

OpenTheo

Matthew 22:23 - 22:33



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In Matthew 22:23-33, the Sadducees questioned Jesus about the resurrection. They presented him with a hypothetical scenario involving a woman who had seven husbands in her lifetime and asked whose wife she would be in the afterlife. However, Jesus corrected their understanding, stating that they were mistaken because they did not know the Scriptures or the power of God. He explained that in the afterlife, people will not marry or be given in marriage, as they will be like angels in heaven. This passage teaches us about the importance of knowing and understanding the Scriptures, which reveal to us the truth about God and his plan for humanity.

Transcript

Returning now to Matthew chapter 22 and verse 23. The same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus and asked him, 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. Now, there were with us seven brothers.

The first died after he had married and having no offspring, left his wife to his brother. Likewise, the second also, and the third even to the seventh. And last of all, the woman died also.

Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her. And Jesus answered and said to them, You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels of God in heaven.

But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 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. And when the multitudes heard this, they were astonished at his teaching. This is the second group of religious leaders among Israel that came to challenge Jesus on this particular day of which we are reading.

Jesus had just been confronted by Pharisees and Herodians on the question of paying tribute to Caesar. And he answered them in such a way as to silence them. But then the

Sadducees came up and decided to take their turn at trying to knock Jesus down.

It reminds me of a carnival where maybe somebody's sitting up on a stool or something up above a tub of water, and people come by trying to take shots at this target, which if they hit it, they'll dump this guy into the water. And Jesus is here, and they're taking pot shots at him. And the Pharisees, they've paid their nickel, and they've taken their shot, and they were not able to knock him down.

So here comes the next customer. The Sadducees are on their way up to see if they can nail him. Well, as a matter of fact, the Sadducees, we have to understand a few things about the Sadducees.

Matthew himself tells us they say there is no resurrection. And that is a key to, of course, this whole story. They come and ask Jesus about the resurrection, but they don't believe there's a resurrection.

It's not that they're trying to be convinced. They were a denomination, a religious denomination in Israel, that it was one of their distinctive points that they deny that there could be a resurrection of the dead. They were against it entirely.

So the whole point of their asking Jesus about the resurrection is an attempt to discredit the resurrection. Obviously, they knew that Jesus did believe in the resurrection. He had spoken of the resurrection, and therefore this was a point upon which they could disagree with him.

It should be noted, however, it was a point upon which the Sadducees disagreed also with the Pharisees. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection just as Jesus did, but the Sadducees didn't. Now, Jesus was a newcomer to the block, and this is the only time in Scripture that we read of the Sadducees as a group confronting Jesus.

The Pharisees did it regularly, and the chief priests, but as far as representatives of the Sadducean party coming up to Jesus trying to find fault with him, this is the only time. However, there were many times previous to this that the Sadducees had had confrontations with the Pharisees on this issue of the resurrection. The Pharisees were strongly supporters of the idea of a resurrection, that is, that the dead will rise in the last day.

The Sadducees were strongly opposed to it, and in their debates with one another, it is clear that there were certain arguments that had developed that the Pharisees would use and that the Sadducees would use in debating with each other to try to prove their particular point. I am convinced that this question that they brought to Jesus was a question that the Sadducees had confronted the Pharisees with on many occasions, and the Pharisees had never been able to answer it. Why do I think that? Because it's a very good question.

It would have been crazy for the Sadducees not to raise it on the Pharisees. It does seem to put the Pharisee or the believer in the resurrection in a state of dilemma. What is the dilemma? Well, okay, you say there's a resurrection, that at the end of time all people who have ever died will rise again, and the ones who ought to end up in heaven.

Okay, well, what about this situation? And here's the situation they give. The law of Moses had a provision in it that if a man would marry and die before he had any children, and he had no son to carry on his family name, well, if he was fortunate enough to have a younger brother surviving him, that brother would then take the widow of the deceased brother, would marry her, and would have children by her, and the first son of that particular woman and that particular brother would be counted as the son of the deceased brother. That is, he would take on the name of the deceased brother so that the brother who had died childless would have someone to carry on his name and his inheritance.

