

A Question about the Resurrection

Matthew 22:23-33

Halifax: 1 October 2006

Introduction:

We are now at that place in Matthew's gospel where he tells us about the different parties that came to question Jesus.

- These Jewish leaders came just a few days before they arrested Jesus and crucified Him.
- They had been growing increasingly discontent with Jesus.
 - He had presumed to ride into Jerusalem on a donkey and had allowed the people to speak of Him as the Messiah who saves!
 - Then He had entered into the temple court and had driven out the moneychangers and those who sold sacrificial animals.
 - The leaders were now coming at Him with questions to try to find some way to discredit Him—either by stumping Him or by finding some thing to accuse Him about.
- The Pharisees and the Herodians had just come and questioned Him about taxes...
 - They had failed...
- Now it is the Sadducees' turn to come.
 - They come to Him with a question about the resurrection.
 - Matthew tells us that they are the ones "who say there is no resurrection."
 - Most of the other Jewish sects and parties affirmed the resurrection, but the Sadducees denied it.

I. Oh my friends, I tell you, the world is full of Sadducees!

- Now of course, I don't mean by that that there are a lot of people who are actually members of the Jewish sect of the Sadducees...
 - But I mean that the vast majority of people in this world live their lives as if there is no resurrection.
 - They live as if this present world that is passing away is all there is!
 - They have nothing else to live for!
 - In their minds, if any blessing is to be found, it is to be found in this life.
 - All the happiness they will ever have, they will have here and now.
 - How sad!
- Children, you can remember this...

- The Sadducees are sad you see—because they don't believe that there is a heaven—they don't believe that we will be raised from the dead.
- Sadducees come in all shapes and sizes.

A. There are both **open Sadducees** and **hypocritical Sadducees**.

1. **Open Sadducees** are those liberal ministers and some neo-orthodox, those atheists and secularists, who openly deny the resurrection.

- Like the men who came to Jesus, they will argue with you and **tell you** that there is no resurrection.
 - The practical minded ones argue that it is not good to believe in a resurrection because when one is heavenly minded he is no earthly good...
 - The more scholarly types will use arguments to try to deny life after death.
 - Some of them will say that they just don't know...
 - But whatever the case, the open Sadducee will tell you that he is not living for any after life but this present life...
 - He will tell you that he has his portion in this life and not in the life to come.

2. But the hypocritical Sadducee is the one who says that there is indeed a resurrection, or at least an afterlife...

a. But then when you watch him,

- you see that he doesn't really live any different than the open Sadducee who claims to have his reward in this world.
- He says that he believes in the resurrection,
 - but when it comes to denying something in this life in deference to the life to come, you will find that he does not do it.
 - When it prays, His desires never rise beyond health, houses, and land.
 - When there is some suffering or difficulty in this life, you see that he falls apart...
 - He cannot honestly say of the journey to heaven, "It were a well spent journey though seven deaths lay between"

b. You who claim to believe in the resurrection, tell me... do you live like it is so, or do you live like a Sadducee?

- How disappointed are you when you don't get what you want in this world?
- How ready are you to sacrifice now in view of the world to come?

- Are you preparing for eternity, or are you just preparing your little nest for this world?
 - Do you look at the things that are temporary, or the things that are eternal?
 - It's one thing to profess, "I believe in the resurrection,"
 - but it is quite another to live as if you do.
- c. Of course there are degrees to this problem, but what a pull the world has on us!
- 1) Very few people—indeed, very few Christians, are living for what God has promised.
 - Most are living for what they can get here and now.
 - In fact, it is looked down on to live for what is promised.
 - All this is very contagious.
 - It rubs off on us and we start to think and live the same way the world does, even when we know better.

TRANS> And to add further to our difficulties,

- 2) We are really quite prosperous—
 - even the poorest among us has running water right in our houses—and shelter from the wind and rain and cold.
 - We all have more than one set of clothes to wear and a tremendous variety of foods to eat.
 - And so it is easy for us to find ourselves living like Sadducees...
 - with all of our focus on the here and now...
 - finding (or at least looking) for all our satisfaction here.

TRANS> Now I suppose I **could** say it's worse to be an open Sadducee who actually **says** that there is no resurrection than a hypocritical Sadducee...

