

INTRODUCTION

- In the passage we come to this morning, we are still with the Lord Jesus in His final week before His crucifixion after entering Jerusalem by the triumphal entry. The religious leadership of Israel have set themselves against Him to destroy Him, and are engaged in a series of attempts to turn the tide of His popularity with the people.

EXPOSITION

I. THE QUESTION ASKED

A. Who Were the Sadducees? – v.27 (see also Acts 2:38)

- The Sadducees were one of the major religious sects of Jesus' day, though not as popular or influential. One of their key teachings is found in this verse, that is that they denied that there is a resurrection. This refers to their denial that after death there is anything else to be expected. They held to a very "this world" view of religion. While they did not outright deny the existence of God, they did deny that God would one day in the future raise people from the dead, have a future judgment, or that there was a future world.
- Acts 23:8 also tells us two more things that they denied, contrary to orthodox Judaism of that day. They said there was no such thing as angels. Angels in Scripture are revealed as real, spiritual, and personal beings created by God that inhabit the universe and a part of the unseen world that exists in parallel with the seen world. The existence of such beings the Sadducees denied.
- We are also told in this verse that they denied the "spirit." They believed that there is no immaterial part of man, nothing other than what is material. There is no spirit defined as a part of man that can exist apart from the body. The consequence of this was that when a person dies, there is no afterlife. There is no conscious existence, there is no future resurrection.
- What we also learn about them from writings outside of Scripture is that they believed that God is only far off creator who created the world, set it in action with sets of laws, and left men with a freewill to either benefit from obeying those laws or suffer the consequences of not living according to them. In other words, God was not a personal God who acts in human history and responds to prayers and has promised a future reward or punishment for their actions in this life. These men were the deists and skeptics of their day, essentially denying anything supernatural other than a far off God.
- This group was probably very influenced by the Greek philosophy of their day, including Platonism which said that this material world is inherently evil, and that even our bodies are part of a corruption that would not be reversed.
- Members of this group were part of the Sanhedrin, the official religious governing body.

B. The Scenario – vv.28-32

- These men sought to discredit Jesus as a teacher by setting up a hypothetical situation to show that His teachings are wrong, especially the belief that there will be a future physical resurrection. Jesus taught throughout His ministry the reality of a future resurrection and judgment (see John 5:28-29). This He had in common with the Pharisees. In asking this question, they are not only trying to discredit Jesus and His teachings, but at the same time attacking their theological enemies, the Pharisees, in essence "killing two birds with one stone."
- Their approach is to try to pit something which Moses taught in regards to marriage with the idea of resurrection, and how the two contradicted one another. They say "Teacher, Moses wrote to us that if a man's brother dies, having a wife, and he dies without children, his brother should take his wife and raise up offspring for his brother." In this, they are correct. This is found in Deuteronomy 25:5-10. That passage taught that if two brothers dwelt together, and one of the brothers was married and died without having a son to carry on his name, that the other brother was to take the woman as his wife and the firstborn was to be considered his brother's heir and namesake. It was understood then that the following children were considered the living brother's offspring. To not do this was considered a disgrace.
- Then the Sadducees reason from this and set up a theoretical situation: there is a family with 7 brothers, and one of the brothers marry, but never has children. So one of the brothers follows this directive and marries her. At this point they could have stopped and asked their question, and it would have been sufficient. But as often happens with those who want to set up scenarios, they push the situation to an extreme. In their hypothetical situation, that 2nd brother dies with no children. So the next does the same, the same happens...then the next...all the way through to all seven of the brothers. After all of this, the wife dies as well.

C. The Dilemma – v.33

- This is where the Sadducees pose their dilemma. Supposing that, from your viewpoint Jesus, there is a future physical resurrection, whose wife will she be? Will she then have seven husbands? They assume marriage is an everlasting covenant and relationship, even in the world to come.
- The dilemma is to make Jesus' teaching (and the Pharisees) to look ridiculous.

II. THE ANSWER GIVEN

A. THEIR FUNDAMENTAL ERRORS (Matthew 22:29 and Mark 12:24)

- There is a part of Jesus' response that Luke does not give us here, but is found in both Matthew and Mark's account. He says "You are mistaken, not knowing..." then gives two things that they do not understand.
- 1.) The Scripture – this would seem like an absurd claim to the Sadducees. These men were quoting Scripture, and would use it quite freely. But Jesus nevertheless points out that they have this fatal mistake. It is one thing to know them in the sense of having information stored up in the head. It is another to be thoroughly shaped by them, believing them, and seeing them as non-contradictory. These men used Scripture only to prove their favorite doctrines, but were not submissive to them.
- 2.) The power of God – These men are essentially rationalists. Things like the reality of an unseen spiritual realm (including angels and the spirits of men) and a future resurrection of all people did not coincide with their human reasoning. They had never experienced such things, and such things were to them like fairy tales and myths. Even their God was shaped by human reason, and therefore was not a God who could act in human history in any real way. Fundamentally, they did not believe in an infinite-personal God who is all powerful and acts according to His will in ways that were supernatural.

