

Seven Brothers

Matthew 22:23-33

Another trick question for Jesus. Last week it was the Pharisees and Herodians asking a question about paying taxes to Caesar.

Mat. 22:15 “Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might entangle Him in His talk. 16 And they sent to Him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You care about anyone, for You do not regard the person of men. 17 Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”

Jesus not only silenced them in their wicked and foolish attempt to “entangle” him in some sort of divisive debate or division, he also took the opportunity to teach them a valuable lesson about the responsibility to honor and submit to the civil authorities which God has established in this New Covenant age.

Now we have a question coming from the Sadducees, again a trick question, really a stupid question, from a group of people who didn’t believe in the resurrection. They think up something of an absurd situation, and then ask Jesus a question that they think is sure to make him appear foolish in his answer.

v.23-28

Again, Jesus not only silences them, but he goes on to teach another valuable lesson about the resurrection. He silences them with quite a comprehensive rebuke, strong and powerful words,

v.29

“Mistaken” could actually be translated more strongly. Like deceived! This wasn’t a minor error. It wasn’t a mere mistake. It

was a conscious and deliberate choice to embrace something that is fundamentally wrong. They were deceived, seduced, they wandered away from that which was right and true. They have wandered on the wrong path, the path of error and deception. Thus Jesus’ rebuke is unrestrained and unqualified. “You are mistaken.” You are wrong. Period. Their stupid question was fundamentally flawed in its very declaration. It has a wrong foundation, built upon a grievous error—they did not believe in the resurrection.

Notice what Jesus says to them in this rebuke, in their error, notice why they are so badly mistaken.

v.29 “You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.”

Let’s begin with the first half of that. They are mistaken because they did not know the Scriptures. Now, don’t miss the personal insult of that. The Sadducees were powerful and influential Jewish leaders, associated even with the High Priest in Acts 5. They were included in the ruling council of the Sanhedrin. But most of all, of course, they are known as deniers of the resurrection. And they were wrong, Jesus says, because they did not know the Scriptures. So let’s look at,

I. THE TRUTH OF THE RESURRECTION ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURE.

Beginning, of course, with,

A. The resurrection according to the Old Testament.

Maybe it isn’t as prominently displayed nor as clearly articulated in the Old Testament as it is in the New, but it is there! The Old Testament saints believed in the resurrection, never more clearly than one who had great reason to cherish such a hope, one who life on earth had become miserable, in God’s

providence. His name is Job, and he is remember mostly for what he was forced to endure, the pain and suffering of his own body, and the death of his family all around him.

In his initial response to his dilemma, his words were foolish even if they were understandable.

Job 3:11 “Why did I not die at birth? Why did I not perish when I came from the womb? 12 Why did the knees receive me? Or why the breasts, that I should nurse? 13 For now I would have lain still and been quiet, I would have been asleep; Then I would have been at rest...16 Or why was I not hidden like a stillborn child, Like infants who never saw light? 17 There the wicked cease from troubling, And there the weary are at rest...23 Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, And whom God has hedged in? 24 For my sighing comes before I eat, And my groanings pour out like water. 25 For the thing I greatly feared has come upon me, And what I dreaded has happened to me. 26 I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest, for trouble comes.”

Yet, despite that despair, despite the horrible advice and counsel he got from his three so-called friends, these verses pop up in the middle of the book that so thoroughly describes the trials of his life,

Job 19:25 “For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; 26 And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God, 27 Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!”

There it is. Job suffers horribly, unimaginably, in his flesh. Yet he lives with this great hope. “I know that my Redeemer lives.” But not only that. This Redeemer shall triumph. “He shall stand at last on the earth.” But not only that, Job knows that he will see

him, this great Redeemer. And he will see him with his own flesh, a resurrected flesh no longer subject to death! As I just read,

Job 19:26 “And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God, 27 Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!”

In my flesh I shall see God! This was not a mere theoretical hope, this was no abstract concept. This had everything to do with his life, his tormented life. What great faith, what great hope and confidence in the resurrection! Then there was David, about whom we read in,

Ps. 16:8 “I have set the LORD always before me; Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved. 9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will rest in hope. 10 For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. 11 You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

Sheol in Hebrew is a reference to the realm of the dead, it refers to someone who has died, much like we might refer to the grave today. The realm of the dead, in a sense, the location of the dead. And David understood something astounding. We don’t know when or how he gained that knowledge, but we know he had it, his faith was secure. So his flesh, his physical body, might die. He might enter the grave, in his flesh, he might enter the realm of Sheol, but he would not be abandoned! For this was his hope, “You will not leave my soul in Sheol.” David might die, in his flesh. He would face the grave, but God would not abandon his soul under death. There would be a resurrection! As there would be for the descendant of David would become the Messiah of all Israel, as Psalm 16:10 continues, “Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.”

So this is what David expected, about which the Sadducees knew absolutely nothing.

Ps. 16: 11 “You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

A third Old Testament reference to the resurrection is one focused even more closely that Messiah, Jesus.

Is. 9:6 “For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.”

Did you catch the end of that? The prophecy of Jesus, the son of David who would be born, would reign over a kingdom that had no end! This child, who is, of course, Jesus, would rule “Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever.”