- But I'm not sure about that!
 - It could be argued that it is worse to **say** you believe in the resurrection and the afterlife—and then to **live** only for this life!
 - To do that is to have your life completely disconnected with what you **say** you believe.
 - Let God's Spirit search you...
 - Consider to what degree this may be true of you!
- Now let us consider some other varieties of Sadducee...

B. There are young Sadducees and old Sadducees.

1. I believe that there are, in fact, very young Sadducees...
 - a. Indeed, we come from the womb looking for treasure in this world!
 - Baby's want immediate gratification.
 - It has been hammered into us that this is just natural for children to be demanding and self centred,
 - but we need to understand that children would not be like this if they were not born in sin.
 - But actually, I agree with modern psychology that it is natural,
 - I differ with the notion that natural is always good.
 - It natural for human beings to sin, but that does not make it good.
 - The only baby who was ever by nature what a human being ought to be was our Lord Jesus.
 - All others were naturally corrupted.
 - b. Any parent can see that there is a natural selfishness in his child that focuses on treasure in this world...
 - Just take a child's favourite toy away from him, and it is a major crisis...
 - It is as if his whole world comes to an end!
 - Like a good Sadducee, all he has is this world.
2. But having spoken this way, you might think that these **young** Sadducees would grow out of it...
 - But the truth is they don't.
 - Young Sadducees grow up to be old Sadducees unless God's sanctifying grace transforms them.
 - They usually (though not always) learn ways to express their selfishness that don't get them in as much disfavour with others,
 - but at the bottom of it all,
 - they are still looking for their portion in this life and are sometimes very bitter when old age begins to cause their life to slip away.

TRANS> And this suggests to us the next category

C. There are **satisfied Sadducees and dissatisfied Sadducees**.

1. A **satisfied Sadducee** is one who is happy with whatever he has obtained in this world...

- a. There is no denying it... God has given us many very pleasant and enjoyable things even in this fallen world!
 - I anticipate that in a little while, at noon... we are going to have wonderful dinner...
 - And how pleasant some of us will find each other's company!
 - Such things are good and pleasing and God calls them so...
- b. But a satisfied Sadducee is the one who finds his portion in this life and it is enough for him.
 - It is not surprising to know that the sect of Sadducees in the Bible included the most wealthy and successful people in Israel.
 - They were known to look down their noses at the poor or the infirm... or those who were not as blessed in this world.
 - They had sharp tongues and were never afraid to through out insulting comments to those less fortunate...
 - They loved to say things like:
 - "You know nothing at all,"
 - or "You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?"

TRANS> But certainly not all satisfied Sadducees are rich...

- c. There are Sadducees who enjoy the simple life and find all their happiness in that...
 - Perhaps another is satisfied with his achievements, small or great, and yet another is satisfied with a great social life, and still another with the beauty of nature...
 - For whatever reason they are happy.
- 2. But then there are other Sadducees who are never satisfied
 - Just like the satisfied ones, they only have hope in this world,
 - but they find that the world always let them down...
 - and their frustration rises **because** they have no other hope.
 - a. They grumble and complain and carry on, either openly or in their hearts...
 - They are greatly disappointed when they don't advance...
 - and they are just as disappointed when they do and discover that it's not so great at the top.
 - They are never satisfied with this world, but they pursue nothing else but this world.

- b. They are just the opposite of the satisfied Sadducee,
 - but yet they are just the same in that they have their portion only this life.
3. Now I hope this makes it clear to you...
- The problem with the Sadducee is not that he is unhappy...
 - An unhappy Sadducee is perhaps more unpleasant for us,
 - But the condition of the happy Sadducee is just as serious as that of the unhappy Sadducee...
 - The problem is that both look for his happiness in this present world instead of in God's promises.
 - There are certain forms of piety that make a virtue out of being always happy and content, and other forms that make a virtue out of always being dissatisfied with this world.
 - The truth is that our satisfaction ought to come from what God has promised...
 - on the one hand, deliverance from this present evil world of sin and death...
 - on the other hand, the inheritance of this world without the corruption.
 - Hope in God's promises is the basis for godliness with contentment which is great gain!

TRANS> So being a Sadducees does not necessarily mean that you are satisfied with this world—it only means that you are looking to this world for your satisfaction...

