

## What God Says About Eternity.

Text: Matt 22:22-33

Suggested Hymns:

456, 401, 183, 103, 297

- 1) The Presentation of the Question
- 2) The Motive of the Question
- 3) The Basis Of The Question
- 4) God's Answer To The Worldly-Minded
- 5) God's Answer To The Worldly-Wise
- 6) God's Answer to the Scoffer
- 7) God's Answer To The Christian

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 22:23-33, <sup>23</sup> *The same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him and asked Him, <sup>24</sup> saying: "Teacher, Moses said that if a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up offspring for his brother. <sup>25</sup> "Now there were with us seven brothers. The first died after he had married, and having no offspring, left his wife to his brother. <sup>26</sup> "Likewise the second also, and the third, even to the seventh.*

<sup>27</sup> *"Last of all the woman died also. <sup>28</sup> "Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her." <sup>29</sup> Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. <sup>30</sup> "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven.*

<sup>31</sup> *"But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, <sup>32</sup> 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." <sup>33</sup> And when the multitudes heard this, they were astonished at His teaching. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Death is a common word in every language. Death is real, it is universal, and its power is unquestioned. Sooner or later each of us must be

touched by it. Each of us, except perhaps that we are still alive at God's termination of this world's existence, must be embraced by it.

Nor does a responsible person shirk the necessity of recognising these facts concerning it. Yet, mankind is terrified. He wants the answers to certain questions. He is ready to admit that death must come, but asks himself what happens then. Where does death lead? What follows after it? Is it an end, or is it rather a beginning? Is it joy, peace, and glory, or is it renewed toil, or nothingness?

For peace of soul and mind, we must be able to answer the question of Job: ***"If a man die, shall he live again?"***<sup>1</sup> Where better, then, can we get that answer and the assurance of its truthfulness than from God who is the Ruler of both life and death? Our text provides the statement of Jesus who lived to die, and died that we might live. Here we find *God's Answer Regarding Eternity*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. The Presentation Of The Question**

Our text tells us that the Sadducees came to Jesus with a question regarding the resurrection. Although we may question their good intent, we will have to admit that they came to the right person for an answer. None could better answer this question, or any question relative to the resurrection, than Jesus, who said, ***"I am the Resurrection and the Life"***<sup>2</sup> and ***"I go to prepare a place for you"***.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, Jesus had reference to something more than a new meeting place in this world. He distinctly referred to the mansions of His Father's house. It was also Jesus who consoled the penitent thief on the cross with the words: ***"Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."***<sup>4</sup> It was Jesus whom God gave to the world in order that everlasting life might be granted to those who believe in Him.

The fact that this question was properly addressed to Christ is just as true today as it was then. Certainly we, as Christians, will want to go with our questions regarding eternity and everlasting life, to Jesus who assured it to us.

We will want to be found leaning for counsel upon Jesus whom we know to be ***"the Way, the Truth, and the Life."*** If we were to shun the Master in our quest for an answer, only too soon we, too, might be found crying in blindness and bitter frustration: ***"There is no resurrection!"***

We, too, might be found hiding behind a self-protecting veneer of bravado. We, too, might hesitate to ask again the question for which all people need an answer, and, if we ask it, fail to ask with a pure heart.

## **2. The Motive Of The Question**

The verses which precede our text quite amply demonstrate the fact that the Sadducees had an ulterior motive in asking their question regarding the resurrection. The Sadducees were one of the religious sects among the Jews in Jesus' day. They carried on a very real rivalry with the others, particularly the Pharisees.

They had, however, found common ground in one definite project. Both Sadducees and Pharisees were opposed to Christ and His ministry. In the light of this background it appears that the question was to serve a dual purpose. Its primary objective was to entangle Christ in His teaching, and its secondary objective was to show the superiority of the Sadducees over the Pharisees, whom Christ had just successfully refuted.

