

Sermons on Matthew
Concerning the Resurrection
Matthew 22:23-33

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999
pastorpaul@integrity.com
www.branchofhope.org
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Concerning the Resurrection
Matthew 22:23-33

— The same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him and asked Him, ⁻²⁴⁻ saying: “Teacher, Moses said that if a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up offspring for his brother. ⁻²⁵⁻ Now there were with us seven brothers. The first died after he had married, and having no offspring, left his wife to his brother. ⁻²⁶⁻ Likewise the second also, and the third, even to the seventh. ⁻²⁷⁻ Last of all the woman died also. ⁻²⁸⁻ Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her.” ⁻²⁹⁻ Jesus answered and said to them, “You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. ⁻³⁰⁻ For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven. ⁻³¹⁻ But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, ⁻³²⁻ *‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’*? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” ⁻³³⁻ And when the multitudes heard *this*, they were astonished at His teaching (Matthew 22:23-33).

Introduction

Jesus the Apologist

It’s been said the three offices of Christ are Prophet, Priest and King and I certainly don’t take exception with this; but here we see Jesus (as we often do) as the master Apologist, giving a reasoned defense for the truth. Whether the Sadducees were affected by the truth we cannot say, but the multitudes were astonished.

The voice of reason could not but strengthen, embolden and assure the faithful that Jesus is truly the rock in every conceivable way. May we seek to imitate our Savior in our current age where religion is governed more by passions and anecdotes than by the hammer of God’s word (Jeremiah 23:29). Let us

—...(hold) fast the faithful word as (we have) been taught, that (we) may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict (Titus 1:9).

The Context

Why is Matthew recording this event? What is the context? Jesus is in Jerusalem where all the sacrifices made (Matthew 21:1), sacrifices which foreshadowed His own sacrifice. But what is difficult to see in the Old Covenant sacrificial system, something that is not foreshadowed, is the hostility toward that lamb by the covenant people. **“He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11)** appears a bit of an understatement. **“For everyone practicing evil hates the light” (John 3:20a)** is now reaching critical mass.

The water is beginning to boil. How wretched the condition of mankind that the mere presence of truth can transform us into murderers. How desperately we need God’s grace in order to even appreciate God’s grace. As I recently heard, “Thank God for God.”

The same day the Sadducees, _who say there is no resurrection, came to Him... (Matthew 22:23a)

Unholy Alliance

See the unholy alliance. The same day the Pharisees sent their disciples, along with their natural enemies, the Herodians, to **“entangle Him in His talk,” (Matthew 22:15b)** come the other enemies of the Pharisees, the Sadducees. Human institutions cease their bickering and form a confederacy against Christ. Jesus would not co-mingle. Jesus did not align Himself with the most efficient party. Unholy alliances were disdained by God in the Old Covenant and such was the case with Jesus. Jesus was no politician.

Sadducees

We learn from secular history that the Sadducees were heretics, liberals of their day. Their name came from Sadoc who lived about 300 years before Jesus. They were probably the smallest of all Jewish sects. They respected as authoritative only the books of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy) and were basically materialists, thinking the only spirit is God Himself—it naturally follows that they didn't believe in a resurrection.

We learn in Scripture that the **“Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit” (Acts 23:8)**. Their denial of the resurrection is also part of the question currently before us.

...and asked Him, ⁻²⁴⁻ saying: “_Teacher, __Moses said that if a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up offspring for his brother. ⁻²⁵⁻ Now there were with us seven brothers. The first died after he had married, and having no offspring, left his wife to his brother. ⁻²⁶⁻ Likewise the second also, and the third, even to the seventh. ⁻²⁷⁻ Last of all the woman died also. ⁻²⁸⁻ Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her_” (Matthew 22:23b-28).

Teacher

Like their nefarious little friends, the Sadducees address Jesus as teacher. They would feign the role of student, yet Jesus would make them students nonetheless.

Moses

They quote Moses, thus revealing who, or what, they regarded as authoritative. Jesus, the Master Apologist, would utilize this in His answer. It is always helpful to get people to acknowledge who, or what, they consider the supreme authority. For many, this is quite an epiphany.

Their reference is from Deuteronomy 25:5-10. If a man died with offspring it was a sin for his brother to marry his wife (Leviticus 20:21), but if there are no offspring it was the brother's responsibility to marry her, though he could opt out if willing to be publicly humiliated (Deuteronomy 25:9). This mandate from God had to do with the inheritance laws and was strictly an Old Covenant practice. Yet the question still remained since the resurrection includes Old Covenant saints (Job 19:26).