So there is a resurrection of the dead. Death does not claim the final victory, and as we read so plainly in,

1 Cor. 15:12 “Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. 14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. 15 Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. 16 For if the dead do not rise,

then Christ is not risen. 17 And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! 18 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. 20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”

Paul goes on in that chapter with this great and glorious description,

1 Cor. 15:50 “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” 55 “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” 56 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The Sadducees didn’t believe any of that, despite their close interaction with Jesus and the availability of his teaching to them. And he himself taught the truth of the resurrection, three times recorded in the gospels for us. He spoke of his own resurrection, in no uncertain terms. And the Sadducees missed it all, not only the resurrection according to the Old Testament, but also,

B. The resurrection according to Jesus’ gospel.

Three times he declared it. First,

Mat. 16:21 “From that time Jesus began to show to His

disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. 22 Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!” 23 But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”

A second occasion is recorded for us,

Mat. 17:22 “Now while they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, 23 and they will kill Him, and the third day He will be raised up.” And they were exceedingly sorrowful.”

The third time is found in,

Mat. 20:17 “Now Jesus, going up to Jerusalem, took the twelve disciples aside on the road and said to them, 18 “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, 19 and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again.”

His disciples were slow to understand as well, Peter at first rebuking Jesus for what seemed to Peter such an outrageous suggestion. “Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!” The next time we just read that the disciples “were exceedingly sorrowful.” But the Sadducees refused to believe it at all, so they come to Jesus with their question.

v.23-28

Here, I believe, is where we see what Jesus means when he condemns the Sadducees because they do not know the power of God! Not only do they refuse to believe the Scriptures, they

deny the power of God to accomplish his great purpose and objective of redemption. Which is to say, the power of God has to do with the age to come, not simply the flesh and blood existence of this present age. Thus, the Sadducees deny,

II. THE POWER OF GOD MADE EVIDENT BY THE RESURRECTION.

That’s whey this supposed dilemma amounts to a stupid question. Who’s wife is she, after marrying each of these seven brothers after the previous one died. The foolishness of the question, the denial of the power of God is simply this, that they do not recognize nor understand,

A. The power of God to make his creatures perfect.

“Who’s wife will she be?” The question misses the point of the reality that in the age to come, after the resurrection, there will be no marriage.

v.30

That doesn’t mean that we will live without bodies, like the angels do, but that we will live without sin, like the angels do. We will be made perfect, glorified. And when we are glorified, in the resurrection, marriage becomes irrelevant. The population of heaven is set and determined. No more children. No more creatures. Just the perfect enjoyment of God for all eternity by of all of God’s people. Because we will be perfect in glory. And perfectly complete, again, no longer bearing children, no longer living as we do in this age, with the constant, ongoing birth of a children within marriage.

We shall be raised incorruptible, and in that age of glory, in that age of sinless perfection, we will live in the presence of God as the angels already do now, perfectly enjoying the fullness of uninterrupted communion and fellowship of almighty God. And

the Sadducees knew nothing of that power. Nor did they anything of the power of God to bring and end to death, such that in the resurrection, what we see and experience is,

B. The power of God to make his creatures eternal in existence.

That's what the resurrection means. That's what it does. We are raised in glory, to go back to 1 Cor. 15. "We shall be changed." That's the evidence of the power of God of which the Sadducees knew nothing. "We shall be changed."

1 Cor. 15:53 "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."

Such is the power of God!

1 Cor. 15:42 "So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. 43 It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. 44 It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. 45 And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. 46 However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. 47 The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. 48 As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. 49 And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man."

That's the power of God, the power to makes his creatures eternal in existence. The power to take a corruptible body, the flesh of dust, and raise it in incorruption. The power to take what

is mortal and make it immortal. And, you see, that is why we no longer live in marriage, since marriage and procreation belong to this present age. The age to come is new and different, for we are new and different. And God has the power to make us eternal in our existence so the question of who we were married to in this present age is totally and completely irrelevant. It no longer matters. It no longer defines us. Rather, by the power of God at work in the resurrection, we will "neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven."

Please understand, that doesn't mean we become body-less creatures. Our bodies are the focus of the resurrection. It is our bodies that will be raised in the resurrection. And in that display of God's power, we become eternal creatures. We will live forever. And so what Jesus explains so plainly to these unbelieving Sadducees is,

C. The power of God to give his creatures life.

His explanation is so easy to grasp, as long as you have faith. As long as you are willing to believe in the power of God.

v.31-32

There was, of course, no answer given.

v.33

The point is this, that God is the God of the living. God rules and reigns over creatures who are alive, not dead. So, you foolish Sadducees, if God is the God of Abraham, then Abraham must be alive! Do you see the logic of that? The declaration of power in those words. God is still the God of Abraham, so Abraham must still be alive. God is still the God of Isaac, so must still be alive. And Jacob as well. God is the God of the living, so in his power, he preserves the life of his creatures. He gives them life, and that is what the resurrection is all about—life. Eternal

life.

Life and death are what define our existence here and now. We are born, we live, and we die. But there is more to our existence than that. There is more to our relationship to God than that. God's relationship with his people is everlasting, ongoing into eternity, and in order to accomplish that, he must give us life.

And remember, in this context, what Jesus said about himself.

John 8:54 "If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God. 55 Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I say, 'I do not know Him,' I shall be a liar like you; but I do know Him and keep His word. 56 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." 57 Then the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" 58 Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."

That is Jesus declaration of life, eternal life. "I am." "I am who I am." And in his power to give life, he gives us that same existence, that same life. So when it comes to the future, we will have no age. We will have no decay, no corruption. We shall be like Jesus, not only in his perfect glory but also in his eternal existence.

This is what that existence will be like,

Rev. 21:1 "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. 2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be

with them and be their God. 4 And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." 5 Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." 6 And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts."

I say all of that this afternoon for this one particular encouragement and application, that you learn to long for that day above all others. All of your days that you live upon this earth in this age, live with this faith to look forward to the power of God made evident by the resurrection. And live with the faith of Job, declaring with equal confidence, no matter what may happen in the flesh,

Job 19:25 "For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; 26 And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God, 27 Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!"