

The Spiritual Realm 11-13-05

Matthew 22:23-33 (NIV)

²³That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. ²⁴"Teacher," they said, "Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and have children for him. ²⁵Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. ²⁶The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. ²⁷Finally, the woman died. ²⁸Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?" ²⁹Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. ³⁰At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. ³¹But about the resurrection of the dead--have you not read what God said to you, ³²"I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." ³³When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.

This took place on Tuesday or Wednesday of the week Jesus was crucified. Jesus' triumphal entry and the cleansing of the temple had challenged the leadership of Israel. Jews had gathered from all over the known world for the Passover Feast. They gathered around Jesus to hear His teaching in the courts of the temple. The Pharisees had tried to trick Him into saying something that would incriminate Him, but had been exposed in the process. Next, it was the Sadducees' turn. This is the third attempt of the day to trap Jesus with baited questions.

²³That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. The Sadducees were the religious group that Rome put in charge of the temple. They were the religious liberals of the day. They only accepted the first five books of the Old Testament. They did not believe in the resurrection, angels, or spirits. They were the ones that were hurt the most financially by Jesus' clearing out the temple merchants. (Matthew 21:12)

There has been an increase of Sadducees in the religious world of the last hundred years. They are those who have decided that there is no spiritual world. In fact, the Sadducean type philosophy has permeated seminaries has gone one-step further and denounced the miraculous. They consider themselves the educated elite who believe only the latest scientific theories. They want to be religious and respected, but it all has to do with this life. They are humanists. The only good they see in the world is that done by people like themselves who know that this is all there is and try to make the best of it for everyone's sake. (2 Corinthians 11:15)

But dig a little deeper and you will find a fear of the restrictions a spiritual reality would place on their lives. (Philippians 3:19) There is also a fear of the opinions of men. (Galatians 1:10) What would their peers think if they believed in the unseen

Commented [notes1]: 12 Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. Matthew 21:12 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 15 It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve. 2 Corinthians 11:15 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 19 Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. Philippians 3:19 (NIV)

Commented [notes4]: 10 Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ. Galatians 1:10 (NIV)

or expressed any kind of faith? There may even be an unwillingness to even consider they could be wrong. So instead of openly inquiring about the miraculous that they do not understand, they attack it as ignorant superstition. We daily accept unseen things in the physical world because we can see the affects. Why can we not accept the spiritual world when we see its affects?

²⁴"Teacher," they said, "Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and have children for him. ²⁵Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. ²⁶The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. ²⁷Finally, the woman died. ²⁸Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?" They thought they had concocted the foolproof question to prove their liberal perspective. To them, it was all quite logical. The Law of Moses commanded for the brother of one who had died, to take the dead brother's wife as his own and name their first male child after the deceased brother. (Deuteronomy 25:5-6) The widow would be cared for, the property would stay in the family, and the deceased would be remembered. (Ruth 4:5)

In the Sadducees' scenario, seven brothers died, one after the other. Each married the widow of the first one. Since all seven married her, if there was a resurrection, whose wife would she be then? In their minds, they had just disproved much of Jesus' teaching, and therefore discredited Him. They couldn't see how He could possibly answer them. I imagine they had tried it on the Pharisees who believed in resurrection, and found them unable to answer.

Before we go to Jesus' answer, I want us to consider again the hardness of the heart of man. These religious leaders had seen miracles performed. They knew of blind people that received their sight. They had heard of the dead raised to life. They saw tax collectors' and prostitutes' lives transformed, but they refused to believe. Instead of coming to Jesus to learn, they came to attack. (Psalm 37:32)

²⁹Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. For every soul that refuses to accept the fact that life does not end at physical death, Jesus has this answer. Here is heaven's wake up call to the liberal theologians that have abandoned resurrection. Jesus is saying, "The reason you are in error is because, number one, you don't know the Scriptures." To tell these learned men they didn't know the Scriptures would be like telling your chemistry professor that he doesn't know the Periodic Table. The Law of Moses was their main study. But Jesus is saying that they didn't know the Scriptures. In saying they didn't know the Scriptures, Jesus is saying more than just intellectually perceiving what was written. (1 John 2:5-6) Some men know their wife. Other men know their wife. Some know their habits, patterns, and history, and others know their favorite color, their hopes, dreams, and their very heart.

Commented [notes5]: 5 If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her.

