

Matthew 22:23-33

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[0 : 00] It's that time of year where we begin to think about holidays in the summertime.! Some of you will be booking holidays, thinking about flights.

! In the old days you'd have gone to a travel agent and got the brochure and looked through! and seen what hotels, which area you went to. Maybe now you buy the books, you buy the lonely planet, you know, five top things to do and things to see of this and that. And maybe you're a planner, you like your holidays, your structure and you plan different things, things that will be exciting, things that you'll be fun, that will be fun. And Christians in their own way, as the Bible would put it, are on their way to a different country, a different place, a heavenly country. And it would be very odd if we didn't take time as Christians to look forward to that. At the moment, the weather is cold, isn't it? And dark and windy.

You get the travel book out or the brochure and you think about the sunshine. You think that's where I'm going, that's where I'm going to spend a couple of weeks. But the Christian, we are looking forward to a better country. And it would be odd. And it would be unwise if we didn't look forward. If we didn't daydream about that better country. I will see this and I will see that. And so as Christians, we are living now for eternity. And that's important, isn't it? In a city like ours, a city like ours where people live for what they can do now, and what they can gain now. But you will waste your life if you don't remember where you're heading. Because the temptation for you and I is that we think heaven, it's irrelevant, everything is a load of rubbish. That's the temptation here though, here is exciting. This will fulfil you. Here and now, this will give you enormous pleasure. And as people who follow the Lord Jesus, we need to look up and we need to say, no, no, no. We are going to be with

God in heaven. We're going to a place which cannot spoil or perish or fade. It will not let down. There'll be no sin. There'll be no sickness. There'll be no ability to upset others. And we won't be upset. There'll be no pain. There'll be no loneliness. And it will go on and on like that. And so I need to think more rightly of then, so I will live rightly now. And Matthew 22 is one of those passages that will help us to do it. Matthew 21 and 22 are all about conflict. Jesus is in conflict with the establishment. So last week, if you remember, we saw how did a Christian relate to authority? How does a Christian relate to authority? And it was the Pharisees. They were, let's put it, middle class people on the make.

Alright? The Pharisees. Religious middle classes. But they've tag teamed with, in verse 23, the Sadducees. And the Sadducees are posh aristocrats. They are religious too. But a different kind of religion. And the Sadducees dominated their religious council, the Sanhedrin. They were very powerful. And they are going to ask Jesus about the resurrection. This group, the Sadducees, and they didn't believe in the resurrection. The Pharisees did believe. Two rival gangs.

[3 : 55] One literalist, one liberal. In their interpretation of the Bible. And they didn't like one another very much, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. They didn't like each other, but they disliked Jesus even more. Do you remember that? The enemy of my enemy is my friend. And so this is the question they're going to ask. And the heart of this passage is this. Is there really a physical, bodily resurrection to come? When they talk about the resurrection here, they're not talking about one like Lazarus. Remember when Lazarus is dead to these days and comes out of the tomb? He died and came back. But we're talking about here the general resurrection. That at the end of the day, at the end of the time, when the Lord Jesus comes again, everyone will rise from the dead and see him. Everyone who's been a believer throughout history will be restored with a new body forever. And so just to be clear, the New Testament teaches that if you died this morning, you would go to be with Jesus immediately. If you remember the thief on the cross, today you'll be with me in paradise.

But only in a temporary sense. You would be with Jesus in heaven, but that is not where you will spend eternity. The Bible teaches that there will be in the future a new heavens and a new earth. We might call it the new creation or glory. And that's where we will spend eternity forever. That's where our hope is. That we will spend eternity forever in a literal, physical, bodily resurrection. And the Sadducees, they thought, nah, nonsense. We don't believe in any of that sort of stuff. A physical, bodily resurrection, that's the issue. People get very, very confused on that. I took funerals and every time I go to the house before the funeral. And I can't think of any occasion where I haven't been told in the last 17 years where I'm told this.

They're in a better place, aren't they? They're in a better place. And so people really want to believe in heaven. Somebody scores a try in international rugby and they say, my gran was looking down on me today. People really want to believe in heaven, but there is massive confusion on what that looks like. But there's no confusion in the Bible. Jesus is very, very clear that when he returns, there will be a physical, bodily resurrection. Three things to this passage.

First of all, the sophisticated Sadducees, they had no resurrection. That's a terrible point for someone with a list, isn't it? The sophisticated Sadducees, they had no resurrection. Secondly, Jesus contradicts them and there's two things there. He says the power of God will bring resurrection and he says the scriptures promise resurrection. So first of all, the sophisticated Sadducees is there is no resurrection. Jesus says, no, you're wrong for two reasons. One, the power of God will bring resurrection. Number two, the scriptures promise it. So first of all, let's look at the Sadducees. They say there's no resurrection. Verse 23. They came to him who say that there is no resurrection and they asked him a question. You can read more about this group in Acts 23. They didn't believe in the resurrection. They didn't believe in angels. And they didn't believe the spirits will last forever. And they were anti-supernatural. They were anti-supernatural religious leaders. There are many of them around today. And what you get with these people here and with some of that sorts of folks today is you get religion that is really a moral veneer.

