

Matthew 22:23-33 – “The Resurrection” – Oct. 20, 2024

1. Explain the resurrection
 - a. Frequent confusion around funerals
 - b. Intermediate state is disembodied and temporary
 - i. This is where our loved ones are now
 - ii. The first resurrection was Christ’s, ours is still future
 - iii. My confusion was that this intermediate state was the final chapter for people, and that they remained disembodied
 - iv. This is where the idea that our dead loved ones are golfing or fishing
 1. This is impossible, since their bodies are still in the ground
 - c. Final state is resurrection
 - i. Body and soul back together to dwell on the earth that has been put back together with heaven
 1. The wicked go to the Lake of Fire, a physical place, with physical bodies
 2. The righteous inherit the earth, a physical place, with physical bodies
 - ii. There are things which will obviously be different in the resurrection than we are used to, as we’ll see in today’s text
 - iii. But the continuity between this world and the world to come is much, much stronger than I think most evangelicals assume
 - iv. We will have solid, material, physical bodies that do physical things like eat and work in the new creation

- d. One difficulty is that when we speak of “heaven”, both realities are often in view
 - i. But the current state of affairs where we have bodies in the ground and immaterial souls away from the body and with Christ is in fact temporary
 - ii. *There is life after “life after death”*
 - iii. *Heaven’s not my home, I’m just a passing through*
 - e. The Christian hope in physical, bodily resurrection, and eternally dwelling on this earth made new is why we have a long tradition of graveyards instead of crematoriums
 - i. This is why traditionally we place bodies facing east, for when the Son rises at the end of history
2. It is fitting for Jesus to be teaching on resurrection at this stage of His ministry, since He is going to be the first person in history to be permanently resurrected
- a. There are resurrections in the Bible, but these could more accurately be seen as resuscitations since those people would have died again in the normal manner
3. A proper understanding of the resurrection is very important because it shapes the way we view the natural world
- a. The world as we know it is fallen, and so we start to assume that things like disease and death are natural
 - b. These things are present in the natural world, but they are not natural
 - c. *Grace does not destroy nature, but restores it*
 - d. It is Gnosticism, not Christianity that speaks of death as though it is a release; a good thing

- i. The Gnostics thought the physical world was evil, and death was a kind of liberation
 - 1. “we’re no longer being oppressed by biology”
 - ii. Christians see the physical world as good, and death as a parasitic corruption in it
 - 1. *Grace restores the created order to its original design*
 - 2. In fact, the resurrection is better than the garden
 - a. In the garden, creation was unstable; corruption was a potential
 - b. In the resurrection, creation is perfected; corruption is impossible
- 4. In today’s text, Jesus gets confronted by the Sadducees
 - a. These people are the religious elites
 - b. They are much more liberal and much softer than the Pharisees
 - c. The Pharisees started as a down-to-earth “Back to the Bible” movement that turned in on itself
 - i. The Pharisees were actually grounded in something positive at the beginning; they started with the authority of the Bible, but later started to add their own speculative ideas
 - ii. The Sadducees minimized the authority of the Bible by picking and choosing; in this sense their starting point meant that they were much further apart from Christ than the Pharisees were
 - d. The Sadducees were the kind of people who taught theology at McGill or Harvard

- e. They were loved by the secular world because their theology was completely toothless; like theological liberalism of today, it doesn't challenge anybody
 - i. The Sadducees were a threat to none of the political class, and that is why they were very well-placed even though they were a much smaller group than the Pharisees
5. VV. 23, 24 – *“The same day Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection, and they asked him a question, 24 saying, “Teacher, Moses said, ‘If a man dies having no children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.’”*
- a. *“The same day”* being Tuesday
 - b. Tuesday starts in 21:18 and continues all the way into 26:5
 - c. Jesus has overcome wave after wave of opponents who have approached Him
 - d. He has overcome the opposition of the elders, the priests, the Pharisees, and most recently the Herodians
 - i. Bit by bit, even in His earthly ministry, we see the outworking of Psalm 110:1, of Christ putting all His enemies beneath His feet
 - e. Now come the Sadducees
 - i. As mentioned, these were the theological liberals of their day
 - ii. They did not believe in the resurrection, nor did they believe in spiritual realities like angels
 - 1. Where the Bible clearly teaches a physical resurrection of both the just and the unjust; the just into a newly renovated creation and the unjust into the Lake of Fire, the Sadducees denied this