This was a service that the younger brother performed for his deceased older brother. For a man to be left without a son to carry on his name was considered a great tragedy, a disaster. So if a younger brother could marry the widow of his deceased older brother and raise up a son to carry out his family name, this was an act of kindness.

Now, in Deuteronomy 25, among other places, this law was given. But the Sadducees had figured something out here. Wait a minute, they said.

This situation would arise then where a woman might marry more than one man in her lifetime. As in this case, they propose seven brothers. The oldest marries a woman, he dies childless, so the next brother marries her, he dies childless, the next one marries her.

All of them do that. So the woman in the course of her lifetime has seven different husbands, all legitimately, and all of them because God commanded that it should be so. It's not as if someone should say, well, these people should never have married.

This is something the law itself required. So God is the one who has put together this system where this woman ends up having to have seven husbands in her lifetime. And she dies, and therefore all have died, and the resurrection comes.

Now remember, the Sadducees don't believe in the resurrection, but they postulate it to show the ridiculousness of it. They say, okay, because of the law of God, this woman has been forced to have seven different husbands. Now comes the resurrection.

She is raised from the dead, and all seven of her husbands are raised from the dead too. Now, they didn't all have her at the same time because they weren't all alive at the same time when they were married to her. But now they're all alive again, and each one in his lifetime can say, she's with my wife.

Now, whose wife is she going to be in the resurrection? Are they going to have to, you know, draw straws or what? I mean, how is this going to be settled? Now, the Sadducees felt like this was an unanswerable argument to those who believed in the resurrection of the dead. Because, of course, if there is a resurrection, they said, it's impossible to avoid this kind of a problem arising. And certainly no one would think that in the resurrection a woman would have seven husbands.

Now, by the way, there are people, even Jews, who would not be too opposed to the idea of a man having seven wives in the resurrection. In fact, Mormons today, some of them probably expect to have seven wives when they become gods later on. But for a man to have seven wives is one thing.

For a woman to have seven husbands is another. Even in places where polygamy is practiced, it is the husband who is allowed to have several wives, not the opposite. Now, before we jump to the conclusion that that's strictly a male chauvinist convention, and maybe it is, we have to realize that there's some method to this madness.

There's a reason why polygamy was permitted for men, but not for women. That is to say that a man could have multiple wives, but a wife couldn't have multiple husbands. One of the purposes of polygamy was to build a larger family.

A lot of men who never intended to have more than one wife took a second wife because their first wife was barren, and maybe a third wife and a fourth wife. We know that sometimes, in some societies, wives' principal function was viewed as being the production of children. And therefore, a man who had several wives could multiply children in his family rather rapidly.

If he had six wives, he could have six pregnant wives all at the same time and have six sons the same year, or six children. Now, that wouldn't be the case if a woman had six husbands. She could still only bear one child at a time, and worse yet, it would never be known who the father of the child was.

The parentage of the child would be open to question. Whereas, if a man has six wives, it's a given that he's the father, and there's never any question about who the mother is. And therefore, in that case, you can have a rapid multiplication of offspring without any confusion about parentage, if the man has several wives.

But if the woman had several husbands, that would just be crazy, because she'd have only one child at a time, as much as if she had only one husband. And no one would know for sure whose child it was. So, I mean, as I say, it may well be a convention of chauvinism, of male chauvinism, that men were allowed to have several wives, and the reverse was not true.

But there was also some reason for it. I'm not saying that we, certainly we don't approve

of it. We don't approve of polygamy today in a Christian society.

But there was some reasoning behind it that was not entirely just a matter of a man wanting to have many outlets for his lust. Having children was a very major part of the whole issue of getting married in many societies, and should be, really. And polygamy was one of the ways that some societies solved the problem of childlessness.

Now, in other words, the Sadducees postulated a situation where if there is a resurrection, this woman is going to find herself with seven husbands simultaneously, because she had them serially in life. That's not a problem. She had them one at a time in lifetime.

And for a woman to have one husband at a time, no one objected to. But for them all to be raised from the dead at the same time with her, now she's got seven husbands at one time. This is certainly an absurdity, they felt, and in itself, it would disprove the resurrection of the dead.

Now, that is a good argument. That's a very good argument, and I'm sure they used this argument in their debates against the Pharisees on this topic many times. And the fact they brought it up to Jesus at this time means it had never yet been answered.