B. THEIR ERROR IN ASSUMPTION – vv.34-36

- Jesus then shows how their reasoning itself was faulty, primarily due to an assumption they were making. That assumption was that God's order for this life is the same for the life to come, particularly that the nature of relationships would be the same in both. He makes statements about the differences (in relation to their question) between this life and the life to come, and He does so using the framework of "two ages."
- He says "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage." By "sons of this age", he is speaking about humanity in general. When He speaks of "marrying", he is likely referring to men, and "given in marriage" refers to women. In the present order of things, as the world is, marriage is an ordinary phenomenon. This was established in creation, and to the end of the age will be a part of life.
- Then he makes a distinction by referring to "those who are counted worthy to attain that age." He doesn't give an explanation to how one is counted worthy to attain that age, but simply refers to that fact in passing. With the whole of Scripture we understand that this refers to those who, through the merit of Jesus Christ alone, are counted worthy. An example of this is found in Colossians 1:12 where it says we are to give thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. We are counted worthy as we with the empty hands of faith accept Christ's righteousness, who then fully qualifies us for the future inheritance of the life to come. Jesus refers to this as well in our verse when He mentions "the resurrection from the dead." This is the promise of future blessing and hope.
- Notice then that he states two things about such people. The first is that they "neither marry nor are given in marriage." The assumption that the Sadducees made was that the relationship of marriage and family was just the same as in the present age (which is the same assumption made by Mormons). But Jesus explicitly says that this will not be the case for those who are raised from the dead.
- The second thing He says is "nor can they die anymore." One of the reasons for marriage in this world is for the propagation of human children to fill the earth and have dominion, filling the earth with the image of God. This is necessary because otherwise, we would die out. (NOTE: The only appropriate context in this world for having of children is within the marriage covenant.) Jesus is saying at least in part that in the future world, where people do not die, there will be no need to replenish.
- He then makes a comparison by relating such people to the angels (which the Sadducees denied), saying that in some way they are equal to them. He isn't saying that in every way they are like angels (only spiritual beings, otherwise there would be no resurrection of the body). But they are beings that, since they do not die, do not need to replenish. The future age will be an age populated by eternal beings, humans made perfect, who will suffer and die no long.

C. THEIR ERROR FROM SCRIPTURE – vv.37-38

- Jesus then reasons with them in another way, by quoting Moses himself. (It should be noted that though in our day liberal Christians deny that Moses is the author of the first five books of the Bible, Jesus affirms his authorship.) He refers to Moses' account of the burning bush, where God revealed Himself in preparation for the Exodus of Israel from Egypt (found in Exodus 3). In summary, Jesus argues that since God reveals Himself to Moses as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (who had long since died), that these three were still living. God is not the God of dead men who no longer existed, but of men living and waiting to receive the fulfillment of the promises God made to them. Jesus makes add the commentary to the passage "For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him."

III. THE RESPONSE – v.39-40

- We are told that some of the scribes, who were likely of the sect of the Pharisees, responded by saying "Teacher, You have spoken well." They were in agreement with His response, and were probably at least somewhat appreciative of the thoroughly biblical answer that He gave the Sadducees (who were against them).
- Then we are told that "after that they dared not question Him anymore." This is probably referring back to the Sadducees, who realized that they could not answer Him. They had sought to make Him look like a fool, and now they felt the sting of Jesus' perfect wisdom, and decided that they dare not try that again.

- At this point Luke is telling us that every major sect/group has sought to discredit Jesus, and they have all failed. If they are to take Him, it won't be by this method. He has anticipated, answered, and refuted them at every step.

APPLICATION

While the sect of the Sadducees has passed away, their basic beliefs have not. Let us beware of the errors of the Sadducees (whether in ourselves or in others).

- 1.) The error of ignorance of the Scriptures – Ignorance through lack of knowing the Bible. Ignorance through lack of submission (though there may be much "knowledge" about it).
- 2.) The error of ignorance of the power of God – Essentially rationalism. We believe in a supernatural God, who works supernaturally and answers prayer. This will significantly effect our prayer life, and belief that God is with us, our belief that we can change.
- 3.) The error of uniformity - assuming that the future world is exactly like the present. There is certainly a continuity, but there is also a discontinuity.
- 4.) The error of pitting Scripture against Scripture – All of Scripture is the Word of God, the Word of Christ. It is one thing, when we find passages that are hard to reconcile, to come to God in the spirit of humility as ask for help in understanding how the things fit together. This is the opposite of a skeptical mentality, set to show how Scripture contradicts itself. God resists the proud, but gives grace (and understanding) to the humble.