Their Question

They begin their question, **“Now there were with us seven brothers,”** no doubt seeking to make it personal. They (probably falsely) present this as no mere hypothetical, but a true problem that affects their countrymen. The natural, sinful man will often assert that God’s laws are arbitrary and capricious, as if God has no knowledge of His creatures and what is in their best interests.

Let it be stated that that which is a lie, by its very nature, is destructive and that which is true, conversely, is constructive. Let us not speak of how painful it is to be obedient without at the same time speaking of blessings which attend obedience. Anecdotes, whether real or made up, never trump the truth.

The men and the woman in their scenario obeyed the Law of Moses. After seven husbands live and die, she dies also. So who is she married to in heaven?¹

How much self-content these Sadducees must have had at their question! **“Clearly Jesus, you won’t be able to answer our question, so we must conclude there is no resurrection!”** Like so many sophists with their silly questions with which they think prove a point—**“Can God make a rock so big He cannot lift it?”**—sophists often fail to recognize that the problem is not in the answer, but in the question. It fails to recognize that God is not a God of nonsense.

Jesus offers a two-part answer. First He will point out the folly of their question. Then He will appeal to their own authority to explain what they had apparently missed.

Jesus answered and said to them, “_You are _mistaken, _not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. ⁻³⁰⁻ For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but __are like angels __of God in heaven (Matthew 22:29, 30).

The First Answer

Wandering Without Purpose

¹ Not readily apparent in the English is the word for “raise up” in verse 24 (*anastesei*) and its similarity to “resurrection” in verse 28 (*anastasei*). They may have viewed resurrection as raising up children.

The word “**mistaken**” (*planasthe*) means to wander about and stray without purpose, to stray from truth. Similar to our confession, Jesus first appeals to the Scriptures then to God and His power. This is not because the Scriptures take precedent over God, but because the Scriptures are the means by which God presents Himself, His truth and His limitless power to mankind.

The Word of God

Ignorance, denial or perversion of the word of God is at the bottom of untold sin and error. “...**Hath God said...?**” (cf. **Genesis 3:1a, KJV**) were the serpent’s first subtle words in seeking to bring about the fall of man. To depart from God’s word, in the world or in the church, consigns man to a life of wandering without purpose, the end of which is a bottom-less pit.

Heaven

Their particular ignorance had to do with their view of the resurrection, or heaven. They somehow viewed heaven as a mere continuation of our current life. Even though we have individuality and bodies and other (what we might call) human characteristics in eternity, we should not think of eternity as mere continuation.

It’s been said that heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. In our current condition the glory of heaven would be deadly for it presents the glory of God (Exodus 33:20). A friend foolishly conveyed to me one time that he didn’t think he’d enjoy heaven because he enjoys conflict and challenges. His problem is that he was anticipating his experience in heaven from the angle of a sinful and discontent human condition.

We are not even capable of grasping the joy of heaven.

Beloved, __now we are children of God; and __it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, _we shall be like Him, for __we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3:2).

Perhaps it is the unfathomable glory and joy of heaven along with our own limited ability to perceive, grasp and appreciate such things that it is often (as we see above) described by what is not there versus what is: no tears, no death, no sorrow, no crying and no pain (Revelation 21:4). Even

things we consider natural necessities are so listed: no sun, no moon, and no night (Revelation 21:23; 22:5). We read of a similar experience with the Apostle Paul who when “**caught up into Paradise... heard inexpressible words, what it is not lawful for man to utter**” (2 Corinthians 12:4b).

I lament over my lack of ability to appreciate fine art, wine, music and architecture forged from the minds and hands of mere men. How much deeper my ineptness in getting my puny mind around a kingdom “**prepared for (me) from the foundation of the world**” by God (Matthew 25:34b).

It Was Not Good

Even the man’s sinless estate there was something “**not good**” (Genesis 2:18). It was not good for man to be alone. Man needed a comparable helper. Such is not the case in heaven. And this should never be understood as families being estranged from each other in glory (as if we’re going to lose the unity of our families). The most intimate of all human relationships, husband and wife, is but a type or foreshadow of something much more glorious—Christ and the church.

Our intimacy and love for one another, for God and our knowledge of His love for us will leave no sense of discontent—apparently words fail express this adequately.

Angels

When Jesus says we will be like angels, He is not saying we will become angels—only man is made in the image of God. He is merely exposing their lack of understanding and appreciation of the glorious distinction between this fallen world and the splendor of heaven. Their question is flawed because it does not take into account the power of God because of their willful ignorance of the Scriptures.