[7 : 54] Just a kind of moral paint job upon people. There's no supernatural power of God to change them. Their religion can't save you physically forever. It won't change you now.

It is a weak God that they believe in. And that's what's being offered by the Sadducees. And many people offer it today. The crowd they are invested in, this group, in the world, they are supportive of the Romans, the occupiers. And they are a wealthy group. They are influential.

Therefore, this group of Sadducees don't want to rock the boat. And their religion is just a gloss, just a religious veneer on the people. And they love that. This crowd, though, has come to Jesus. And they are an anti-supernatural sophisticated group. And they come to Jesus with what they think is a very, very clever question. Let's go through verse 24.

Teacher, Moses said, Moses said of the law, if a man dies and doesn't have any children, well, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.

Now that's the Deuteronomy. So to the second brother, and the third, and the fourth, and the fifth, and the sixth, and the seventh. That's, that's, short, short, short. What are you going to make of this, Jesus? Because we know, don't we, there's no resurrection. Whose wife will she be, brother, one, two, three, four, five, and six, seven, in the resurrection? And what are you going to make of that, Jesus? How are you going to answer that? Your silly little system of resurrection, how does it cope with a sophisticated, sensible question like ours?

[9 : 55] And you read this, don't you, and you know it's not genuine. You read this question, and it's not sensible that they've asked. You think, don't you, it's a very unlikely story.

We'll run with one minute for a moment. Husband dies, and leaves the wife. And the culture of the time is, yes, the brother must marry the widow. Let's say you are brother four, number four, okay? And you've seen your brothers, you've stood in the church on three occasions, and you've watched this woman marry one of your brothers. And all three of them have died.

How do you feel on your wedding day? Your best man before you go to the church? Are you sure? She seems a femme fatale, doesn't she? And you stand there on your wedding day, you say this for richer, for poorer, for better, for worse, in sickness and in health, till death has to part. It's a silly story, isn't it? They're asking nonsense. They want to trap him. It's not a real question. But they are taking something from the Bible. They take something from Deuteronomy 25. Moses gives this law. He says if brothers are living together and one of them dies and another son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Your husband's brother shall take her and marry her. The first son she bears will carry on the name of the dead brother, so that his name will not be blotted out. So do you

see that the principle here is that you don't want the name of the family to disappear. You're the name of the family to last. You can see the concern behind it. How does a family raise children if dad is dead? How do we keep going here? And I think if you are a Sadducee and you believe in no physical afterlife, it's a very normal question to ask. In fact, that's a very, very contemporary question to ask. Lots of people will say that there's no life to come. There's no life to come, but I will live on in my children. Do you hear that? The family name will last. I'll live on in my children. And that is how they justify emotionally the fact that there's nothing to come. Albert Einstein, you know the physicist? Let me read to you what he wrote. He wrote this, our death is not an end. If we can live on in our children, in the younger generation, for they are us and we are them. Our bodies are only wilted leaves on the tree of life. We live on. Einstein, you are brilliant. Albert Einstein did physics like no one before him and no one after him and that's the best that he can come up with. Our bodies are wilted leaves on the tree of life. We live on. It's not true. Have you heard this at a funeral? I've heard this at a funeral that I've taken. I've heard these tributes. We're not really saying goodbye to Audrey. Because she would live on. She would live on in the memory of her children and grandchildren. That's so not right. Why is it not right? It's not right because remembering is not living. They are two very different things. And it might sound nice superficially but it's not true. Because the horror of death is that that person is dead. People are into family histories, aren't they? I was preaching in Leicester two weeks ago and the family I was with in the afternoon and the conversation was drying up and I asked about their family and really wish I hadn't.

[14:27] Because they're really into genealogies and it went back and somehow they thought that they were related to William the Conqueror and at that point I was just kind of zoning out on the sofa. But William the Conqueror does not live on, does he? He's not living in Leicester.

And you may be remembered. Mightn't you? It's very very unlikely that anyone in this room will be remembered in 150 years. And you may be remembered. You might achieve some greatness. But then, even then, not for very long. And people think, oh I'll live on in the lives of my children. There's no supernatural, no afterlife. Schools are obsessed with this, aren't they?

Your school children are obsessed with this. You kind of maintain the community. You make a name for yourself. You build other traditions. And if you're a sadducee, you've got to have something. Haven't you? Like that. Because no one really thinks you die and that's it.