- Moving on to the next category, consider that:

D. There are moral Sadducees and non-moral Sadducees.

- Have you ever thought about that?
1. The moral Sadducee looks for his portion in this world through moral means...
 - a. He believes that he will be happier in this world if he is honest and fair and kind...
 - b. He may even seek to obey the Ten Commandments...
 - He may try to love his neighbour and he may be full of all sorts of good deeds...
 - a generous, giving, person who finds delight in serving others.
 - He may be a model citizen.
 2. Opposite to this moral Sadducee is the non-moral Sadducee...

- He is a fellow who looks to find happiness in this world by following his passions.
 - He may pursue happiness through partying, carousing, fornication, or riches gotten by deceit and robbery.
 - He may be very disciplined (as the hard-nosed business man) or he may be very undisciplined (as the gutter drunk),
 - but because his portion is in this life only, he has no hesitation about breaking the rules if he thinks it will make him happy.

TRANS> Now let's move on to the last category we will consider...

E. There are religious Sadducees and non-religious Sadducees.

1. Non-religious Sadducees are the ones who believe that their happiness in this world has nothing to do with God...
 - God does not, in other words, give them the blessing they seek in this world.
 - It is something that comes to them either through luck, cleverness, or hard work—or by some combination of these.
 - They never pray unless it is just to fit in socially—which is not, of course, real prayer.
2. Religious Sadducees, on the other hand, are the ones who believe that God gives them the blessings they are looking for in this world!
 - They pray to Him to give them whatever it is they seek in this world—riches, morality, health, relationships...
 - They may even pray a lot—and give offerings and make sacrifices—but their prayers are always concerning earthly things.
 - Their problem is not that they see that all these things come from God...
 - Their problem is that they only look for the treasures of earth and ignore the promise of God for eternal things.
 - They will stay up all night praying for a car, but they will not stay up praying for holiness.

TRANS> The problem with the Sadducee is the same in every one of these categories...

- The problem is that the Sadducee has His portion in this world instead of in what God has promised.
 - Christian brothers and sisters,
 - we all do this **far** more than we ought!

- We need to hear what our Lord says...

II. Jesus puts His finger on what is wrong with Sadducees...

A. He says, "You are mistaken, not knowing the scriptures or the power of God."

1. "Not knowing the scriptures" means that you, if you are a Sadducee, do not understand the magnitude of what God has promised in His word.
 - a. It means you look at the promises of God in a very superficial way so as to think that you have hope only in this life!
 - You are not like Abraham who looked for city whose builder and maker is God.
 - The scripture says:
 - Hebrews 11:8-10: By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as *in* a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker *is* God.
 - Think about Abraham...
 - About all he got in the land of promise was a place to bury his dead wife!
 - What kind of an inheritance is that!
 - Was he a fool who followed God and only got saw dust?
 - Not at all--
 - Abraham understood that God had promised him far more than what he was to obtain in this world...
 - God had even told him that his descendents would be slaves in Egypt...
 - It was not just blessings that would come to some of his distant descendants that Abraham desired...
 - It was blessing that would come to **him**.
 - He himself wanted to inherit the city of God,
 - and the city of God was not what he had in this life!
 - and it would not even come for hundreds of years.
- b. So you see, this is an encouragement to look at the fullness of God's promises in the Scriptures!
 - When God promises us peace, it is eternal peace...

- When He promises us new life, it is absolute perfection in holiness and love...
- When He promises us healing, it is absolute health without death or pain or suffering of any kind...
- When He promises a loving community, it is a community without any selfishness or slackness or anything that falls short of perfection.

TRANS> You are mistaken if you are a Sadducee because you don't know the scriptures...

- you don't understand what God has promised...
 - that's the first mistake Jesus shows you...
 - and secondly,
2. He says you are mistaken, if you are a Sadducee, because you do not know the power of God.
- a. Really, at the bottom of the Sadducee, he just does not think God is really able to do very much...
 - He says, "How can the dead be raised?"
 - "The body is decomposed—and it is eaten by wild animals or worms...it may be scattered all over the place..."
 - "How can it be raised up?"
 - b. What a huge problem this is in our society!
 - 1) There is a very widespread denial of the power of God!
 - The very creation itself testifies to the power of God...
 - But fools who do want to answer to such a great God have given us ridiculous theories that say everything was self-generated!
 - If you really stop and think about it, it is absurd beyond belief!
 - Talk about a blind leap of faith!
 - Biblical faith is belief in what God has spoken, being testified by prophets who performed signs and wonders...
 - but this leap of faith that we are asked to make today...
 - My—what a blind leap it is!
 - Self-generation is just plain absurd!
 - It is to say that something that is not just began to be!

