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A0513 -- Mar. 27, 2005 – Matthew 22:23-33 – Jesus' Logical Use of Scripture

Matthew 22:23-33 ²³ On that day *some* Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) came to Jesus and questioned Him, ²⁴ asking, "Teacher, Moses said, 'IF A MAN DIES HAVING NO CHILDREN, HIS BROTHER AS NEXT OF KIN SHALL MARRY HIS WIFE, AND RAISE UP CHILDREN FOR HIS BROTHER.' ²⁵ "Now there were seven brothers with us; and the first married and died, and having no children left his wife to his brother; ²⁶ so also the second, and the third, down to the seventh. ²⁷ "Last of all, the woman died. ²⁸ "In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had *married* her." ²⁹ But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God. ³⁰ "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. ³¹ "But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: ³² 'I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB '? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." ³³ When the crowds heard *this*, they were astonished at His teaching.

Matthew 22:23-33 ²³ **On that day *some* Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) came to Jesus and questioned Him,**

Who were the Sadducees?

- 1) A small Jewish sect
- 2) respected only the Torah (first 5 books of OT)
- 3) rejected the resurrection from the deadⁱ
- 4) rejected existence of angels
- 5) anti-supernatural liberals of the day

So, the Sadducees were the more liberal and rationalistic of the Jewish sects as signified by their rejection of supernatural doctrines such as angels and resurrection from the dead. Instead of resurrection they believed that the body and soul perished together.

Interestingly, Jesus actually interacted with the Sadducees very little during His ministry on earth (Matt 16:1ff; 22:23ff). He mainly answered challenges from the Pharisees (Matt 9:11ff; 12:2ff; 12:24ff; 15:1ff; 16:1ff; 19:3ff; 21:45; 22:15ff; 22:34ff; 27:62). But the Sadducees become very prominent in the Book of Acts. Why do we observe this shift from Pharisees in the Gospels to Sadducees in Acts?

GOSPELS
Pharisees

ACTS
Sadducees

Because the Doctrine of the Resurrection was not very well understood before Christ's resurrection (Mark 9:10). It was believed but not well understood. But with the beginning of Christianity in Acts 2 it became THE leading doctrine (Acts 1:22; 2:31; 4:2, 33; 17:18, 32; 23:6, 8; 24:15, 21; 26:23) and with additional revelation it became the foundational doctrine upon which the church was built. It is therefore absolutely crucial to Christianity (1 Cor 15). With all the persecution against Christianity in the 1st century, Christianity would never have gotten off the ground if Jesus had not risen from the dead. Witnesses of the resurrection were bold and fearless. Because resurrection was THE cornerstone doctrine of the Church the Sadducees naturally became more vocal opponents in Acts.

However, there is one interaction between Jesus and the Sadducees before His resurrection. And that one interaction is recorded here in Matt 22:23ff. This is the second time Jesus was challenged within that same hour. First the Herodians had challenged Jesus in 22:16. Now the Sadducees attempt to embarrass Jesus within that same hour. Literally, the text says "in that hour", not in "in that day".

The intent of the Sadducees in **coming to Jesus and questioning Him** was not a sincere search for truth. They had just seen a rival sect, the Herodians, get schooled by the logic of Jesus' scriptural answer and this would be a good opportunity to put forth their disbelief in the resurrection, score against Jesus, and cause tension among the Pharisees. A. T. Robertson says, the hypothetical story of one wife with seven husbands "was probably an old conundrum that they used to the discomfiture of the Pharisees."ⁱⁱ So, they were seeking for amusement rather than truth as well as one-upping the other sects.

²⁴ asking, "Teacher, Moses said, 'IF A MAN DIES HAVING NO CHILDREN, HIS BROTHER AS NEXT OF KIN SHALL MARRY HIS WIFE, AND RAISE UP CHILDREN FOR HIS BROTHER.'

The conundrum, meant to embarrass Jesus and bring amusement, is found in v. 24. The Sadducees had used this conundrum from Dt 25:5 numerous times on the Pharisees and thinking this problem to be insurmountable presented it to Jesus. The Law states **'IF A MAN DIES HAVING NO CHILDREN, HIS BROTHER AS NEXT OF KIN SHALL MARRY HIS WIFE, AND RAISE UP CHILDREN FOR HIS BROTHER.'** The Sadducees then went on in vv 25-28 to exaggerate the situation by saying this happened seven times.

²⁵ "Now there were seven brothers with us; and the first married and died, and having no children left his wife to his brother; ²⁶ so also the second, and the third, down to the seventh. ²⁷ "Last of all, the woman died. ²⁸ "In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had *married* her."

