

DEFENSE AGAINST DECEPTION

Matthew 22:23-33

THE CHALLENGERS

Matthew 22:23

23 On that day some Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) came to Jesus and asked Him a question ... (**Matthew 22:23, 2022 LSB**)

The Sadducees were one of the three main religious sects in Israel during the time of Christ. They had four primary teachings.

First, they prioritized written Scripture over tradition.

Second, they believed that human beings have autonomous free will. They not only denied the concept of fate but of God's sovereign decrees as well.

Third, they denied the supernatural and spirits, whether angels or demons.

And fourth, they denied there is any sort of afterlife.

They come to Jesus with a question, just as the Pharisees had done.

THE CHALLENGE

Matthew 22:23-28

23 On that day some Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) came to Jesus and asked Him a question, **24** saying, "Teacher, Moses said, 'IF A MAN DIES HAVING NO CHILDREN, HIS BROTHER AS NEXT OF KIN SHALL MARRY HIS WIFE AND RAISE UP A SEED FOR

HIS BROTHER.’ 25 Now there were seven brothers with us; and the first married and died, and having no seed, he left his wife to his brother; **26** so also the second, and the third, down to the seventh. **27** And 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.” (**Matthew 22:23–28, 2022 LSB**)

Before you go trying to figure this out, let me point out that this is a straw man argument. That’s a kind of argument where someone’s position is misrepresented in order to make it easier to attack or disprove. The Sadducees confronted Jesus with a carefully constructed straw man argument that uses Levirate marriage to deny the concept of resurrection.

What is a Levirate marriage you ask? Good question!

In the ancient world of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, if a married man died without any children, one of his brothers was responsible to marry his wife and have children with her. That’s unthinkable in our time, but it made perfect sense in the ancient world.

For one thing, it allowed a man’s family line to continue. The children were not the biological children of the dead man, but they were the legal children of the dead man. They would inherit his land and wealth, and his name would be preserved through them. That was important at that time.

And just as important, it provided for the childless widow. The ancient world was nothing like today. It was a wild, lawless frontier. A childless widow had no way to provide for herself. There was no social security, no retirement benefits, and no police force to keep her safe. Surviving meant raising crops and animals, building and maintaining a shelter (whether a tent or a building of stone), gathering wood and water on a daily basis, and defending oneself against violent men and animals. A childless widow was in deep trouble, and it only got worse as she got older. Levirate marriage did not treat a woman as a piece of property; it required that she be protected with tenderness and love.

The Sadducees used this valuable, rich historical custom to present a silly straw man question to Jesus. A married man dies childless. His wife marries the next brother in line, but he dies without giving her children. She works her way down the line until all seven brothers have died. And then she dies. In the resurrection, whose wife will she be?

Now, why do the Sadducees raise this particular question? They are trying to disprove the resurrection of the dead.

BUT JESUS

Matthew 22:29

29 But Jesus answered and said to them, “You are mistaken...” (**Matthew 22:29, 2022 LSB**)

They had been misled and deceived. Jesus doesn't accuse these men of being insincere. At the same time, sincerity doesn't cancel out error. Most mistaken and deceived people are sincere. Our culture is largely driven by emotion, by people who are intensely sincere in what they think. Every pro-abortion argument is ultimately emotional. Every pro-perversion, pro-LGBTQ+ argument is ultimately emotional. Every we're-going-to-die-from-climate-change argument is ultimately emotional. The false teachers of Charismaticism and the false teachers of the religious left rely heavily on emotion. Those who are deceived are unquestionably sincere, but they remain deceived. Sincerity is no defense against deception.

These men have been rendered defenseless against the deceptions of false doctrine. How?

29 But Jesus answered and said to them, “You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God.” (**Matthew 22:29, 2022 LSB**)

THEY DIDN'T UNDERSTAND THE SCRIPTURE

The Sadducees might have prioritized Scripture over tradition but they didn't understand it. They weren't alone. In fact, when Jesus began His public ministry, virtually no one in Israel understood the Scriptures. Paul writes in First Corinthians 2:8 that "if [the rulers of this age] had understood [God's purposes], they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."

God gave us His Word so that we would understand.

We believe that "The whole counsel of God concerning everything essential for his own glory and man's salvation, faith, and life is ... contained in the Holy Scriptures."

We believe that "Nothing is ever to be added to the Scriptures."

We believe that "the things that must be known, believed, and obeyed for salvation are so clearly set forth and explained in one part of Scripture or another that" anyone "may achieve a sufficient understanding of them by properly using ordinary measures."

But here's the thing. We also believe that "the inward illumination of the Spirit of God is necessary for a saving understanding of what is revealed in the Word." The Spirit of God will not grant that illumination to those who come in rebellion, hardness of heart, pride, or unbelief. The Sadducees were marked by rebellion against God and His Son, hardness of heart toward the Scriptures and Jesus' teachings, pride in their own position and ability, and a rank refusal to believe what God said.

The Sadducees denied virtually everything that makes God, God; is it any wonder that they could not understand His Word?

THEY DIDN'T UNDERSTAND THE POWER OF GOD

They didn't understand that God's power would accomplish things beyond their comprehension. They view the entire world as completely natural. They left no room for supernatural events. They denied the afterlife, spirits, angels, demons, miracles, and anything and everything that was beyond their understanding. They affirmed free will because they not could comprehend that there was an intelligence and power greater than theirs. Given time, the Sadducees would have denied Yahweh Himself as just a cultural creation, no different than the man-made gods of Greece and Rome.

So what if you were a man or woman who truly believed in Yahweh, confessed your sins in the faith that God would forgive, offered the appropriate sacrifices according to that faith, and died as Hebrews 11:13 says, "without receiving the promises, but having seen them [by faith] and having welcomed them"? What would happen to you at death? According to the Sadducees, absolutely nothing.