2) But how much this denial of the power of God in creation has made Sadducees out of us—that is—persons who do not believe in the resurrection!

- If you do not believe that God made the world,
 - you may have trouble believing that He can resurrect us...
- But if you believe that God made the world,
 - it is not at all hard to believe that He can restore the world to perfection as He has promised.
 - Then, it is no longer a question of His power!

TRANS> So to whatever extent you deny the resurrection, Jesus says your problem is that you don't know the scriptures or the power of God...

B. Now look at how Jesus deals with the foolish objection of these Sadducees...

1. He dismisses their foolish little scenario with a single stroke...
 - a. They had told this little story about the man with seven brothers who died and whose brothers married his wife in accordance with the law of Moses...
 - and how one after another died until at last all seven had married her...
 - Then they ask the question that was supposed to stump Jesus...
 - “Whose wife will she be in the resurrection?”
 - “Imagine, a wife with seven husbands!”
 - “Surely there can be no resurrection-”
 - “Ha ha! we got Him now!” they thought.
 - b. But Jesus simply informs them that in heaven things won't be the same...
 - There won't be marriage as we know it now, but we will be like the angels.
 - Surely it is logical to suppose that in the resurrection there will be changes to things.
 - Their little story has no weight.

TRANS> But having swept away their little objection,

- Jesus then goes to the real heart of the matter...
 - People can raise their silly little objections all day, but the real issue has to do with coming to grips with what the Bible says and with what God is able to do.

2. And so Jesus goes to the often repeated statement in the Old Testament where God says,
 - a. I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob long after Abraham, Isaac and Jacob have died...
 - And He adds, “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.”
 - b. This was one of those moments when it became perfectly clear that these Sadducees who stood before Jesus had completely lost sight of the big picture when they read God’s word!
 - 1) The whole Old Testament is about God blessing His chosen people...
 - And if the Sadducees are correct that there is no resurrection,
 - then God did not do what He promised!
 - They all lived and died without receiving what was promised.
 - These Sadducees, who claimed to believe in the first five books of the Bible, had completely misunderstood the whole message of those books!
 - They had looked at God’s Covenant in an absurdly superficial way!
 - 2) The writer of Hebrews puts it in perfect perspective when he says of the Old Testament believers,
 - Hebrews 11:13-16: These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that *country* from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly *country*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.
 - Do you see how plainly this says it?
 - “They did not receive the promises.”
 - They did not even begin to receive the promises!
 - Eye has not see or ear heard what God has prepared for those that love Him!
 - Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were not fools...
 - They did not think that God was through with them when they died!

- They were looking for better things—much better things than what they had in this world!
 - “They desire a better, that is, a heavenly country!”
- But verse 16 really drives home the point...
 - It says,
 - “Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.”
 - Do you see what this is saying?
 - If Abraham received all that God had to give him during his time on earth,
 - God would have been ashamed to have been called his God!
 - It has to make a difference for God to be someone’s God or God has nothing to give!
 - But Abraham was not that different than anyone else as far as the reward he received in this life...
 - Nor was Isaac all that different from Ishmael...
 - Nor was Jacob all that different from Esau...
 - What made them different was:
 - What God had promised!
 - What God was **going** to do!
 - If He had had nothing more to do for them than what He did while they were on earth,
 - He would have been ashamed to say that He was their God!
 - God has a **whole** lot more in store for His people than what He does for them in this present world!
 - His very honour depends on it!
 - Therefore, it means **everything** for Him to say to you that He is your God!