If the Pharisees had been able to answer it, then there's no sense bringing it to Jesus. He could just repeat the answer they'd given. It's clear that this was an unanswerable conundrum for the Pharisees, and the Sadducees had used it as a great weapon against the doctrine of the resurrection.

Now, they come to Jesus. They know that he believes in the resurrection, as do the Pharisees, so they're going to try to take him out with this one and try to make him look ridiculous. And so they say, well, here it is, the seven brothers.

They all, in turn, died and left the wife to the next brother, and so she had seven husbands, and in the resurrection, whose wife is she going to be? For all seven had her. Now, Jesus answers in a way that no Pharisee ever could, for the simple reason is that no Pharisee could have known the information that Jesus knew. Jesus, as the Son of God, could speak authoritatively about the condition of people after the resurrection and so forth, even though the Scripture had never spoken about it.

You see, if the Scriptures had said something like this, suppose the Old Testament Scriptures said, no one will be married in the resurrection. Well, if that had been revealed, then the Pharisees could have answered it the same way Jesus did, but that had never been revealed. Jesus gives that information as authoritatively as if the Scripture itself said it, because, of course, Jesus is the Word of God, and whatever he speaks is as good as Scripture itself.

And so Jesus is capable of answering the question in a way that no one else could,

because he knew something about the resurrection that had never been revealed before, and he now reveals it. He says a couple things. You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.

Now, to tell the religious leaders they don't know the Scriptures is rather a slap in the face, but there's a sense in which this was true. According to Josephus, the Sadducees did not accept all of the Old Testament as Scripture. Now, there is a statement in Josephus that has been variously interpreted, but most understand Josephus to be saying that the Sadducees only accepted the first five books of the Old Testament as Scripture.

This would be the Law of Moses, the Pentateuch. Now, if they only accepted the first five books of Moses, that means they didn't accept the prophets and the Psalms and so forth as Scripture. Now, there is in the Psalms and in the prophets much that would encourage belief in the resurrection, but the Sadducees didn't accept those portions of Scripture.

They only accepted the Law, and they didn't find anything there to support the idea of a resurrection. Well, Jesus, therefore, says you are mistaken, that is, you're mistaken on your view of the resurrection because you don't know the Scriptures. Now, what I think he means is that you don't acknowledge all the Scriptures as Scripture.

If you accepted the whole Old Testament, you'd have plenty of grounds for believing in the resurrection, but because you don't accept the whole Old Testament, and you only accept the part you want to accept, therefore, of course, you're left without the total witness of God on the subject, and you reach fallacious conclusions. He says part of the reason you're mistaken is because you don't know the Scriptures. Another reason is because you don't know the power of God.

And what he's really getting at there is that these people were anti-supernaturalists. The Sadducees did not believe in angels or spirits or the resurrection. They typically were not believers in the supernatural, and that being so, of course, they couldn't accept the doctrine of the resurrection.

There are many people who reject the resurrection of Christ today as a doctrine. There are people who do not believe Jesus rose from the dead, not because of their rejection of the evidence. They haven't seen the evidence.

They simply reject the possibility of resurrection altogether because that would take a miracle, and they are opposed to belief in miracles. There are many people like that today. The Sadducees were like that.

It's not even so much that the objection they were here raising to the resurrection was their real objection. Their real objection was that they didn't believe in miracles. And, of course, if you don't believe in miracles, you can't believe in the resurrection.

So he says, you underestimate the power of God. By your lack of belief in the

miraculous, you simply limit what God can do in your thinking. So you have a mistaken notion on this subject because you don't acknowledge all the scriptures as scripture and because you don't acknowledge the power of God adequately.

Then he goes on to answer their question. He says, For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven. Now that's his answer.

The question was, this woman, she's going to have seven husbands in her lifetime. Whose wife is she going to be in the resurrection? He says, No problem. There's no marriage there.

Now, as I said, the Pharisees could never have answered that because how would they know whether there's marriage there or not? The Bible had not previously revealed this information. But Jesus knew because he was the Son of God. He knew information that no one else knew.

