

Culver Community Church
Pastor Chris Sweeney
Sermon Notes
November 25, 2018

Matthew 22:23 - 33 Resurrection & The God of the Living

{vs. 23} Last time, we saw that the religious leaders' "**Jesus problem**" had forged very interesting alliances (i.e. the Pharisees and the Herodians). The Sadducees also ignored (for the moment) their deep divisions with the Pharisees in order to address this greater problem! **In this section, it is the Sadducees' turn to take a swipe at Jesus. So, they prepare and bring their best question to try to stump the 'master'.** I don't know about you, but I find great comfort in the fact that we serve a God, who cannot be stumped or bested! If God were like us, limited in wisdom, knowledge and power – then frankly, what would be the point of serving Him? In this exchange, like all the other confrontation with the religious leaders – **Jesus shows Himself to be glorious, all-knowing and Master of the scriptures - - - in short, Devine!**

As a reminder, these Sadducees were the rulers of the temple; controlling the merchants (who Jesus just chased away) and the procedures/policies of the day-to-day worship. They were **wealthy** (because of the temple scams), **unpopular** (again because of the temple scams) and a **minority**, but they held the majority of seats on the Sanhedrin (ruling religious council – similar to our own Supreme Court). Because of this they controlled the approval process for incoming rabbis, which is why they most likely were the ones who began this whole process with the first question - "**By what authority are you doing these things?**" (21:23). Practically, they were similar to the Herodians (with some overlap in the two groups) because it was Rome & Herod who appointed the High Priest (not God!) from their ranks (every so many years, they would bribe their way into renewed support)! Which is why the position was passed back and forth between the members of Ananias' family (instead of being a lifetime position). Theologically, they were the rivals to the Pharisees, focusing on the riches and enjoyment of this life because they did not believe in an afterlife, a resurrection, angels nor demons – at that point, I don't understand how they even believed in God! (Perhaps they didn't!) **The Pharisees only relied on the Pentateuch** (the first five books of the Bible, written by God given through Moses). Most of the references (not all) to angels, resurrection, miracles etc. are found in the other books of the Old Testament.

{vs. 24} "**Teacher**" – they come showing respect (not quite the flattery of the Pharisees last time) – addressing Jesus as a **teacher** even though they would not learn from Him! They begin by setting the stage for their question, stating an established principle from scripture. This is a fair retelling of what is referred to as the **levirate** law found codified in Deuteronomy 25:5-6. Levirate marriage is a type of marriage in which the brother of a deceased man is required to marry his brother's widow in order to provide for her and to raise up a child for the deceased brother to carry on his name. The term levirate is a derivative of the **Latin** word **levir** meaning **husband's brother** (not Levi). God continued this practice so that the tribes would not be diminished after a premature death and so that the God appointed family land would continue to be distributed to the heirs created. Remember, there was no artificial insemination or other means of '**carrying on the family line**'. Now this was to be for **unmarried** brothers – not creating polygamous messes and the firstborn son would be considered the deceased brother's own. All future children would be considered the living brother's children. This was the practice even before being put into law in Deuteronomy (we see God condemn Onan for refusing to fulfill this duty in Genesis 38). We also see a positive example of this principle in the book of Ruth. Ruth and Boaz produced an heir named Obed for Naomi's deceased husband Elimelech (and her), who turned out to be the father of Jesse, the grandfather of David (who was anointed King and forefather to Jesus)!

During Jesus' day this had fallen out of practice – much if not all of the ancestral land allotted by God had been lost to invaders. The support of widows was provided for (when they did their duty) through special offerings. In addition, many of the Jews of that day also had gaps or issues in their lineage that made the practice of preserving the family name a moot point. Jesus, on the other hand could trace His lineage back to David, back to Abraham and yes - - - back to Adam because God preserved the record! In fact, no one could legitimately claim to be the Messiah today because all of those records were destroyed with Jerusalem in 70 AD (except of course for those of Jesus preserved in the Bible for us).

{vs. 25-28} While this may seem a little like a story from a soap opera or maybe the Jerry Springer or Maury television shows – what they are doing is setting up an **extreme case – a ridiculous or absurd situation**. In fact, it is an example of a type

of argument called '**Reductio ad absurdum**' meaning '**reduction to the absurd**'. This type of argument offers two choices – agreement with the author/speaker or absurdity (stupidity). Sadly, we see and hear a lot of this in politics today! When any argument is taken to the extreme, most things will appear ridiculous. However, the real fallacy of this type of argument is that there are only two options, refusing to allow any alternatives – even room for God!