- a. They believed that once a person died, their soul was annihilated
 - b. This life as we currently know it is all there is
 - c. *Imagine there's no heaven / It's easy if you try / No hell below us / Above us, only sky / Imagine all the people / Livin' for today*
- iii. They rejected the bulk of the OT and trusted only the Pentateuch/Torah, the first five books of Moses
- f. While the OT does in fact teach the bodily resurrection of the dead, it is more explicit in later books like Psalms, Job, Isaiah, and Daniel
 - i. They rejected these books, and therefore felt no need to believe in the resurrection
- g. Just like theological liberalism today, these men come to challenge Jesus by pitting one author of Scripture against another
- h. They are going to try to use Moses to disprove the resurrection
- i. They go to Deuteronomy 25:5-10 and Levirate (Latin – *levir, brother-in-law*) Marriage
 - i. This was a provision that if a married man dies without a son, his brother should marry the widow and their first-born son would be credited as belonging to the dead brother
 - 1. This accomplishes several things
 - a. It is a protection for a widow; her in-law family keeps her in the family to take care of her

- b. It prevents a dead man from being permanently cut off without an heir to continue that branch of the family
 - c. It keeps the dead man's property and wealth in the family
 - d. We see this with Judah's family and Tamar
 - i. Er – Onan – Shelah (Gen. 38)
 - e. In a typological sense points out that Levirate marriage is a kind of taste of the resurrection, since it shows that through the womb of his wife (*a tomb in the heart of the earth*), there is a sense in which a dead man can continue to live
 - f. In v.24 the language hints at this, for the Levirate marriage does in fact “*raise up*” a seed for the deceased brother
2. The Sadducees are unable to see that even in their appeal to Moses, and to Levirate marriage, there are glimpses of resurrection and of a dead man tasting eternal life
6. VV. 25-28 – “*25 Now there were seven brothers among us. The first married and died, and having no offspring left his wife to his brother. 26 So too the second and third, down to the seventh. 27 After them all, the woman died. 28 In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her.*”
- a. This is a kind of “*reductio ad absurdum*” argument, where you take a position you disagree with and make it so extreme that it reduces to absurdity
 - b. This is a hypothetical situation that goes way beyond what we saw with Judah's sons and Tamar

- c. The Sadducees are trying to show that the resurrection is absurd and that it contradicts the Bible
 - i. Leithart – *“Torah prescribes levirate marriage if a brother dies; but Torah prohibits polyandry, the practice of one woman marrying several men simultaneously. If all the brothers, and the woman, are all alive at the same time, in the resurrection, then the law is nullified in one way or another. Either the levirate marriage law is annulled, or the prohibition of polyandry is annulled. If you believe in resurrection, you cannot believe in an eternal, inviolate Torah.”*
 - ii. This is how the Sadducees think they have sunk Jesus
 - 1. Jesus will now have to deny the resurrection and anger the orthodox Jews who do accept the biblical doctrine of resurrection; or He will have to deny Moses and the Torah, which will make everyone angry
- d. They think they have trapped Jesus
 - i. Before we consider Jesus’ response, let’s remember that these are the effeminate, soft, professional theologians with credentials and titles from the best unbelieving seminaries in all Israel
 - ii. They reject their own religion enough to be able to go on Colbert and do the talk show circuit just like today where many compromised and unbelieving pastors and theologians end up being the public face of the church
 - iii. These are the elite of the elite theologians of the time

7. V.29 – *“But Jesus answered them, “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.”*
- a. Jesus just cuts right to it here
 - b. He doesn’t say *“What you’re suggesting is certainly interesting here. I am well aware of your tradition. When can we schedule our next interfaith dialogue on this very complex and nuanced matter?”*
 - c. No. *“You are wrong! You know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.”*
 - i. Their way of doing theology was all about respectability from the Romans, about accommodation, being sure to include the latest philosophical insights in their doctrine, etc.
 - d. Jesus is no respecter of persons
 - e. But this also means that He is seeing to it that He runs out of friends
 - f. He is upsetting virtually every theological and political tribe that has come to try to trip Him up
 - g. And note how He does it
 - i. Sola Scriptura!
 - ii. Jesus of all people could answer on His own authority, but He always takes people to the Scriptures to settle the matter
 - iii. Jesus opposes the liberal, rationalistic, unbelieving theology of the Sadducees by taking them to Scripture
 - 1. He opposes their slicing up of the canon of Scripture, only accepting certain parts
 - 2. He opposes their setting Moses against David and Isaiah