And says, Okay, if that question has bothered you, Sadducees, I'll solve it for you right now. There's actually no marriage in heaven. There's no marriage in the resurrection.

His answer on this is a little longer in Luke. The parallel is in Luke 20, verses 35 and 36, where his answer is given in these terms. He says, Those who are counted worthy to attain that age, meaning the age of the resurrection time, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage, nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God being sons of the resurrection.

So Jesus said that those who reach the resurrection can't die anymore and they don't marry and are not given in marriage anymore. Now, why would they not marry anymore? You know, it's really hard to say. But one of the reasons for marriage, one of the principal reasons is for having children.

And probably one of the main reasons for having children is not only to produce more people, but to perpetuate the race after the death of one generation. There's another generation to come along. And when that generation dies, another one yet.

Marriage is the institution that produces children. And children perpetuate the race, even though earlier generations die off. Now, in the resurrection, they won't be dying off anymore.

And therefore, there won't be need to continue producing more people to replace the ones who are dying. There won't be the same need for marriage that there is now. Now, this doesn't mean that the woman you married or the man you married, that you won't enjoy their company in the resurrection, but you simply won't have exactly the same relationship.

Now, some people have thought that what Jesus says only means that there won't be new marriages in the resurrection. I've heard people say, well, Jesus just said they won't be marrying or giving in marriage. That just means they won't establish new marriages in the resurrection.

But the person you're married to now will still be your spouse. But that can't be true, because Jesus is not addressing the issue of new marriages. He's addressing the case of people who were married on earth in their lifetime.

In the resurrection, they won't be married anymore. If he simply argued that there won't be new marriages taking place in the resurrection, it would not answer the question of the Sadducees. They were not asking about new marriages.

They were talking about historical marriages, the seven marriages of seven men to one woman that occurred before they died. And therefore, his answer has to mean that not only will there not be new marriages, but marriage simply will not be a part of life in the resurrection. Now, some people might say, well, that doesn't sound very nice.

I'm not sure I want it. Well, let me guarantee you, it's not going to be very nice in hell either. And I don't think there will be any happy marriages there.

The fact of the matter is that marriage serves a purpose that God has ordained for it to serve. When the resurrection at the end of time comes, there will be no more need for marriage to serve that purpose, and therefore, it will not go on. The angels apparently do not marry.

And Jesus said, we will be like the angels when the resurrection time comes in that respect. Now, he turns to the Sadducees further. He's answered their question, and actually what he's done is he's taken away from them forever the best argument they ever had against the resurrection.

And they, of course, could never really use it again now. But he goes further. Remember, the Sadducees accepted the law of Moses.

They accepted the first five books of the Old Testament, but not the rest of the Old Testament. Normally, if you want to prove the resurrection in the Old Testament, you're going to have to use the prophets or the Psalms for that. But Jesus was able to even go to the five books of Moses, the portion that the Sadducees accepted, and show them that the resurrection was even found there.

He says it in verse 31, But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? Now, that quotation is a quotation of what God said to Moses. Of course, on many occasions, he said, I'm the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But in Exodus 3, verses 6 and 15, when God met Moses at the burning bush, he said, I am the

God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Now, we have to remember that when God said this to Moses, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had died a long time earlier, centuries earlier. And yet, though these men had died, God said to Moses, I am the God of these three men. Now, after quoting this, Jesus says, God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

And in Luke, he adds this, For all live to him. That's in Luke 20 and verse 38, where he closes the statement. So, Jesus said, God is not the God of the dead, but the living.

For all live to him. Now, what this seems to mean is that, although Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had died when God revealed himself to Moses, yet God was still their God. He was the God of those men.

And since he is not the God of dead men, since dead men don't worship, I mean, people who are literally dead, they must still be alive somewhere. And the idea is, if they are alive somewhere, there is still a future for them, which includes a resurrection. Now, Jesus, therefore, is saying that even the law of Moses hints at the resurrection.

It doesn't necessarily prove it, but it certainly hints at it by referring to men who had died as if God was still their God. It's like their future was assured. Their life isn't really over.

There's more to it in the future. And thus, every Christian can have confidence that even after we die, or after our loved ones die, there is a future. In God, there is the resurrection.

And we'll have more to say about that another time.