–22, he freshly asserts God's claim on the whole person. A proper response to the call to the wedding banquet will involve love of God and love of neighbour.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps the order of the Ten Commandments reflects this understanding of grouping into loving God, and loving neighbour. These commandments are expressed in Lev 19:18, 34 and in Deut 6:5; 11:1 and have a verbal link with the words "you [singular] shall love". Certainly Jesus' summary is in keeping with Jewish interpretive practice. Jesus' answer makes it clear that he is within the realm of mainstream Judaism and not some heretical fringe sect.

"Your heart" denotes a response to God from the innermost personal center of one's being; "your life" ("soul") conjures up the role of the life force that energises us; ... "your mind" signals the inclusion of the thinking and planning processes. The challenge is to a comprehensive engagement with God with the total capacity of all of one's faculties'. The omission of ... 'strength'... from the list tends to let the focus on love for God fall on the inner dispositions and thoughts, leaving the sphere of energetic physical action to love of neighbour.<sup>14</sup>

Jesus subsumes the whole Law and the prophets into these commandments, and at the same time issues his understanding of life in the Reign of God.

In verses 41-46 we have Jesus asking them his own question which now stumps them.

... other features of Jesus' ministry and sporadic suggestions by people in Matthew's story that he be identified as the messiah (often with 'Son of David' language) provide a link between the present discussion and the coming of the

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<sup>13</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 907–918.

<sup>14</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 907–918.

kingdom that Jesus had been proclaiming. In Mt. 26:64, where self-reference is clearly implied, Matthew does allude to Ps. 110:1.<sup>15</sup>

The reduction of the Law to a few commandments was of interest to rabbis.<sup>16</sup> Jesus' response would have met with approval by the Pharisees, however they still wanted to trap him.

Jesus' second command is certainly in keeping with his teaching (see especially the Sermon on the Mount and especially "The Golden Rule" in 7:12).

Jesus now takes the initiative and asks his own question.

This question is not one designed for its cleverness but one that has to do with Jesus' own identity and calling. The Pharisees are unable to draw the required conclusion, just as they have been earlier unable to accept Jesus, his message, or his personal claims. Whereas he has passed the tests they put to him, they fail in the test he puts to them.<sup>17</sup>

Ps 110:1, which is cited in v. 44, became a particularly important OT text in the early church. It generally is used in referring to the resurrection/ascension and heavenly rule of Christ (cf. 26:64; Acts 2:34–35; 1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12–13). Here is the only time, however that the focus is on the introduction: "the Lord said to my lord."<sup>18</sup>

It was common knowledge that the promised Messiah (ὁ Χριστός, "the Christ," i.e., "the anointed One") was to be of the lineage of David (cf. John 7:42; for OT background, see 2 Sam 7:12–13; Ps 89:4; Jer 23:5; cf. *Ps. Sol* 17:21). Conversely, throughout the Gospel the references to Jesus as the Son of David (e.g., 1:1, 20; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30–31; 21:9) amount to assertions of his messianic identity.<sup>19</sup>

Behind the two uses of "lord" (*kyrios*) here are two different Hebrew words in the Psalm. The first is the personal name "Yahweh," which was not spoken by the Jews. The second Hebrew word is the word for "my lord" and so the Psalm could be translated: "Yahweh [the Lord] said to my lord."

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<sup>15</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 907–918.

<sup>16</sup> R. Simlai [*b. Mak.* 24a; *Midr. Tanhuma B* on Judg §10 (16b)] refers to the reduction of the 613 commandments of Moses to 11 by David [Ps 15], 6 by Isaiah [Isa 33:15–16], 3 by Micah [Mic 6:8], 2 by Isaiah again [Isa 56:1], 1 by Amos [Amos 5:4], and 1 again by Habakkuk [Hab 2:4]; for specific reference to Lev 19:18 used similarly to the present passage, cf. *Sifra Lev.* 19:18 [Rabbi Akiba]; *Gen. Rab.* 24 [16b]; cf. too *m 'Abot* 1:2). (Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, vol. 33B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1995), 643–652.)

<sup>17</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, vol. 33B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1995), 643–652.

<sup>18</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, vol. 33B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1995), 643–652.

<sup>19</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, vol. 33B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1995), 643–652.