3. He opposes their unbelief in the resurrection of both man and nature
 4. He opposes their low view of God's power over His creation
 - iv. *By what standard? By *this* standard!*
8. V.30 – “*For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.*”
- a. In the resurrection, we no longer have marriage
 - b. It says we become like the angels
 - i. Note – we don't become angels, but *like* angels
 - ii. That is, at the resurrection, the number of people is a fixed number; it is no longer growing
 - c. One of the chief purposes of marriage is childbearing
 - i. It is the Christian's great privilege and honour to be fruitful and multiply, and to populate the kingdom of God
 - ii. We don't think that way anymore
 1. In marriage counselling Tanya and me were told that a husband and wife is a complete family
 - a. In a sense, of course, that is true
 - b. Some people cannot have children, and they are no less married than couples that do have children
 2. But the advice we were given fit into the cultural narrative that children are a burden and an optional add-on to marriage

3. But from creation on, marriage is God's ordained means of filling the planet
4. We both wanted children because we enjoy them, but neither of us recall learning a theology of childbearing, even growing up in the church
5. The church has been far too silent amid the culture of selfishness, death, and childlessness
 - a. We have our 1.7 children as we inch towards depopulation just like the unbelievers do
6. In the world of philosophy and ethics, in the early 2000s when same sex "marriage" (*mirage*) was being debated, it was very hard for public theologians to make the case that marriage must be one man and one woman because this is the arrangement that produces life and stability
 - a. Even many Christians had denied this great truth in practice, and in turn, this reduces sex to an indoor recreational activity
 - b. If you want to get a piece of paper saying that you and another person do this activity together, that's fine
- iii. The whole superstructure that has made the family possible has made civilization and life possible
 1. How can Christians hold a biblically faithful view of marriage when all the while we delay marriage in favour of travel and

college degrees, make intentional interventions to minimize our fruitfulness, and buy in to easy divorce?

iv. Saying that there is no more marriage in the new creation is not saying that marriage and family are unimportant

1. It is saying that by the resurrection, marriage will have served its purpose
2. Marriage will have produced new image bearers of God until the full measure has been reached, and then after it has served its purpose, it terminates into the new creation

d. But I want to make a special plea and application to young people here

i. Marriage is good

1. It is the norm. God calls some to singleness, and providentially withholds children from others, but this is the exception and not the norm
2. Don't delay marriage. God made our bodies to desire marriage at a certain stage of development, and to produce and nurture children in a certain window of time. His wisdom is such that most of us have fairly independent children yet still have most of our strength by the time our aging parents need us. *This is good.*

ii. Children are good

1. Children are in fact a taste of eternity and of the new creation

2. When a woman goes into the ground, her daughters carry on in the nurture of their own daughters, so that there is a sense in which even the dead woman continues to be present on earth
3. The raising of children echoes into eternity; it is how we populate the new creation
4. In fact, 100% of the people entering into the new creation will have to be produced on this side of the resurrection
5. That is part of the dominion mandate that God has given us
6. So quit looking at porn, quit reading unrealistic romance novels, and prepare to become the kind of person that the kind of person you want to marry, wants to marry
7. Then don't delay marriage or childbearing
 - a. My marriage has been God's single greatest blessing in my life apart from salvation
 - b. My only regret was that I didn't marry Tanya sooner, that we didn't have children sooner, and that we didn't have more
- e. So now is the age of marriage and of children; in the resurrection, this is a fixed number
 - i. No more death in the renewed creation, and also no more replacements coming up the ranks
 - ii. We will be like the angels in this regard

