

# Matthew 22:23-33

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Preacher: David Moser

[0:00] Good morning. For those of you I have not met, my name is Dave, one of Shoreline's pastors.! And as we approach the end here of Advent season, our sermon series in Matthew is approaching! His final week in Jerusalem. And as he approaches, he's going to be doing that which he entered the world, Christmas, Advent, to do, to save his people from their sins by his cross and by his empty tomb. Now, he came on a rescue mission, right? He came to the city as our king, but those that he came to save, and especially their leaders, resisted him, rejected him. And today, in the temple courts, we're going to see that they continue that resistance. So let us pray, and then we will see what our Lord has to say.

Father, by your Spirit, will you speak to us today, and will you show us your Son, in whose name we pray. Amen.

I invite you to turn with me to Matthew chapter 22. If you don't have a Bible with you, they're on the back table already marked today's passage, and I think it will be up here as well. Our passage today begins Matthew chapter 22, verse 23.

The same day, Sadducees came to him, who say there is no resurrection, and they asked him a question. Today, we're looking at a passage where a group of religious leaders try to trap Jesus in an impossible question. Now, does that sound familiar to you? Sounds familiar to me, because last Sunday, which Matthew tells us was actually, in the same day, a group of religious leaders tried to trap Jesus in an impossible question. Last week, it was the Pharisees. They asked if they thought that people should pay taxes to Caesar. Now, if he had said yes, the people would have turned on him. They hated Rome. They hated the taxes. And if he said no, well, then they could report him to the authorities as an insurrectionist. So either way, the Pharisees would win, or so they thought. But Jesus didn't just answer yes or no. Summing it up, he basically answered, go ahead, pay the tax, because it doesn't matter nearly as much as you or Caesar thinks it does. You think economics and politics are really the ultimate reality. But God cares and wants you to care about something else, something greater.

You're asking the wrong question entirely. And there was nothing that they could say. Now, this wasn't the first time that he had bested them, so to speak, in public. They had tried to undermine Christ, and he had shown them up numerous times before. And so another group, the Sadducees, are watching all this, and what do they do? Now, from our vantage point, we know what they should do, right? Okay, so Jesus is over there wiping the floor with these other guys. We should quit while we're ahead, right? But they don't, right? They don't leave him alone. They don't steer clear. Now, the Sadducees were a much smaller group within Israel than the Pharisees, and history records far less about them. But what we do know is that they were rival schools of thought within Judaism in the first century. Now, the Pharisees last week, right, they were very conservative. They vigorously studied the scriptures and tried to obey it as closely as possible. You could kind of call them fundamentalists.

[4:13] Now, the Sadducees, you can even see here, those who deny the resurrection, they were more interested in amassing power than piety. They ran in the circles of the very wealthy, the elite in Jerusalem, and they were involved in Roman politics much more, and that had earned the several Sadducees the position of high priest in the first century. And we can see here, Matthew is telling us that they denied the supernatural. Religion seemed to serve a social function for the Sadducees. To them, it

was not a living relationship, a covenant with the creator God. Now, based on how it was going with the Pharisees, they should have quit, right, while they were ahead. But whether it's from rivalry against the Pharisees, or pride, or they just couldn't help themselves, the Sadducees overcome wisdom with foolishness and say, well, the Pharisees can't beat him, but we can.

And just like the Pharisees, they're going to learn that if you spring a trap, make sure it doesn't trap you. And they say, verse 24, teacher, Moses said, if a man dies having no children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. Now, there were seven brothers among us. The first married and died, and having no offspring, left his wife to his brother. So to the second and third, down to the seventh. After them all, the woman died. In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her. Now, this question makes very little sense to modern hearers, right? The Sadducees are talking about an ancient practice called leveret marriage. You can find instructions about it in Deuteronomy chapter 25. There are actually a lot of stipulations on it, which we won't go into today. Just come back for Shoreline's sermon series in Deuteronomy in 2025.