Jesus continues with the final portion of His answer:

But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, ⁻³²⁻ ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. ⁻³³⁻ And when the multitudes heard *this*, they were astonished at His teaching (Matthew 22:31-33).

The Second Answer

Jesus now appeals to the authority they had already acknowledged, Moses. In numerous places (Exodus 3:6, 3:15) God describes Himself as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. He does not say He *was* their God, but that He *is* (present, active, indicative) their God even though they had died centuries earlier.

A person's lack of ability or, more likely, lack of willingness to be reasonable can be destructive to their understanding of God, His laws and His promises. How concise! How obvious is Jesus' answer. Sometimes answers are so quick. If you need an 1100 page book to prove your point you may wish to re-think your point.

Like people who labor to demonstrate how Christians can lose their salvation—how quickly this can be answered. John tells believing Christians they "have" (present, active, indicative) "eternal" (*aionion*, meaning of unlimited duration) "life" (*zoen*). To say I have that today but may not have it tomorrow is inconsistent with the length of time denoted by "eternal."

Resurrection

Jesus here argues for the resurrection. The Apostle Paul will teach that Jesus was the "**firstfruits**" (1 Corinthians 15:20) of the resurrection meaning that in the same way Jesus was resurrected we shall be resurrected and given new and incorruptible bodies (1 Corinthians 15:53). Paul teaches us that if there is no resurrection, then Christ is not risen that our "**faith is empty**", that we are "**still in our sins**." "**If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable**" (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:12-19) which brings up an interesting point:
Our Best Life Now?

We live in an era where Jesus is presented as some sort of oracle of personal success. Churches become infomercials and Christ and His advice becomes the appliance to be purchased if we desire to be upwardly mobile, climbing the ladder of societal prestige and financial prosperity. Our current evangelical context does not have as its best seller *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* by John Owen, but *Your Best Life Now* by Joel Osteen.

How well would *Your Best Life Now* have squared with Jacob who said _"__few and evil have been the days of the years of my life"

(Genesis 47:9b)? And how would such a statement by Jacob have not been insulting to the God who numbered those earthly days (Psalm 139:16)—how would those words not be, as Matthew Henry conveys, a **“reproach to the wisdom, goodness, and faithfulness, of that God who had so often called himself *the God of Jacob*”**² if not for the resurrection?

I believe obedience to God’s word yields blessings both in history and eternity. But there is great danger in assuming the blessings to be always immediate or individual in nature. Regardless of our eschatology or what we think God may do in the here and now, Christians must always understand that the transcendent message of the gospel, that message which is of equal value, importance and significance to all generations, is the good news of the resurrection.

It is hard to argue that those stadiums full of people today who avail themselves of Jesus’ ethical advice without believing in, or even focusing on, the resurrection are **“of all men most pitiable”** the way Paul meant it. After all, the only stadiums full of Christians during Paul’s era were also full of lions.

But in another sense those today who deny or even downplay the importance of resurrection by seeking their best life now are most pitiable. For they, like the Sadducees, have **“a form of godliness but (deny) its power” (2 Timothy 3:5b)**. What would be more horrifying than to testify before Jesus, **“Lord, lord, did I not achieve great success using your advice?”** only to hear Him reply, **“I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness” (cf. Matthew 7:23)**.

The hope of the Christian is in the resurrection of Christ and our subsequent resurrection—He was raised for our justification. Our personal testimonies of what God has done in us and through in our few and evil days pales when compared to our eternal testimony which we will ever sing not of Christ the teacher but of Christ the Lamb:

**For You were slain, And __have redeemed us to God __by
Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and
nation (Revelation 5:9b).**

²Henry, M. (1996, c1991). *Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible : Complete and unabridged in one volume* (Mt 22:23). Peabody: Hendrickson.

Questions for Study

1. How was Jesus an apologist? How is this valuable (pages 2, 3)?
2. What is the context of Jesus' confrontation with the Sadducees (pages 3, 4)?
3. What were the beliefs of the Sadducees (pages 3, 4)?
4. What was wrong with the question asked by the Sadducees (page 5)?
5. Why were the Sadducee's mistaken (page 6)?
6. What will heaven be like (pages 6, 7)?
7. Do people become angels when they die (pages 6, 7)?
8. Why is the resurrection important (pages 8, 9)?
9. Why does the teaching of the resurrection seem to be at odds with today's "Your Best Life Now" mentality (pages 9, 10)?