III. Consider what it means for God to say that He is your God!

A. It means that you are totally set apart from those who are not His own...

1. In the Bible, God speaks about those that are His people and those that are not His people.

- a. Certainly, there is a sense in which God is everyone's God because He is the only Maker, the only Provider, and the only Judge...
 - We are all His offspring.
 - b. But in another sense,
 - The human race has been separated from God by sin.
 - The whole body of mankind has been cut off from God by guilt and rebellion.
 - God is not our God and we are not His people.
 - He has rejected us and declared that we are not His people and that He will bring us to everlasting misery.
 - c. And this is true of every one of us unless and until God calls us to Himself.
 - Then we are set apart from the rest of the world to be His people.
 - In taking us to be His people, He promises to be our God...
 - He promises that He will give us a new heart to love Him and obey Him forever,
 - and He promises that He will pardon all our sins so that we will not be condemned with those who are not His people.
2. The difference between those who are His people and those who are not His people is very great...
- In fact, it is the most radical division in the whole human race.
 - But this difference will not be so visible and evident **in this world** until the day of Judgement.
 - a. On that Day, everyone will be resurrected,
 - Everyone's bodies will be raised from the dead and everyone will appear before God's Throne.
 - But those who have God as their God will be resurrected to life and blessing,
 - and those who do not have God as their God will be resurrected to everlasting misery and destruction.
 - The difference will be very pronounced, very permanent and very extreme.
 - b. In fact, God will deliberately direct His Almighty power to bless those who are His people and to curse those who are not His people.
 - 1) If you have God as your God,

- that means that His divine power will be directed to do you good and to make you happy and holy.
 - Your body will be changed so that you will never again suffer.
 - Your heart will be changed so that you will never again sin.
 - And you will live in community of perfect love that finds unimaginable delight in the living God.
 - God will actually bring you into the joyful, holy, loving, eternal fellowship of His very own household in heaven!
- God will Himself off by doing abundant good for us!
 - He will be deliberately revealing the abundance of grace by being kind to you.
 - What a marvellous hope and future belongs to you if He is your God!

2) But if you are not one of God's people,

- Then that same divine power will be unleashed in wrath and judgement upon you.
 - God will display His holy justice and vindictive wrath upon your sin.
 - It will be a day of inexpressible terror and anguish,
 - and what will make it all the worse,
 - it will be clear in that day that His judgement is fully justified because we will see His glory.

TRANS> So you see that it makes all the difference to have Him as your God, and this difference will be most conspicuously evident on the day of judgement.

- But don't misunderstand...

B. There is indeed a great difference in you as soon as God takes you to be His own.

1. Immediately, your sins are pardoned and Christ's righteousness is imputed to you.

- You may have differing degrees of comfort and assurance,
 - but if you are God's, you know that Christ has been given for sin and that God has accepted His sacrifice.
- And the comfort and assurance that this is grows as you continue to pray, as you continue to receive God's word, and as you continue to worship Him with His people.
 - As you grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ,

- you realise more and more what a wondrous thing He has done in taking away your sins...
- and you realise from what great judgement you have been saved...
- and you realise more and more the glory of heaven and what it will mean to have everlasting fellowship with God...
 - and to live in communion with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the perfect love of heaven.
 - In short, you embrace God's promise to pardon your sin through the blood of Christ.

TRANS> But this is not the only difference you experience in this life...

2. You also experience a transformed life...

- God writes His law on your heart so that you are inclined toward it with an earnest and sincere desire to obey it...
 - In one respect, this is painful because you yearn for what you do not yet have in perfection...
 - But it is also sweet because you begin to bear more and more the fruits of holiness...
 - You begin to love God with your whole heart and soul, to delight in Him and to give yourself more and more to Him with joy...
 - And you express that love in serving your neighbour—especially the members of your own household...
 - You grow in grace and love, and your heart is renewed day by day.

TRANS> So there are these two great changes that occur in this life—

- an embrace of God's promises and
- and a renewed heart that walks more and more in God's commandments...
 - But even though these changes are very great...

C. You never become a Sadducee who supposes you have already obtained all that God has promised—all that He can give—in this life!

1. You always realise that it is only a beginning...

- **There is a godly discontentment!**
 - A yearning for the glory to come!
 - A yearning to see the glory of God so much of which is not yet seen...
 - A yearning to live in the full presence of God...
 - A yearning to be done with all your sin and selfishness once and for all...

- A yearning to be resurrected with an incorruptible body that will never know sickness...
- A yearning to live in that holy society of heaven where perfect, holy love permeates every relationship.

2. The Sadducee thinks God has done all He can do...

- But the one who believes in the resurrection does not insult God with such small expectations...
- Christian, you know that if God has taken you to be His own and declared Himself to be your God,
 - What you have now is only a small of beginning of the glory that will follow.
 - It is a much appreciated deposit,
 - and it is a marvellous deposit...
 - but it is a deposit that is small in comparison with God can do and with what He has promised to do!