But if all the requirements are met, what happens is that if a widow is about to be left destitute, and if the circumstances were such that a family line was about to be cut off in the land of Israel, in order to care for the widow and to carry on the family name, the nearest relation would marry her. Now, that probably sounds really uncomfortable to us today, right? Ladies, you're probably, you know, some of you might be raising an eyebrow at the prospect of marrying your brother-in-law. I hope you don't see it as an upgrade. But the culture that saw this as normal, in the ancient historian Josephus said that this was a comfort to widows in their affliction. And so it's essentially a safety net, right? Now, the interesting thing here is that the Sadducees don't even need to bring it up, right? They don't have to talk about leveret marriage in order to spring this trap. They could simply have said there was a widow who remarried, period, right? In the resurrection, which would be the wife of the first or the second husband, right? That's all they needed. The dilemma is already baked into that. So why even mention leveret marriage, right? And why make it seven marriages? See, they aren't interested in Jesus' answer, right? They're not asking this question to get information, right? They think they already know the answer. They're not trying to discern some principle here. They're trying to mock him, right? We ask questions for all sorts of reasons, right? Sometimes we ask questions in order to get an answer. That's not it here. Sometimes we ask a question to make ourselves look smart, right? That's probably a little bit of what's going on here.

But sometimes we ask a question to make someone else look stupid, and that's what they're doing, right? Jesus, you believe in the resurrection? Well, on your way to Jerusalem, you said, I am the resurrection and the life, right? Well, let's show you why resurrection must be stupid, right? It's not just two husbands. It's seven. That's not just seven men. It's seven brothers. And so if the resurrection is real, Jesus, well, there's going to be a lot of fighting in heaven over that woman, right? And not just any fighting, fighting in a family among brothers. This is the biggest mess you've ever seen.

How's that for resurrection? And so now the Sadducees are smug and they are happy. They've shown Jesus how stupid he is to believe in resurrection, and they've shown how smart they are to have bested him when the Pharisees couldn't. But. Verse 29 begins, but.

[9:25] But. Jesus answered them, you are wrong. Literally, you go astray like a stupid sheep. Because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. And as for the resurrection of the dead, you have not read what, or have you not read what was said to you by God?

I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. He is not God of the dead, but of the living. In verse 29, Jesus diagnoses their problem, and it is twofold. First, they do not know the scriptures, he says. And he demonstrates that in verses 31 and 32. And secondly, they do not know the power of God, which he unpacks in verse 30. So let's take those two ideas in turn. First, they do not know the scriptures. Jesus asks in verse 31, have you not read Exodus chapter three? Them's fighting words.

Right? To accuse the priests of not knowing scripture. Have you not read this? Right? And it's not just some obscure passage that he's quoting here that they could be forgiven for like forgetting or pushing to the back burner. Right? This passage that he cites in verse 32, it's God introducing himself to Moses at the burning bush in Exodus chapter three, right? This is Judaism 101. So when Jesus says, have you even read Exodus three? He's saying, you who claim to lead Israel, you don't even know the basics. And he asks, have you read it? Well, of course they've read it many times.

But in the sense that matters, they haven't read it. Right? When the Lord introduced himself to Moses, those patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, they had been buried in the ground for generations. They were dead. The Lord didn't say, I was Abraham's God.

[11:50] I was the God of Isaac. I was the God of Jacob. He said, present tense, I am their God.

The patriarchs, generations after their death, live. Because the Lord made you and every other person in this world with a soul that cannot perish.

And when your heart stops beating, your soul will not cease. And you come face to face with the living God. Well, friends, will it be a happy meeting?

More on that in a moment. But before we get to you and your soul, let's continue and finish up with the Sadducees. Because in pointing this out, Jesus is saying, you know the story of Moses, but you haven't read it closely.