We are inclined to look upon these contemporaries of the Saviour as being particularly blind and evil men. Yet, it is certainly true that we can readily find their counterparts today.

Someone at a hospital asked a question regarding eternity but used the answer as a springboard for an attack on Christianity. Fortunately, such an individual is the exception rather than the rule. In our day there is an increasing amount of earnestness reflected in the quest for answers regarding eternity. Sadly, people are turning to all sorts of New Age ideas

In a day which completely overemphasises the frivolous, we must constantly be on our guard lest we fall prey to improper motivation or indifference. We need to pray repeatedly for God's grace that our minds and hearts may remain open, always yearning for the truth, always ready to accept the truth, and always striving for a greater appreciation of the truth. God alone can provide that through His Holy Spirit.

## **3. The Basis Of The Question**

And on what shall we base our question? Motivated as they were, we can readily understand the approach used by the Sadducees. They weren't really

looking for an answer, but were rather hoping that they might stump Jesus whom in ridicule they had called Master.

To achieve their end, they concocted a situation. They told a story that had all the earmarks of having been invented for the occasion. It was a story based upon God's demands with regard to the so-called Levitical marriage.<sup>5</sup> Upon this intentionally caricatured situation they based their question and hoped thereby to misconstrue Scripture and set at naught the chief Champion of the doctrine of the resurrection, Jesus Christ.

Motivated as we are, on the other hand, we have no need for concocted situations or for the misuse of Scripture. Mindful of the constant pressure applied over against us by our materialistic environment, we should be kept thinking in terms of the spiritual.

Recognising our innate weakness, we desire the reassurance that God alone can provide. Beset on every hand by the demoralising advice and discouraging ridicule of this world, we turn to Jesus who points the way to looking through and over and beyond this world. We ask the simple question of Job: *"If a man die, shall he live again?"*

Turning, then, to our text, we find a reply which includes a reprimand for all presumptuous individuals and, at the same time, a reply which completely supplies our desired information.

#### **4. God's Answer To The Worldly-Minded**

Addressing His answer to the Sadducees, Christ replies: *"You are mistaken."* With their reference to marriage law they had made the obvious mistake of imposing the laws of this world upon the saints in heaven. They had hoped thereby to demonstrate the impracticability of an immortal existence. But they succeeded only in manifesting their ignorance concerning spiritual realities.

For the most part, the Sadducees were well-educated and rather wealthy men who held a high position among their people. As is so frequently the case, however, with men of this type, they were also filled with the glory which this world had provided, and therefore they could conceive of none other or greater.

In their own peculiar imagination, the tangible glories of this world, the praise and position and authority which they had, overshadowed the glories of the company of the saints in light, in the adoration and service of the Lord.

They presumed that this world is greater than heaven, and so the conditions of life in this world could be applied to heaven and used to deny the existence of heaven and the life after death. To all who so believe, Christ says: “*You are mistaken.*” There is no comparison. Scripture says, “*For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts,*”<sup>6</sup>

### 5. God’s Answer To The Worldly-Wise

Continuing His answer, Christ accuses His questioners of failing to know the Scriptures. “*Not knowing the Scriptures,*” Christ says. Given a basic understanding of the principles upon which the Sadducees operated, this need not surprise us.

Christ’s accusation was indeed justified, for, despite the fact that they were to be the representatives of God, and despite the fact that they said they were willing to accept the five books of Moses, they also insisted upon the right of private interpretation.

We have good reason to believe that a large number of them became disciples of Greek influence and philosophy. Historians assure us that they had developed their knowledge of this world. They were, indeed, worldly-wise.

But they failed miserably in attaining that wisdom which Paul commended to Timothy, the wisdom of the Scriptures, the wisdom that makes us wise unto salvation. The approach with which the Sadducees treated the doctrine of the resurrection and all other doctrines of Scripture was therefore completely rationalistic, that is, based on human thoughts.