6 The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.

Deuteronomy 25:5-6 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: 5 Then Boaz said, "On the day you buy the land from Naomi and from Ruth the Moabitess, you acquire the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property." Ruth 4:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: 32 The wicked lie in wait for the righteous, seeking their very lives; Psalms 37:32 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: 5 But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: 6 Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:5-6 (NIV)

How do you know the Scriptures? (1 John 3:24) You may be able to quote verses, give their reference, even teach a class on the passage, but do you know them? Are you intimate with them? Do they utter God's heart to you? Do they whisper words of wisdom and love to you as you go through your day, and counsel you when you face difficult situations? (Psalm 119:24)

Commented [notes9]: 24 Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.
1 John 3:24 (NIV)

Jesus will explain what it was they didn't know in the next verse, but he also said they did not know the power of God. Sometimes people ask me about cremation. "Is it okay for Christians to be cremated? After all, we are going to be raised in the last day." They don't know the power of God! How many saints were put to the torch? How many were eaten by lions? Do you think God is going to have a problem resurrecting their bodies? (1 Corinthians 15:51-52) For the omnipotent God, who spoke everything into existence, to gather the molecules that once made up your body and rearrange them in a way that can survive the spiritual realm for all eternity is all in a days work. Do you really think that the One who said, "Let there be light!" will have a hard time with your resurrection if you should be eaten by sharks? (Genesis 1:3) You don't know the power of God.

Commented [notes10]: 24 Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors.
Psalms 119:24 (NIV)

Peter and Jude both predicted that people would scoff at resurrection. (2 Peter 3:3-4 Jude 1:18) They knew the day was coming when people would only believe in what they can see. Why are people unwilling to believe in the power of God? They may know nothing about God and be ignorant of His power. They may be refusing to believe because they prefer their own gods, the things their heart lusts after. They may be refusing to believe the picture in creation that clearly gives us an illustration of resurrection, such as the burial of seeds, or the metamorphosis in cocoons. (1 Corinthians 15:36-38) Or they may believe, but be weak in faith. All they can imagine is limited to the laws of this physical world.

Commented [notes11]: 51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed--
52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.
1 Corinthians 15:51-52 (NIV)

Commented [notes12]: 3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.
Genesis 1:3 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: 3 First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires.
4 They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."
2 Peter 3:3-4 (NIV)

Commented [notes14]: 18 They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires."
Jude 1:18 (NIV)

It may be hard to describe or put into words, but there is a spiritual world all around us. This December, C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, Witch, and Wardrobe* will be in theaters. In the story, four children find that by going through a wardrobe that they enter into another world. It is a world that has a time independent of our world. They can spend years there and only have been away for a moment in our time. It is a fantasy, but it is based on the reality that we are surrounded by a spiritual world that we cannot see. Those who have gone before are watching us as if we are in an arena. (Hebrews 12:1) Occasionally a prophet like Ezekiel, Elisha or John are allowed a glimpse into that world and left us written records of what they saw and how it affected our world. There are more than human beings attending our worship services. If only our eyes could be opened for a moment, like Elisha prayed for his servant. (2 Kings 6:17) What we would see all around us?

Commented [notes15]: 36 How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.
37 When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else.
38 But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body.
1 Corinthians 15:36-38 (NIV)

Commented [notes16]: 1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.
Hebrews 12:1 (NIV)

³⁰At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. One of the Sadducee's problems was that they thought about the next life like we think of this one. When it comes to the spiritual realm, we really have so little we can relate to. One of the common expressions of those who have received a glimpse of the other world is that they cannot find

Commented [notes17]: 17 And Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.
2 Kings 6:17 (NIV)

words to describe it. That is because our vocabulary is built around what we experience in this world. The Sadducees were thinking the next world was going to be very much like this one, just a little better.

What did Jesus mean when He said that we would be like the angels in heaven? I can only guess from passages about angels in Scripture that we will be so overwhelmed with the presence of the glorified Christ that we will be worshipping with our whole being. (Revelation 4:8-11) Our attention will be fixed on Him. Jesus is the adoration of the angels. They are totally submitted to Him. (Psalm 103:20) They aren't worried about their relationship to one another. In joyful submission and service to Him, they are all in complete unity.