Hagner comments: “But it is astonishing that David should call his son ‘my lord’; by Jewish standards of familial respect, it is rather the son who might refer to his father as “my lord.”<sup>20</sup>

[In v. 45 the] question is repeated for emphasis. How can it be that David calls his son κύριος, “lord”? This question, which goes unanswered either by the Pharisees or by Jesus, must not be taken as an implicit denial that the Messiah is in fact the Son of David ..., an ascription that the evangelist repeatedly uses in referring to Jesus and that Jesus himself willingly accepts.... The point of the question addressed to the Pharisees is apparently to elevate the concept of Messiah from that of a special human being to one who uniquely manifests the presence of God—and thus one whom David has also to address as his lord. This pericope serves thus in one sense as a kind of justification for the extravagant claims made by Jesus, or concerning him, earlier in the Gospel (e.g., 10:32–33, 40; 11:27; 14:33; 16:16). As in Peter’s confession, so here, the Christ, the Son of David, is to be recognized as uniquely “the Son of the living God”.... He is the living Lord of the church ... who sits at God’s right hand. The Pharisees accordingly reject Jesus at their very great peril. They have rejected not merely a human messianic claimant but the unique emissary of God, whom even David had called “my lord.”... “lord,” in reference to Jesus here ... suggested to the evangelist and his community that Jesus “was somehow on a par with Yahweh of the Old Testament”<sup>21</sup>

“The process against Jesus, which comes to its culmination in chaps. 26–28, must therefore find some other basis before it can proceed.”<sup>22</sup>

### **For the Preacher**

The two love commandments belong together, covering the vertical (relationship with God) and the horizontal (relationship with others) dimensions. The first entails the second; the second presupposes and depends on the first. It is obvious, however, that the use of the verb ... [*agapēseis*], “you shall love,” does not mean the same thing in both places. In neither case is love construed as an emotion. Love for one’s neighbor means acting toward others with their good, their well-being, their fulfillment, as the primary motivation and goal of our deeds. Such love is constant and takes no regard of the perceived merit or worth of the other person. Love of God, on the other hand, is to be understood as a matter of reverence, commitment, and obedience. It is at once an acknowledgment of his identity as Creator and Redeemer and a reflection of that reality in the ordering of our lives. With this orientation toward God and others, the law and the prophets have reached their ultimate goal. Further concern with commandments, further elaboration of ethical stipulations—these all depend upon the real manifestation of the love commandments for their legitimacy.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Donald A. Hagner, [Matthew 14–28](#), vol. 33B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1995), 643–652.

<sup>21</sup> Donald A. Hagner, [Matthew 14–28](#), vol. 33B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1995), 643–652.

<sup>22</sup> Donald A. Hagner, [Matthew 14–28](#), vol. 33B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1995), 643–652.

<sup>23</sup> Donald A. Hagner, [Matthew 14–28](#), vol. 33B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1995), 643–652.

The Pharisees assumed they had sufficient knowledge concerning the promised Messiah. They saw no problem in the question Jesus put to them. The Messiah was to be a descendant of David. Yet they could not explain why David referred to his son as “my lord.” They had not confronted the mystery of a human being who was also the divine agent of God, the unique Son of God. It was because God uniquely manifested himself in his Messiah for the gracious fulfillment of his promises to Israel that David referred to his descendant as “my lord.” So too today repeated attempts are being made to explain Jesus in strictly human categories. Yet if we limit our understanding of Jesus to analogies that from the beginning rule out the supernatural and the divine, we will never arrive at an adequate view of Jesus. This is the very point the Gospel desires to press home to its readers. ... The burning question “Who do you say I am?” (16:15) has only one adequate answer.<sup>24</sup>

Soards et al suggest:<sup>25</sup>

A sermon could begin with the difficulty of Jesus’ question, asking ‘Could you answer Jesus’ question?’ Then, one might reflect upon the genuine advantage of Christian hindsight and, in turn, move to the Christological level of ‘the Christ who is more than expected.’ The final theme could be best developed by holding high the two key Matthean titles, Son of David and Son of God. Illustrations from incidents in Matthew’s account of Jesus’ ministry and also from the forthcoming Passion and Resurrection accounts would be an appropriate way to communicate the understanding of Jesus communicated in the Gospel and articulated in the passage.

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<sup>24</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, vol. 33B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1995), 643–652.

<sup>25</sup> Marion Soards, Thomas Dozeman, Kendall McCabe, *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary Year A After Pentecost 2* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992), 107.