The basis for this craziness comes from their own misunderstandings of the resurrection. The Sadducees as noted did not believe in any resurrection, but that we cease to exist, both body and spirit at death (eternal oblivion). The Pharisees believed in resurrection (as they knew Jesus did) but they thought that at the renewal of all things (end of the age) there would be a bodily resurrection. Not a new glorified body as we see in the New Testament but a body '**as is**', with all the scars, defects and even the clothes worn at death. They reasoned that this was so that others would see and know the person resurrected (if these resurrected people looked different, how would anyone living know/believe it was you?) This would only be temporary though, after this proof was established then they would be transformed into a glory or splendor like that of the angels. Most of this was pieced together from apocryphal or 'extra-Biblical' writings. This belief in itself was ridiculous to the Sadducees (as it is to us) – so they no doubt used this same question to befuddle and shut down their rivals the Pharisees.

If as the Pharisees believed she came back, **as she left** – but so did her husbands - - - then Houston, we have a problem here! Although found in the scriptures, **they knew that God does not condone polygamy** – every case displayed the family drama and problems that would result. They also knew from their own divorce and remarriage teachings (compromises) that Jesus proclaimed **Marriage to be between one man and one woman**.

So, whose wife would she be? They thought that they had done what the Pharisees could not – painted Jesus into a no-win situation. Marriage is a basic tenant of life, they **assumed** that it would be in the resurrection also. There is no reasonable way to select a husband from among the seven. So - - - **gotcha!** (They thought.)

Frankly, after the first one or two, I would start to suspect that something funny was going on! This is one deadly woman – is she that bad of a cook, or is there something else? By number seven, you would think that they would find ways to be married or out of town **before** their number came up!

{vs. 29} Notice that although they tried to make Jesus look foolish, that is what He did to them! As the kids say today, "**BURN!**" Once again, Jesus exposes the ignorance of these scriptural experts. Not only do they not know how to understand what God's Word says but also because of that, **they don't know God or His power!**

{vs. 30-33} In Jesus' answer, the resurrection is not even questioned - - - it is assumed! This is a well documented if not easily understood idea in scripture (yes, even the Old Testament). In Job, the oldest book of the Bible the main character proclaims – "**I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand on the Earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see Him with my own eyes--I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!**" (Job 19:25-27 NIV). See Also Psalm 49:15 and Daniel 12:2-3.

However, these religious men had never before seen the truth of the Resurrection in the Pentateuch (Moses' books), the only books of scripture that the Sadducees relied upon. **Here, Jesus with His infinite wisdom and knowledge of the scriptures shows them what they have missed all along!** This quote from Exodus 3 (from the Pentateuch) is God speaking to the children of Israel and He describes Himself to them. What God says is **I am the God of** and list a bunch of dead patriarchs, but in the **present tense!** More than that, the verb we translate as '**of**' is literally '**who belongs to**' – which means either God belongs to Abraham, etc. or they belong to God (personally, I like both!) Do you belong to God, and He to you? I hope and pray that you have that kind of relationship! Now this is wonderful because at the time this was spoken (Exodus 3), all of these men have passed away and if the Sadducees were correct about there being nothing after this life – **then they ceased to exist! God would be describing Himself not just as a God of men of the past, but of men who no longer exist!**

Finally, Jesus adds a new truth (not revealed in scripture) and His own commentary. **This truth** is that in the resurrection, there will be no marriage – those resurrected to life will be glorious like (but not) angels, not needing such relationships because they will be whole and directly relate to God! Something that should be clear from common sense and implied by the multiple illustrations of God/Jesus as the groom for Israel and the Church. **The commentary** is both critical of these questioners (and their whole sect) and reaffirming of the character of God. Jesus says that you do not understand – they had chosen only five books and yet, they could not get the message right even from just those five! They must know who God is – not a critical, condemning God but a God of second chances, a God who brings new life (resurrection) and the God who

would not abandon those He loves to the grave or nothingness! **God is the God of the living and those who put their faith/trust in Him continue to live for all eternity!** This is the truth (God's truth) found in both the Old Testament