Have you ever met someone that had the exact same love for something that you did? You are always on the same page, always together in your desires, and even see things the same because of your common passion. Our passion will be Jesus, the bridegroom. You won't be looking for a mate that might meet your needs, Jesus will be all you need. (Philippians 4:19)

To go on and describe it more than that would be futile. I would have to relate it to things in this world and that would confuse the issue because it is too unlike this world. (Ephesians 3:20) That is the mistake the Sadducees were making. I can say that you will be fully satisfied with Christ. You won't be bored. If we are like angels, we will be busy. We will have assignments.

³¹But about the resurrection of the dead--have you not read what God said to you, ³²I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." Jesus first addressed their refusal to believe in the spiritual realm and their misunderstanding of how we would be in heaven. You can really see how pathetic man can be in his pride. Remember, they came with a question that they thought was sure to trip Jesus up. Instead, Jesus patiently corrected them and even pointed out why they had come up with such a ridiculous argument, not knowing the Scriptures or the power of God.

Now, Jesus is addressing the particular issue they were hung up on, resurrection. Since they only believe in the books of Moses, Jesus quoted from the books of Moses. There is that heart-piercing introduction, "have you not read..." God introduces Himself in the Torah as the God of the patriarchs. (Exodus 3:6) If there is no resurrection He would have to say, "I was the God of the patriarchs." They are alive, so He says that He is their God, presently.

God entered into a relationship with them, and that relationship is not only for the short period of life on this earth, it is for eternity. His promises to us don't end at our death, they are forever because He is forever. The author of Hebrews tells us that these patriarchs were seeking their heavenly home. (Hebrews 11:13-16) They weren't satisfied with this world.

Commented [notes18]: 8 Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come."
9 Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever,
10 the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:
11 "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."
Revelation 4:8-11 (NIV)

Commented [notes19]: 20 Praise the LORD, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word.
Psalms 103:20 (NIV)

Commented [notes20]: 19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.
Philippians 4:19 (NIV)

Commented [notes21]: Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to his power that is at work within us.
Ephesians 3:20 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.
Exodus 3:6 (NIV)

Commented [notes23]: 13 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.
14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own.
15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return.
16 Instead, they were longing for a better country--a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.
Hebrews 11:13-16 (NIV)

God is not the God of the dead but of the living. When we enter into a relationship with God, we have eternal life. (John 10:10) Because God is eternal and active, God's relationships are eternal and active. If you are not in an active relationship with God, do you possess eternal life? It is the active sense of being in relationship with our God that means we will live eternally. Jesus said He is resurrection, and He is life. (John 11:25) God is the God of those who have entered into life. (1 Corinthians 15:22) And with those arguments, Jesus silenced the best that the Sadducees could throw at Him.

Commented [notes24]: 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.
John 10:10 (NIV)

Commented [notes25]: 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies;
John 11:25 (NIV)

Commented [notes26]: 22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.
1 Corinthians 15:22 (NIV)

After all the evidence that the life of Jesus gave them, they would not even consider His words. Why is it so hard for man to accept that there is a spiritual world?

By its very nature of permanence, the spiritual world supersedes and becomes much more important than the physical and dying world. Therefore, the spiritual world demands that man give preeminence to it. It is these demands that man rebels against. Therefore...

- a scientific society questions what it cannot prove.
- a materialistic society questions what it cannot use to satisfy its lust for more.
- an immoral society questions what it fears will correct its behavior.
- a worldly society questions what it fears will restrain its pleasure.
- a power society questions what it fears will loosen its grip and lessen its authority."

—Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible – Commentary

³³*When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.*

They were all astonished at the power and conviction of Jesus' response. Believers were astonished at the wonder of the spiritual world in which God would love us enough to desire to be in an eternal relationship with us. Unbelievers were astonished that anyone could believe in a spiritual world and resurrection. Each of us stands on one side of that fence or the other. To those of us that believe, drink deeply of that wonder. Don't try to define it in terms of this world. Know that it so much greater than we could possibly imagine. To those who are unbelievers I just have one question. How do you explain the life and words of Jesus?

Friends, we have seen before how easy it is to have an overly flattering view of self. In light of our passage today we should ask ourselves if we know, really know, the Scriptures and the power of God? Are we in an active relationship with Life Himself? Whoever would please God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who earnestly seek Him, seek to know Him as life evermore. (Hebrews 11:6)

Commented [notes27]: 6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.
Hebrews 11:6 (NIV)