- f. Some are discouraged by this, especially those who have lost a beloved husband or wife
 - i. But since there is evidence that we will continue to know and recognize each other in our resurrected bodies, just as Christ was recognizable with His, we will no doubt know our spouses
 - ii. Whatever else we may say, this much I know, no matter how much I love Tanya and how much I enjoy being married to her, I will love her *much better and more perfectly* in the resurrection than I do today
 - iii. The closeness, the unity, the openness, the lack of shame or pretense, and even the physical pleasure and intimacy of marriage are designed to be a picture of the complete rest and joy and satisfaction between Christ and His church in the regeneration of all things. How can we top these things?
 - 1. *“It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”* – Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*
- g. Part of the error of the Sadducees is that they assumed that if there was a renewed creation and a resurrection, that it would work exactly like this chapter of history
- h. Jesus shows that that assumption is wrong

- i. There is great continuity between this world and the next, but there are also points of difference
 - ii. History advances from one degree of glory to another; so Jesus sees what the Sadducees cannot
 - 1. The resurrection is more real and more solid than our current experience. *Grace will have permanently restored nature.*
 - 2. The fall and its consequences are erased in the resurrection. We are going to be like the unfallen angels in this regard.
 - 3. *In the resurrection, I will not cease to be a man. I will finally become one.*
9. VV.31-33 – “*And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: 32 ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not God of the dead, but of the living.’ 33 And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.*”
- a. Here Jesus goes to Exodus 3:6 to make His point about the resurrection
 - i. In doing this, He is going to the Torah, which even the Sadducees recognize as authoritative
 - ii. He is making His case for resurrection from the Torah, showing that Moses does in fact agree with Daniel and Isaiah and David on this matter
 - iii. The progress of revelation may very well show us something more clearly, but it never disagrees with what has been previously revealed

- b. Christ's commitment to biblical inerrancy and authority is so strong that He is making His entire case based on the tense of a verb that God spoke to Moses at the burning bush
 - c. By the time God comes to Moses:
 - i. Abraham has been dead for about 550 years
 - ii. Isaac has been dead for about 440 years
 - iii. Jacob has been dead for about 400 years
 - d. Yet God tells Moses *in the present tense* that He *is* their God
 - e. God is not God of the dead, but of the living (v.32)
 - i. That means that these patriarchs live on despite being dead
 - ii. Yes, their bodies and souls were torn apart from one another in death, but their souls are present with the Lord while they continue to wait for the resurrection when their souls will return to those same bodies, and they will be resurrected in glorious form
 - f. Jesus has not only shown that Moses himself teaches the resurrection in Exodus, but He has swept the feet out from under the Sadducees assumptions about marriage, God's law, and the nature of death
 - g. Like in the previous exchanges, the crowd was astonished. Jesus has shown them so clearly what was hidden in plain sight in the Scriptures all along
10. There are several points of application here for us
- a. Marriage and childbearing are gifts from God which are to be received gladly

- i. These are God's ordained means of filling creation, populating the kingdom, and giving us an enacted reminder of Christ's union with His church
- b. Death is not natural, nor is it the final word
 - i. Gnostics may speak of the soul being freed, but Christians anticipate the power of God in restoration and resurrection
 - 1. Our funeral customs should recognize these truths
 - ii. At death, body and soul are separated, but this is an unnatural, absurd, and temporary arrangement brought about by sin, which will be reversed fully and finally at the resurrection
 - iii. God is the God of the living, not of the dead, and we anticipate the great and glorious marriage of the Lamb, when all things are put back together and made glorious and permanent

11. CHARGE

- a. *In today's text, the Sadducees attempt to show that levirate marriage makes the idea of resurrection absurd. Christ's opposition to their argument is both abrupt and insightful. The very provision of levirate marriage points to the resurrection itself. If God gave a law which provided hope that life could indeed continue for a dying, childless man, hope that his name would live on, does that not itself demonstrate that God is a God of resurrection, a God of the living and not of the dead? When God binds Himself to Moses, He says that He remains bound to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob even centuries after their deaths. He is a God who is faithful unto death, and faithful yet again after death. Even this great obstacle to*

our eternal joy can never have the last word. The Sadducees do not understand the faithfulness nor the power of God. Christian, your charge is to remember that the gospel of grace does not destroy nature, but restores and perfects it. In this age we continue to taste death and to lay loved ones in the ground like a seed (1 Cor. 15:36, 37), but we do so in the great hope that they and we will come back out of the grave, just as Jesus did, having finally become fully glorified men and women. May we know both the Scriptures and the power of God.

12. BENEDICTION

- a. *Hebrews 13:20, 21 – “Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, 21 equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”*