The probability that not one of the seven men could give her a child is highly improbable and shows that this is not a real-life situation. Additionally, some unbiblical assumptions are couched within the conundrum. *First*, they presupposed that marital status would continue beyond this life. But that is never taught in the OT Scriptures. *Second*, they assumed that a woman could not have numerous husbands. The question **whose wife of the seven will she be?** was stated to indicate that a wife could have only one husband. The statement **for they all had her** indicates that the Sadducees assumed that the marital relationship indicated permanent ownership. They thought they would force Jesus into one of two conclusions. Either Jesus could say that she must be the wife of all seven (which would be adultery) or there must be no resurrection. This was probably the Sadducees favorite argument against resurrection and I'm sure they got a big kick out of seeing how people would handle what they considered an insurmountable problem.

²⁹ But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God.

But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken". Jesus' answer is blunt and to the point. The verb **mistaken** is in the middle voice. The middle voice means you are both the actor and the receiver of the action (e.g. I hit myself). So here it might be translated "you have deceived yourselves". The Greek verb *planao* refers to "a wandering planet". Jesus is saying, "you are like wandering planets, you've misled yourselves".

The reason they had gone astray in their thinking was because they did not accept the supernatural. Jesus understood that everyone has presuppositions behind their beliefs or statements. Jesus didn't waste time arguing about seven men and one wife. What He did was go straight to the root of the problem. See, Jesus was a thinker. Jesus knew exactly what the Sadducees were after in their conundrum. He saw the trap being laid. But He saw more than that because He understood that all beliefs are rooted in presuppositions and now he begins to trap them in their own trap. Therefore, He went straight for those presuppositions. So, he didn't waste time arguing about the seven men and one wife. That would all come out in the wash. But what He did was show that they didn't understand the Torah because they had deceived themselves into an anti-supernatural bias..

So, first, they misunderstood Scripture because they had deceived themselves into approaching Scripture with an anti-supernatural bias. That was the root of the problem and that is why they did **not understand the Scriptures nor the power of God**. If they accepted the supernatural then they would not have deceived themselves and could have understood the Scriptures and the power of God. So, the basic premise for believing the resurrection is to accept God's word on His authority. God says that the universe is not just an impersonal and natural thing but is a personal and supernatural place. In a personal and supernatural universe resurrection makes perfect sense. So, Jesus' initial response undermines their basic anti-supernatural stance.

It is important that Jesus says they did not understand the **power of God**. They didn't understand it because anti-supernaturalism precludes it. Approaching Scripture from an anti-supernatural stance therefore caused them to misunderstand God's character. God is all-powerful. The word for **power** here is *dunamis* and refers to kinetic energy, energy in motion, dynamic energy. God's dynamic energy is greater than the force of death. Their view of God was way too small. They did not realize or accept that God's power had the capacity to raise the dead to a new existence that is quite unlike our present existence. They had a weak view of God.

This shows the danger of basing our beliefs on human speculations like the Sadducees rather than basing our beliefs on the authoritative statements of Scripture.

³⁰ **"For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.**

For (*gar*) indicates an explanation in light of their mistaken ideas. Here we get a rare glimpse of the post-resurrection life. He says, “**For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.**” First, Jesus affirms **resurrection** but he undermines the human tendency to take standards from this earthly life and apply them to the resurrection life. It is always the human tendency to interpret things beyond our experience in light of our present experience but Jesus’ statement warns against that. If you let your experience enter in on scriptural questions about the resurrection life then you will draw some really wrong conclusions. You get the real answers to these questions by digging into Scripture very carefully and asking questions of the text. That’s what Jesus is going to illustrate in v 31-32. But here let’s look at Jesus’ explanation.

In the words **they neither marry nor are given in marriage** he covers both male and females. Males **marry** and females **are given in marriage**. Why is there no marriage in heaven? Most people assume that the reason is because there will be no need for procreation. While this may be true to an extent this is not a complete explanation because it reduces the purpose of marriage to procreation. But procreation is not the whole purpose of marriage is it. There’s also got to be some recreation! God designed male and female to be partners and intimate companions, not just reproduction units. The key question of the Sadducees is “whose wife of the seven will she be?” “Who has claim to this woman?” Jesus’ answer is that such relationships will no longer be binding in the resurrection life. What this essentially means is that every married couple gets divorced. Did you know that every couple gets divorced? But did you know that no one is supposed to get a divorce before physical death. Physical death is the divorce. During a marriage ceremony one of the things the minister says is “What God has joined let no man separate.” That means no man (or wife) should divorce. But notice it does not say that “What God has joined let God not separate.” What God has joined God will separate. And the way He separates us is by physical death and the giving of resurrection bodies. God is the one who has authority over death and life. No one should try to act like God and use that authority to get a divorce. Paul agrees with this assessment in Romans 7:1-2. So, in the resurrection males do not marry and females are not given in marriage.