Their ignorance of Scripture was only too soon exposed. The Saviour might have used many different passages of Old Testament Scripture to prove the certainty of the resurrection. He chose, instead, to quote to them from that portion of Scripture which they would accept and which they claimed to know.

With reference to the call of Moses at the burning bush, Christ repeats the words of the Lord: ***“I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.”***<sup>7</sup>

From this saying of God, Christ drew the conclusion, ***God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.*** Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were dead long ago, yet God called Himself their God; but God is not the God of the dead, of that which does not exist; He is the God of the living.

If He is still the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, then these men must still be to God as living creatures. They have not passed out of existence, nor will their bodies remain in the earth; for being their God, and God being the God of the living, He is their God according to soul and body, as without either they would not be complete human beings.

Similarly so today, God would ***“destroy the wisdom of the wise” and “bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.”***<sup>8</sup> If man today, with all his accomplishments, with all his accumulation of knowledge and scientific wisdom, would know the truth concerning things spiritual, if he would know the place of importance that these latter things must take in his life, then he must be directed to a fuller understanding of the Scriptures.

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit he must accept the teachings of Jesus whose resurrection is our very real guarantee that all who believe in Him shall arise to eternal life.

## **6. God’s Answer To The Scoffer**

Continuing, then, with our text, we note that Christ includes in His correction of the Sadducees an accusation of their ignorance and non-acceptance of the ***“power of God.”***

Like the sceptics and scoffers of our present day, they no doubt drew frequent attention to the different ways and places in which people die, emphasising the fact that some are burned, some are crushed, some are lost at sea, and still others are devoured and eaten by wild animals.

They, no doubt, argued that all buried bodies crumble into decay and eventual nothingness, and that no power in heaven or earth can bring them back to life again. All the while they forgot the omnipotence, or power, of the eternal

God, who in the beginning created all things, called them forth out of nothing, and with whom even today nothing is impossible.

Quite evidently, the Sadducees, just as people do in our day, denied the power of God to transform the bodies of men from their dust and ashes to the form in which they will appear in the resurrection.

In the resurrection, Christ said that we shall not be angels, but like the angels as far as marriage is concerned. In heaven there is no need for marriages. Situations as they exist in this life and for this life will not exist in the new heavens and the new earth. Insistence that the situations that apply on earth must apply in eternity is tantamount to a display of ignorance and is indicative of a persistent refusal to recognise the power of God.

Recorded, then, in our text, we have God's answer regarding eternity for all of those unbelievers, sceptics, and scoffers who find all answers in the glories, pleasures, and situations of this world. Of them Jesus says, ***You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.***

### **7. God's Answer To The Christian**

But what of God's answer to us? We, too, stand in need. Each of us must die sooner or later, and we know it. Each of us may at any time be called upon to bear to its last resting place in the bosom of the earth the body of a loved one. What assurance have we, then, of the resurrection of the dead?

The meaning of our text is clear. God's answer is clear and definite: ***God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.*** Christ died and was raised in order that all those who believe in Him shall rise to eternal life. Death, that is, the separation of soul and body, is but the gateway into eternity.

When it occurs, the soul of the believing child of God is received into Paradise, and one day, at God's calling, soul and body will be reunited in the glories of heaven. This is God's answer. We need, therefore, never doubt.

In Jesus' name we are able to sing:<sup>9</sup>

I know that my Redeemer lives;  
What comfort this sweet sentence, gives!  
He lives, He lives, who once was dead;  
He lives, my ever-living head.

He lives, and grants me daily breath;  
He lives, and I shall conquer death;  
He lives my mansion to prepare,  
He lives to bring me safely there. Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Job 14:14

<sup>2</sup> John 11:25

<sup>3</sup> John 14:2

<sup>4</sup> Luke 23:43

<sup>5</sup> Deut. 25:5-10

<sup>6</sup> Isa. 55:9

<sup>7</sup> Exo. 3:6

<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor. 1:19

<sup>9</sup> Hymn 103