Even Richard Dawkins thinks it's kind of genial and they'll carry on and feed the plants or something like that. No one stands in a funeral and thinks, well I'm happy this is just it.

[15:48] No one does. The Sadducees, they were sophisticated anti-supernaturals. But you've got to find meaning elsewhere. That's our culture. And Jesus says, your thinking is far too small.

So they come to the end of their question. They're nudging and they're chortling to one another. And verse 29, Jesus batters them. You are wrong. You've strayed from the path.

Because you don't know the Bible nor the power of God. Two reasons you make an error. And they're two pretty insulting reasons, aren't they, to say to somebody who's a professional religious bloke. You don't know the Bible and you don't know the power of God.

You feel so well we study the Bible. It's quite possible to say it's so many presuppositions that actually when you come to the Bible you've already decided what is right and wrong anyway.

And to completely miss the point, don't do that, Jesus says. So two errors. Let's take them in turn.

First of all he says the power of God, verse 30 and then the scriptures, 31. So they're sophisticated. They've got no resurrection, verses 23 to 28. They say there's no power of, Jesus says, no. Think about the power of God. Verse 30.

[17:05] For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels in heaven. Jesus is saying it's different. Sadducees, implicit in your question is this woman who marries certain times, which of them will be her husband in the afterlife. Implicit in your question is that you think that the life to come is basically the same as this one. With a mild uplift. You think that it's comparable from iPhone 9 to iPhone 10. You know, you finish a contract, you give in your iPhone and you get an upgrade and it's sleeker, it's better, it's a little bit glossier, it's a bit quicker. And that's what you think that life is like, Sadducees. You think it's upgrade. And that's what you think that I think Christian life, the resurrection is like. One mild upgrade. But we're not talking about that. In the next life relationships are very different. And people will be like the angels in heaven, not will be angels in heaven. And so our pattern of relationships and how we relate to one another will be very different, not just a mild upgrade. So think, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, you take the acorn and you compare it to the full grown oak tree. Is there continuity from the acorn to the oak

tree? Yeah, there is, isn't there? But there's also radical discontinuity between the acorn and the oak tree. The seeds that you plant in the ground and the tree that emerges, same but different. Well, we know that, don't we? We see that in the Lord Jesus.

Jesus, in his resurrection, he's the first fruit. He's the prototype. His body is the same they recognize him, they recognize him, although they're slow to recognize him, his body is the same, but it's radically different. He walks through walls. He can appear in a room with closed doors. He is different. He goes up to heaven. There's continuity and discontinuity.

Not just a mild upgrade. You know Muslim heaven? Muslim heaven is upgrade. In heaven, as a Muslim, when you get to heaven, you can have a drink. It's about time, isn't it? You're not allowed to in this life, the Quran says. But when you get into paradise, you can have a drink. And you can marry multiple times in heaven, according to the Quran. And when you read what the Quran says about paradise, there's loads of couches. Couches everywhere. People reclining on couches. It's supposed to be a picture, isn't it? Of luxury. But that is just life with a mild upgrade. Jesus is not talking about that. It's radically different. You will live like the angels. And it doesn't go into detail here. But it's a completely different scale of things.

And so, there's no marriage then. And there's no children needed. It is forever. Let's think about this. New bodies, new relationships. New bodies, continuity and discontinuity. I'll be me, and you'll be you, but we will be different. Like the angels, it says here. Like Jesus, 1 John 3, 2 says, perfected. It's one of the funniest things I think, that only in the Christian faith do we become more after death than what we are now. It's very, very important. That after death, according to the Bible, we become more than what we are now. More. Not diminished.

[21 : 15] Not with a little upgrade or a little uplift. Radically more. Sown in weakness. Raised in power. C.S. Lewis famously puts it this way in his essay, *The Weight of Glory*. He says, remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship. God will make the feeblest and the filthiest of us. A dazzling, immortal creature pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love that we cannot now imagine. It's quite right according to the New Testament.

Radically different. And that really matters. And I think as some of you get older, and we are watching some of you get older, aren't we? It really matters. New bodies in the world to come. New relationships. And the element Jesus is choosing to stress here because of the question they ask. Their silly question. You know that throughout the Bible there's a trajectory.

Okay? So in the Old Testament marriage is the norm. And to not be married is unusual in the Old Testament. And to have no children in the Old Testament is to be seen as a curse.