The next phrase **but they are like angels in heaven** is difficult because people have so many misunderstandings about angels. We have very little revelation about them anyway but human speculations only compound the problem. The most probable reason Christ mentioned the **angels** is because the Sadducees rejected their existence (Acts 23:8). They had misunderstood this too, for angels are mentioned several times in the Torah, the supposed books the Sadducees accepted as authoritative (Gen 19:1, 15; 28:12; 32:1). Here,

it is clear what Christ's words mean. Christ means that resurrected humans are like angels in heaven in the sense that angels in heaven are not bound by marital relationships. Instead, "Angels are totally and exclusively dedicated to God, and in the resurrection glorified human beings will be totally and exclusively dedicated to God. No human relationship will impede one's...intimacy with Christ. One's love for other human beings will not be depleted, but the only "marriage" relationship will be with God in His pure form."ⁱⁱⁱ

We would do well to dispel some of the common myths regarding the resurrection and angels. First, humans do not become angels in the resurrection. We will be above the angels and will judge the angels, we will not be angels. Second, Jesus' point is not to say that humans will be mere spirits in the resurrection. Angels are mere spirits but human beings will have resurrection bodies that are composed of material. Third, all angels are male in gender throughout Scripture but this does not mean that resurrected humans will all be male or sexless.

³¹ "But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God:

Here's where Jesus really nails them to the wall. Jesus knows that the Sadducees only accept the Torah as authoritative Scripture and so He quotes from their accepted source of authority (Exod 3:6). The words **have you not read** were a stiff rebuke in the 1st century.

We ought to learn a lesson about Christ-likeness from Christ Himself. Normally when people talk of Christ-likeness they speak of His pleasant deeds of feeding others, healing others and forgiving us. But this is only one dimension of Christ's person and work. This incident, and others like it, show that Jesus was unwilling to accept false religious views of His day. His primary target was not immoral people but the self-righteous Scripture-quoters. "Jesus was anything but politically correct in His time and place. He was committed to upholding truth even if it angered and brought persecution from religious leadership."^{iv} To be Christ-like we also have to be unwilling to accept false religious views in our day and this includes shutting people's mouths by showing error to be error by the logic of Scripture.

After this stiff rebuke Jesus says **have you not read what was spoken to you by God.** Jesus says that what God spoke He spoke to the Sadducees and it was therefore their responsibility to know what God had said to them. Boy, here is another striking application. Not only are we to reject false Scripture-quoters but we are responsible to know what God has said to us. In fact, it is by knowing what God has said to us that we are able to reject

false Scripture-quoters. This means we are responsible to know the word of God. Do not think for even one moment that you will all of a sudden know it all when you get to heaven. That is a passive, mystical view of knowledge. Knowledge does not come by some passive instantaneous event. If you have questions in the resurrection Jesus or others might say, **have you not read what was spoken to you by God?** God has already answered most if not all of our questions but we have failed to think through Scripture and think through the implications of Scripture. We're a Bible Church. If anyone has Bible-knowledge and the wisdom to apply it they should be found within this church. People ought to be able to come in here and get answers.

³² 'I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB '? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.'

How many of you would have picked this verse to prove that resurrection was taught in the Torah? In fact, this verse doesn't say anything explicit about the resurrection does it? How then does it prove the resurrection? Jesus, answering from His humanity, is showing us what it looks like to think theologically. He doesn't just quote some explicit proof text. He gives a logical answer that makes people think and which is irrefutable. He's drawing a conclusion by putting together the concepts of Scripture into a unified whole. He's not thinking in compartments like the Sadducees. They had boiled down the issue of resurrection to a fine point in the Mosaic Law (Dt 25:5). Jesus is thinking way outside of the box because He had trained His mind to think theologically. He was linking doctrines together and showing relationships. He wasn't cutting doctrines up all nicely and keeping them in separate compartments. He was putting the whole thing together. The Sadducees had not advanced to this level of thinking. They were far too limited in their thinking. They had not trained themselves to think theologically. Over the years, as I grow, I want to teach you how to think theologically. There is nothing grander than learning to think like Christ and Christ thought theologically. So if you learn to think theologically then you will become Christ-like in this area. And that's what we're after as Christians, to be Christ-like in every area of life and that starts with our thinking.