You haven't really heard it. You haven't drawn out its lessons. Because you haven't given God's word the attention it's due. And friends, he is the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, even this moment.

[13:07] If you look forward to next week, into verse 34, you'll see that he silenced the Sadducees. It's right there, plain as day. He is the God of Abraham.

So simple. So profound. They just didn't have eyes to see it. Probably because they didn't want to. If you deny the resurrection, you're not going to look for reasons that it's true.

Confirmation bias, where you only pay attention to or give credence to information that supports what you already believe. That's super real, isn't it? Sin is tricky.

Our hearts are deceptive, even to ourselves. Confirmation bias is real. And studying the scriptures too lightly is real, too. Right? Jesus is teaching us here how to read our Bibles.

He's based his argument, in verse 32, on what? The tense of a verb. I am, not I was. That's how closely he instructs us to read our Bibles.

[14:14] Friends, how attentively do we read this? We have a book from heaven. Let us give it the attention it deserves.

Let's read it in its entirety. Let's read it very closely. Let's read it in context. And let us read it. As Jesus says, verse 31.

Well, I'll let you look closely. How does verse 31 instruct us to read? Let's put it into practice. How ought we to read the scriptures based on verse 31?

Jesus says, As for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God? To you. Now, who did God speak to again in Exodus chapter 3? Who did the living God address from inside the burning bush?

[15:20] He spoke to Moses, not the Sadducees. And who is Exodus written to? The book itself. It was recorded for the generation of Israel that would enter the promised land.

So they wouldn't forget what God had done for them and why they were going there. It was written to that generation. Not to second temple Jews. But Jesus looks them in the eye and says, God is speaking to you.

Because the Bible is not just a recording of religious truisms. It is not only a record of what God spoke, but through his word, he speaks to the world, everyone who will read it.

This is why Hebrews chapter 4 says, the word of God is living and active. And not just active, friends, but personal.

Have you not read what God said to you? Jesus asks. A pastor named Thabitian Neobwile points out about this.

[16:42] He says, Notice how the Sadducees are not even believers. They deny the resurrection. They deny angels. They are not followers of Christ.

Yet Jesus says, God has spoken to them. And this means if you are a skeptic, an unbeliever, and you read the scriptures, God is speaking to you.

Your unbelief does not prevent him from telling you the truth. Your doubt does not prevent him from speaking clearly. When you open the scriptures of the living God, friends, he speaks to you.

No matter who you are. That is the power of God in his word. Which is actually the second thing that the Sadducees don't know.

The second part of his diagnosis in verse 29. You know neither the scriptures nor the power of God. And he unpacks that in verse 30. He says, For in the resurrection, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

[17:49] See, the Sadducees had very little imagination. They mistook the new creation as basically an improved extension of the old creation.

Right? The heavenly life that they rejected in their heads was just this. But, you know, a little nicer and a lot longer. That's what they were rejecting.

But that's not the picture that's painted for us in scripture, is it? Right? And if they had this small idea of the resurrection and reject that, well, is that even the truth of the matter?

Well, it's kind of a lot like what we said two Sundays ago. Right? Most people who don't follow Jesus don't actually know who it is that they aren't following. Right? Most people who don't follow Christ don't have any idea who he really is.

And today, the Sadducees don't actually know what it is they're rejecting because they're not interested in finding out. But the transition from this present age to the fullness of the new heavens and the new earth, it's not a change in degree like they're thinking.

[19:04] It's a change in kind. It's a category shift. We will be changed and perfected in such ways that we cannot yet imagine.

That's the testimony of Scripture. Which means that our relationships will also change. And marriage, strangely enough, he says, will be no more. Now, to many of us, that sounds like going backwards.

Right? Like we will lack a good thing in heaven that we have now. Right? For some, the idea that marriage will end in heaven is a great disappointment.

I mean, I hope you weren't counting down the days to that or something. You know? But as one writer put it, the resurrection was not to be viewed simply as prolonging human arrangements, but entering into a new order of life.