Or what if you were a man or woman who denied Yahweh, living in sin and rebellion against God's Word and holiness, caring nothing for Him or His people? What would happen to you at death? According to the Sadducees, absolutely nothing.

John Lennon was a Sadducee, as he shows in his song *Imagine*:

Imagine there's no heaven

It's easy if you try

No hell below us

Above us, only sky

Imagine all the people

Living for today

The Sadducees did not believe that God possessed the power to do what they could not

comprehend, and so they simply rejected it, as people so often do. They were religious, but their religion was empty of any truth or power. They didn't understand the Scriptures, and they didn't understand the power of God, and that left them defenseless against error and false doctrine.

Jesus then corrects their thinking.

THE RESURRECTION

Matthew 22:30-32

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, saying, **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.”
(**Matthew 22:30–32, 2022 LSB**)

Jesus addresses two issues regarding the resurrection. First, life for resurrected people will not be like it was before death. Second, the resurrection is necessary because of God's nature. Let's take them in reverse.

Second, the resurrection is necessary because of God's nature. Jesus quotes what God said to Moses, “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” The Lord said these words to Moses three times in Exodus 3 and once in Exodus 4.

Now, when Yahweh spoke these words to Moses, these men had been dead for centuries. And yet He says, “I AM the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” not, “I WAS the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” They had died centuries before and been buried. But their souls continued to exist in conscious awareness before their God.

Jesus takes God's words literally. He doesn't even really interpret them. He simply quotes

them and points out what they say. God is not the God of the dead but the God of the living. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob still live before God. Moses and Gideon still live before God. David and Isaiah and Amos and Malachi still live before God. God is the God of the living, not the God of the dead.

So the hope of the resurrection that we find in the Old Testament means that those who are physically dead but alive in God – in Christ, actually – will one day be raised from the dead. This is exactly the hope that Job had:

25 “As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives,
 And at the last He will rise up over the dust of this world.
 26 Even after my skin is destroyed,
 Yet from my flesh I shall behold God,
 27 Whom I myself shall behold,
 And whom my eyes will see and not another.” (Job 19:25–27, 2022 LSB)

So second, the resurrection is necessary because of God’s nature as the God of the living.

And first (remember, I’m taking these in reverse order), life in the resurrection will be different than life prior to death.

30 “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.” (Matthew 22:30, 2022 LSB)

The Sadducees clearly didn’t understand this. They assumed that resurrection meant a dead person getting up out of the grave and just going back to life as usual. That’s why they thought Levirate marriage contradicted the resurrection. Because they knew neither the Scripture nor the power of God, they could only interpret the resurrection according to their own small, sinful imaginations. Not surprisingly, their imaginations provided them with silly ideas. They turned the glory of the resurrection into a ridiculous picture that was easy to

mock and dismiss.

What will life be like after we are resurrected? I can't give you details; you know that. Very little has been revealed. But I can tell you this.

All humanity will be resurrected. The wicked will be resurrected to face judgment. The elect will be resurrected to live eternally with God. That eternal existence will not be in the throne room of heaven but on a new earth within a new universe. That eternal existence will be completely free of sin and everything that arises from sin. There will be no death, no tears, no pain, and no mourning. There will be no bitterness, no regret, no disappointment. There will be no jealousy, no anger, no selfishness.

One of my favorite professors in seminary, Alan Gomes, writes this in his book *40 Questions about Heaven and Hell*:

We can be confident that we will not pine after whatever does not carry over from the old order, for in the eternal state we shall be fully satisfied, lacking nothing we desire. If something we enjoyed in this life does not carry over into the next, it is only because God will replace it with something much better. What about the intense emotional closeness that characterizes a happy marriage? If marriage will be no more, then will we not miss that intimacy? Again, the answer here is similar to what we just observed. God takes nothing away from us in the eternal state except to replace it or enhance it with something better. In this instance, it is not that we will love our earthly spouse any less in the eternal state than we do now but that we will love everyone in the eternal state to a degree unfathomable and unattainable at present.

BRINGING IT HOME

The Sadducees, who understood neither the Scriptures nor the power of God to do something they couldn't imagine, were defenseless against deception. This is the state of every

unbeliever. Unfortunately, it's also the state of many believers. In the Holy Scriptures, God has given us a vast resource of unimaginable height and depth and breadth and width. God has revealed His divine power in creation, but in His Word, He tells us what His power is for; how He uses it, and for what purpose.

To be honest, the Word of God can be intimidating. It's like wanting a drink of water and coming across Lake Superior, the largest freshwater lake in the world. Where would you start? You start by taking a drink. You start by quenching your thirst. You start in the Scriptures by opening them up and reading them in an attitude of humility and prayer.

Drinking from the water of the Word of God will increase your thirst for it. That doesn't mean that it becomes less intimidating over time. Imagine having a great thirst and coming across the shoreline of Lake Superior. You simply cup your hand and drink. It's just water, after all. Then you learn that it has more than 31,000 square miles of surface area and an average depth of more than 400 feet. You learn that it's 350 miles long and 160 miles wide at its widest point. How on earth do you drink THAT? One swallow at a time.

The immensity of Scripture is intimidating, I admit. But I have never found a better approach than simply opening it and reading with an attitude of humility and curiosity. Read with a longing to know your God and obey Him. Read with the desire to know more about God so that you can worship Him.

I've grown more familiar with the Bible over the years. I've learned more advanced study methods, and I've surrounded myself with many resources to understand it, but in the end, I still drink it one swallow at a time. Because of that, the Lord has protected me from false doctrine and errant teachings.