Let's look at Jesus' theological thinking which links Exod 3:6 to resurrection even when resurrection is not explicitly stated. What Scriptural truths is Jesus linking here? *First*, He quotes from Exod 3:6 which is already accepted by the Sadducees.^v They would have no qualms with Exod 3:6. *Second*, He mentions Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are the three patriarchs who identify the nation of Israel and whom God made an unconditional covenant with. *Third*, the doctrine of creature time. Creature time is linear. *Fourth*, the doctrine of God's eternity. God is not confined to time. Time is a creation of

God (Heb 11:3). Jesus was putting aspects of all these doctrines together to conclude resurrection.

When God spoke these words to Moses in Exod 3:6 Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had died and were buried 100's of years before. But it was in Moses day that God said '**I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB**'. Therefore, God was the God of Abraham in Moses day. How could that be if Abraham didn't exist? See Jesus' logic. Now the Sadducee's are in a real pickle aren't they? How are they going to square their doctrine that the body and soul perished together with Exod 3:6? How could God be the God of someone who no longer exists if resurrection is not true? How could God fulfill His covenant to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob if they no longer existed? See how Jesus put Scriptural truth together into a system of thinking. Therefore, Jesus says, **He is not the God of the dead but of the living**. In other words, the true God is not the God of buried bones but of living creatures made in His image. The Torah itself assumes resurrection.

I hope you see the brilliance of Jesus' responses in Scripture. And I hope you see the benefit of learning to think theologically. By that I mean learning to put together all the doctrinal truths about God so that you field questions. You need to be able to field questions in order to be a good witness for Christ. Turn to 1 Pt 3:15...

1 Peter 3:15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;

All Christians, not just the so-called experts, not just the pastors, not just the theologians, etc...but all Christians are commanded to **always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you**. This means you are supposed to **always be ready to** respond to a challenge and to do what Jesus did with the Sadducees. He gave a sanctified response to those people and He didn't compromise the truth.

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

The people listening to this interaction were impressed with the logic of Jesus' answer. They were not astonished at the content of His teaching. Most Jews of the 1st century already believed in the resurrection. What they were astonished by was his method of argumentation and the irrefutable wisdom of His answers. This was unlike the typical rabbi who quoted traditions to prove their points. Jesus went straight to Scripture and based His

arguments on the authority of God's word, not on contemporary or past opinion. Scripture does not contain opinions. Scripture is the final word. Humans have opinions but God's word has answers. If you say, well it may have answers but there are many interpretations of those answers. That is an observation. But there may be forty proposed interpretations but 39 of those are wrong and possibly all 40. When bias is put aside and you are interested in what God's word says no matter where it leads you then you can actually get to those answers.

Christ not only proved from Scripture that resurrection was taught in the OT Torah, He also predicted His own death and resurrection multiple times (Matt 16:21; 17:23; 20:17-19; 26:12, 28-29, 31-32; Mark 9:30-32; 14:28; Luke 9:22; 18:31-34; John 2:19-22; 10:17-18). His prediction rang true when He was crucified on Friday, April 3, 33AD and resurrected on Sunday, April 5, 33AD.

There are really no problems with the resurrection from the dead within the framework of Scripture. Because it is within that framework where significance is given to resurrection. In Acts 26, Paul was on trial before King Agrippa and Agrippa was well schooled in the OT scriptures. Paul said to him, "Why is it considered incredible among you *people* if God does raise the dead?" The word "incredible" is *apistos* which means "not believable". Why is it considered not believable among you if God does raise the dead? In the framework of Scripture God is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. In that kind of universe why is it incredible that God raises the dead? The same power that created the universe is the same power that raises men from the dead. If one accepts creation then he should easily accept the virgin birth, the inspiration of Scripture, the miracles of Christ, and the resurrection. So, we can say with certainty that one thing besides taxes is certain for every 21st century American; resurrection (Dan 12:2; John 5:28-29). The question is not whether you will be resurrected or not. The question is where you will spend eternity in your resurrection body. Will you spend it with the Lord Jesus Christ or will you spend it in Hell apart from the Lord Jesus Christ? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ today and you will be saved.

ⁱ Josephus (Ant. 18:1, section 4) states "the doctrine of the Sadducees is that the soul and body perish together; the law is all that they are concerned to, observe; this doctrine however has not many followers, but those of the highest rank, ... almost nothing of public business falls into their hands."

ⁱⁱ Robertson, A.T., *Word Pictures of the Greek New Testament* (note on Matt 22:24).

ⁱⁱⁱ Glasscock, Ed, *Moody Gospel Commentary: Matthew* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1997), 435.

^{iv} Glasscock, Ed, *Moody Gospel Commentary: Matthew* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1997), 440.

^v Christ could have quoted from numerous other passages in the OT to prove resurrection (e.g. Job 19:25-26; Daniel 12:2; Isa 26:19) but he chose something from the Torah since this is what the Sadducees accepted as authoritative making His argument even more forceful.

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