In the New Testament marriage is the norm. And singleness is seen as good. And there are real benefits in not having the stress and the opportunity to work flat out for the gospel. So singleness is seen as good. And in the New Testament some people have natural children and some people have spiritual children and both are great. So when you get to the new heavens and the new earth, there is no marriage. There is no physical children. But many that we've loved here and now. There. Now I need to work a little bit more on that trajectory. But what you need to see this morning is you need to know where you're going. I think we can safely assume that in glory the new creation we will recognize one another. When we get there in glory and we'll recognize people that we don't know here. In Matthew 8 we're going to sit with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. We can't do that if we don't know who they are. Or more accurately 1 Thessalonians 4.13 says do not grieve as those don't grieve without hope for those who've died because you will see them again. And they'll be reunited with our brothers and sisters. We'll recognize friends and families in the new creation. But there is going to be a difference in how we relate.

And I think what Jesus is saying here is in this life marriage is a place where often our desire for intimacy is met.

[24 : 34] And one of the dangers that people feel when they're not married is that they're missing out on intimacy emotionally and physically. But what Jesus seems to be stressing here is that in the life to come there is an intimacy but it is never in marriage between a man and a woman. That we will have that quality of intimacy with many people.

I don't think that's too hard to imagine. Phokias, four children. First child, Marius, comes along. Then she goes on to have Rebecca, the second child.

She didn't say, oh, I'm sorry, I just can't love any more than Marius. Did she? I can only love number one. I can't love the others.

Poor Annis and then poor Florence at number four. There's just not enough love to go around. That's not how it works, is it? But I think Jesus is saying that the quality of relationships, there's enough love to go around.

This great intimacy is spread. Friends, family members. So let me make two comments here, okay? I know we're a little bit late, but stick with me, alright? Two comments.

[25 : 53] Number one, you've got to keep looking forward. You've got to keep looking forward. Eternity is a long time. And if you're married, you need to know that your marriage doesn't last very long, only this life.

And you've got to serve Jesus Christ and the people you know through him. Because that will last forever. And if you're single, you need to recognise that that doesn't last very long.

And serving Jesus Christ is the most important thing, because what you do in serving him will last forever. And there'll be friends you can make and people you can encourage in the Christian faith that you'll be with forever.

And you'll have a quality of intimacy that surpasses anything that we know now. And so you've got to keep looking forward. That's one obvious implication.

The second is this. That there'll be no loneliness in heaven. And therefore there should be no loneliness in the church now. And the church has got to make sure that those who are single have intimate relationships emotionally.

[27 : 11] And so for us here, it's really incumbent on families and those of us who are married that we open the doors of our homes. But there's intimate relationships and friendship.

And sometimes there's an awkwardness. And we need to get over that. And for us, our single folk, sometimes the temptation with loneliness is that you pull back.

Let me tell you what, the only thing that can happen when you pull back is that you'll get more lonely, isn't it? I'll never forget a guy sitting in the old church lounge with his arms folded, looking down, saying to me, no one talks to me.

And I said, you want to sit in like that? I'm not surprised. Because your body language is that you want no one to talk to you. And so if you pull back, the only thing you'll get is more loneliness.

Those are tangents. Jesus is saying, it's me, you think too small. You're mocking me, saying the life to come will be like this, just a bit better. You have no idea, it's radically different.

[28 : 23] You don't know the power of God. And then lastly, really quickly, you don't know the scriptures. They promise us resurrection. Look at 31 and 32. And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God?

I am the God of Abraham. I am the God of Isaac. I am the God of Jacob. I'm the God of the living, not the dead.

The issue isn't really marriage. It's just a silly question. The issue is bodily resurrection. Jesus could have gone for any number of Old Testament texts. He could have gone for Isaiah 26, 19.

That's a good one. Your dead will live. Their bodies will rise. You who have died in the dust will wake up and shout for the joy of the earth will give birth to the dead.

Could have gone for Daniel 12, 2. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will wake some to everlasting life and others to everlasting content. There's plenty of Old Testament texts that demonstrate there's life to come.

[29 : 21] But Jesus goes for the big one. He goes for Exodus chapter 3. Do you remember? They're Jewish leaders. Exodus is your big book. This is the one where God calls to Moses.

It doesn't get bigger than that. It's one of your all-time favourite passages. And you know that one, Jesus says, where he calls, I'm the God of these people who have been dead for 500 years.

He says, I am, present tense. And either they're still living in some sense or you're calling God a liar. Which is it? Over to you, Sadducees.

You like your questions? You should have known it from the scriptures. So the sophisticated Sadducees, they had no resurrection, just a little moral veneer.

They tried to find meaning elsewhere. And Jesus says, you think too small, you are an error, you don't know the power of God, and you don't know the scriptures.

[30 : 22] But elsewhere, he'd be more stark, and more bold. Because in John 11, he says, I am the resurrection and the life. I am the resurrection and the life.

And he who believes in me will live, even though he dies. There will be physical, bodily resurrection.

And if you've trusted in the Lord Jesus, you will be there. And that matters. And so trust him will take you there. Let's pray.