In the resurrection, your relationship to your spouse will be better than it can be today.

[20:21] The great Scottish preacher, Eric Alexander, said, think of the deepest and most beautiful happiness any marriage could ever bring and then conclude in light of this passage today that you only have a pale reflection of what relationships in the resurrection are going to be.

and there in the world where we have a new heaven and new earth and new bodies in which to worship and to know him and share fellowship with him and with all the saints in light, then there will be something infinitely more glorious than the most glorious marriage the world has ever known. the reason, friends, that there is no marriage in heaven isn't because we will lose something in going there.

In heaven, there will be no marriage because we will gain something. And as foreign as it may sound, we won't miss it because, Jesus says, we will be like the angels.

Now, that's an incredible statement. Right? Nearly every time a person in scripture meets an angel, what happens? Terror, right? In today's Advent reader, do not be afraid.

[21:46] Sometimes the angels have to say, don't worship me. And Jesus says, we'll be like that. Incredible. Now, let's not misread it. Right? First, he says we will be like angels, not that we will be angels.

Common misconception. And second, it's a limited statement. Right? We won't be like the angels in every respect. He's specifically saying that we won't be married like them.

And friends, that's a good thing. That, well, what's in store for God's people is something so much better than simply being angels?

Did he make the angels in his own image and his own likeness to be known and to know him? for what angel did he shed his own blood?

Which angels did he adopt as his own children? To which angels does he declare his fatherly love and affection?

[23:03] does he gather the angels together and say, you are my bride? The way he says the gathered church is his beloved? No. Ours is a far greater future than the angels.

your present marriage as good as it is won't continue in heaven. Or the marriage you have lost or the marriage you long for, they will no longer haunt you.

Why? Because human marriage will give way to that which it has always symbolized. The marriage of a man and a woman and it points to the love of God for his people.

The God who did all that that is far greater than the angels, right? Made us in his own image and likeness, shed his own blood for us, adopts us as his own children.

The God who did all that, we will see him face to face. The greatest of human loves will be dwarfed and overshadowed by the son of his love.

[24:27] Eric Alexander, again, we are only dealing with the shadow of the hope that yet lies before us in Jesus Christ. When we have tasted the sweetest blessings of the earth, we have not begun to fathom the sheer glory of what God is preparing for those who love him.

And it is, in every sense, better. That's the Christian hope. For the Sadducees, there was no such hope. Life ended, people died, and that was that. For the Christian believer, in every sense, the best is yet to be.

That is why you can go from here this morning with light in your eye and hope in your heart. And this is, we'll see next week in verse 34, silences the Sadducees.

And then our last verse of today's passage, verse 33, the crowds marveled. in four sentences, he has undone the Sadducees' entire theological system.

In four sentences, he had set their eyes on the glory to come. In four sentences, he had shown them where to place their hope.

[25:56] He made them marvel. Do you? Do you marvel at Christ today?

Today, we are promised a love past our understanding.

Do you stand in awe? We're celebrating Christmas. The testimony that our God, who has life in himself and cannot die, took on a human nature so that he could taste death for you.

But that is not the end, that is the beginning. Because the incarnation of Christ and his cross and his empty tomb, they're not the end of the matter, they are the beginning.

They're the purchase price. And what he has purchased is an everlasting life with him, the great lover. That will make the grandest love this world has now look small.

Friends, what compares? What can? The Sadducees, they doubted the resurrection. And today, he disproves them in the scriptures.

[27:28] And in just a few days, Good Friday, they will assume that they have won. But, on Easter Sunday, he will disprove them once again with an empty tomb.

Will you marvel at him today? Let's pray. Amen. O Lord, our God, how great is your name and your love for your people.

Lord, I ask that you would do a work in our hearts so that each and every one of us will stand in awe of Jesus Christ born to save his people and bring them to you.

We pray that in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen.