

CONFRONTATION WITH THE SADDUCEES

Matthew 22:23-33

For the most part, **Jews** not only believed in *life after death* but in the *resurrection of the body*. The one exception were the **Sadducees**, who in that and other ways were at odds with the rest of Jewish theology and culture. It was representatives of the **Sadducees** who asked Jesus this *second* question in the series of *three* questions designed to entrap Him.

The **Sadducees** were the “*religious liberals*” of their day...for they said that there is *no resurrection* or *angels* or *spirits* (**Acts 23:8**). Purposely their question centered on the *doctrine of resurrection* and its implications in a particular case.

I. THEIR APPROACH: (vs. 23)

On that day some Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) came to Jesus and questioned Him (vs. 23)...

The **Sadducees** were the *smallest*...but by far, the *wealthiest* and *most influential* of the *Jewish* sects...which included the **Pharisees**, the **Zealots**, and the **Essenes**.

The **Pharisees** were the *largest*, the *most popular*, and the *most outwardly religious*. They held strongly to *external customs* and *practices*...and were *legalistic to the core*...firmly believing that their *works* gained them *acceptance with God*. For the **Pharisees**, *rabbinical traditions* had become more authoritative than Scripture.

The **Zealots** were *political* and often *military activists*...extremely *nationalistic* and *resentful of Roman control* of **Israel**. They were the *extremist*.

The **Essenes** were a *reclusive sect* who spent most of their time *copying* the Old Testament. It was a group of **Essenes** living in **Qumran**, on the *northwest shore* of the **Dead Sea**, who produced what has become known as the **Dead Sea Scrolls**.

The **Sadducees** were the *aristocrats of Judaism*...being largely in *control* of the Temple...and the *operation* of the *priesthood*. It was primarily through the Temple *concessions*...*money changing* and *selling of sacrificial animals* (**Matthew 21:12**)...where they obtained their wealth. The *high priest* and *chief priests* were almost always **Sadducees**...as were most members of the **Sanhedrin**, the *Jewish high council*.

The **Sadducees** weren't respected by most Jews...especially by the **Pharisees**...because they were *aloof* from the *common people* and *acted superior* to them. They were also disliked for their *theology* ...the fact that they didn't believe in *resurrection* or *angels*, or *spirits*. *Politically*, the **Sadducees** were *pro-Roman*.

Because their *power* and *wealth* were founded in the Temple through its *offerings*, *sacrificial system*, and *enterprises*...when the Temple was destroyed in **70 A.D.**, the **Sadducees** ceased to exist.

The **Pharisees** and **Sadducees** had great *social* and *political*, as well as *theological*, *animosity* between them. *Socially*, the **Sadducees** were *aristocratic* and the **Pharisees** were *commoners*. *Politically*, the **Sadducees** were *pro-Roman* and the **Pharisees** were *anti-Roman*. They didn't like each other...but the one issue that *united* them was their *intense opposition* to Jesus.

Until the day before when Jesus has *cleansed* the Temple, the **Sadducees** had shown little interest in Jesus. But when Jesus cleansed the Temple...when He disrupted their financial operation at the most lucrative time of the year...that immediately got their attention.

II. THE ABSURDITY: (vs. 24-28)

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.’ Now there were seven brothers with us; and the first married and died, and having no children left his wife to his brother; so also the second, and the third, down to the seventh. Last of all, the woman died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had married her.” (vs. 24-28)...

Just like the **Pharisees’ disciples** (vs. 16)...the **Sadducees** addressed Jesus as **Teacher**...again hoping to catch Him off guard with such flattery. One commentary has called this “*polished scoffing*.”

To the **Sadducees**, there was no higher appeal that could be made than to **Moses**. They considered him the *great lawmaker* and the *supreme spokesman* for God. And because the **Sadducees** were aware of Jesus' high regard for Scripture, they knew that He

wouldn't contest the validity of the teaching that they were about to cite...namely, the provision for **levirate marriage**.

The term **levirate** is from the **Latin, levir**, meaning "*husband's brother*." The **Mosaic** provision for **levirate marriage** is found in **Deuteronomy 25:5-10**...a summary of which the **Sadducees** gave to Jesus in their question.

In order that **tribal names, families, and inheritances** might be kept intact...**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 custom of **levirate marriage** had been practiced for many centuries and was honored by God even before He directed **Moses** to place it in the law.

- **Genesis 38:7-10**...When **Judah's** son **Er** was killed by the Lord for his wickedness, **Judah** told another son, **Onan**, who was unmarried, to fulfill his responsibility and marry **Er's** wife. **Onan** refused and was also killed by the Lord.
- **Ruth 4:1-10**...It was in the fulfillment of the **levirate law** that **Boaz** took **Ruth** as his wife because her first husband, **Mahlon**, had died.

Whether **levirate marriage** was still practiced in Jesus' day isn't known...but the custom of it was well known to every **Jew**...and was recognized to be a **divine provision**.

Now there were seven brothers with us...The **Sadducees** may have actually been reporting an actual story...and obviously no one knows for sure...but it was a perfect illustration for this occasion.

It's not hard to visualize the look in their eyes and the smirks on their faces as the **Sadducees** looked at Jesus and pondered what they thought was an **unanswerable question**. They must have thought that the dilemma that they had presented had to prove that the idea of a **resurrection** was absurd...and they must have thought that Jesus would be forced to admit such...either by His silence (being speechless) or by His verbal answer.

III. THE ANSWER: (vs. 29-32)

The **Sadducees** probably expected Jesus to say nothing and just walk away in **humiliation** and **disgrace**...just as they had caused the **Pharisees** to do on many occasions before when challenging their theology.

But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God (vs. 29)... Jesus answered *without hesitation*...and *immediately* put them on the **defensive**. The **Sadducees** had just put their own ignorance on display for everyone in the Temple to see and hear.

You are mistaken...Gk. **planao**, means *to go astray, wander off, or be deceived*. In its form here it means *to lead oneself off course or to stray from the truth*. It often carries the idea of *being cut loose from reality*.

Jesus then presented the **two** reasons **why** the **Sadducees** were **mistaken**.

- They erred in **not understanding the Scriptures**.
- And they **didn't understanding the power of God**.

This was a strong denunciation of these religious leaders...who of all people, certainly should have known **God's Word** and **God's power**...because they **considered themselves authorities** in both of these areas.

The Lord then explains in reverse order **how** they misunderstood **God's Word** and **His power**.

IGNORANCE OF GOD'S POWER...

For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven (vs. 30)...

In exposing the **Sadducees'** lack of belief about the **resurrection**... Jesus also exposed their false notion about **angels**...whose existence they also denied.

Here, Jesus said that **heaven** isn't simply an extension of the pleasures people enjoy here on earth. In fact in the eternal state, **marriage** will not be necessary. Once individuals have received **glorified bodies** no longer subject to death, the need for procreation ...one of the basic purposes for marriage...will no longer exist. Believers in **glorified bodies** will be **like angels** in that angels don't reproduce themselves.

IGNORANCE OF SCRIPTURE...

The more important issue raised by the **Sadducees** pertained to the biblical theology of **resurrection**. If they had **read** and **understood**

the Old Testament Scriptures, they would have clearly seen that there is a *future life*...and that when a person dies, he continues to exist...to live.

To the **Sadducees**, the **resurrection** was ridiculous because they believed that death ended man's existence. But Jesus quoted a statement God had made directly to **Moses** at the *burning bush*...

But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: '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." (vs. 31-32)...

I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob...If the **Sadducees** were correct and **Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob** had died and were no longer present anywhere...the words "**I am**" should have been "**I was**." The use of the *present tense*, "**I am**" implied that God is still the God of these patriarchs because they are still alive and are with God...and will ultimately share in the **resurrection** of the *righteous*.

He is not the God of the dead but of the living...Again, the *present tense* is used here to emphasize the fact that **Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob** were obviously *still alive*...just *in another realm*. They would have to still be living so that God could fulfill His promises to them...those which weren't fulfilled during their lifetime.

"All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them."

~Hebrews 11:13-16

IV. THEIR ASTONISHMENT: (vs. 33)

When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at His teaching (vs. 33)...

The multitudes were accustomed to being **astonished at Jesus' teaching**...

Astonished...Gk. *explessonto*, literally means *overwhelmed*. It suggests *a strong, sudden sense of being astounded*.

Luke even reported that even...

"Some of the scribes answered and said, 'Teacher, You have spoken well'."

~Luke 20:39

But tragically, Jesus hadn't convinced the **Sadducees**...because they wouldn't allow themselves to be convinced.

In the Temple that day, Jesus again demonstrated His absolute commitment to Scripture. And through Scripture, He affirmed the *reality* and *glory* of the **resurrection** that awaits those who belong to Him.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS PASSAGE:

- No matter how *religious* you are...how *wealthy* you are...or how *politically* you are networked...regardless of your *prominence, position, or power*...these things will not gain you acceptance with God.
- No matter how sincere you are in your *faith* and *belief*...*false teaching* and *bad theology* will be *repudiated, rejected, and denounced* by God.