

**Pastor Adam Parker**

**4/28/24**

**Sermon Title:** The Sadducees Were Sad You See

**Sermon Text:** Matthew 22:23-33

**Matt. 22:23** ¶ The same day Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection, and they asked him a question,

**Matt. 22:24** saying, “Teacher, Moses said, ‘If a man dies having no children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.’

**Matt. 22:25** Now there were seven brothers among us. The first married and died, and having no offspring left his wife to his brother.

**Matt. 22:26** So too the second and third, down to the seventh.

**Matt. 22:27** After them all, the woman died.

**Matt. 22:28** In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her.”

**Matt. 22:29** ¶ But Jesus answered them, “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.

**Matt. 22:30** For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

**Matt. 22:31** And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God:

**Matt. 22:32** ‘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.”

**Matt. 22:33** And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.

**Main Point:** If we know the Scriptures, then we know that the resurrection is a very real comfort.

**Outline:**

1. The Correction of the Scriptures
2. The Comfort of the Resurrection

**Introduction**

There is a church that I used to preach at every month in Natchez, MS from about 2014-2016. One of my favorite things about the church was this graveyard off to the side of the building. There were graves here that dated back to the early 1700s – Older than the United States. And the church’s cemetery had lovely walking paths, and had Spanish moss hanging down. I just loved going through the graveyard there.

But there was one grave in particular. Now I don’t remember the name on it anymore. But I remember that it was a woman’s grave, and under her name was written “Wife of ...” and then it put her husband’s name. I wish I could remember it. But the thing is, her husband’s grave had been there long before she died. If I remember correctly she lived another thirty years past her husband. But even after all that time this woman wanted her gravestone to say, that she was his wife.

And seeing this gravestone got me thinking, “Marriage forms a strong bond. Romans 7 tells us that it’s a bond that lasts as long as we’re alive. Sometimes theological discussions can be really abstract and can feel far away from where people really are. But regardless of the motives of the Sadducees in bringing this story to Jesus, this question that they ask Jesus really reminds you that not all theological discussions are these abstract high level exercises that have no practical or real-world importance.

And we have sort of two ways to appreciate this passage today. On the one hand we do have here a record of a debate. And in that debate the importance of the Scriptures comes through loud and clear.

On the other hand, this is a practical and even intensely personal subject. And in that sense this brings the importance of the resurrection and the comfort found in it to the forefront. So yes, it’s a debate. But it’s a debate that really matters.

And so we have two points today: the correction of the Scriptures, and the Comfort of the Resurrection.

**1. The Correction of the Scriptures**

The first point is the correction of the Scriptures. Now the correction is something the Sadducees need to hear. But let's look at what's really going on.

The Sadducees bring this story to Jesus. It's a story that's almost comically absurd on the one hand. The story focuses on a family situation where a man dies and leaves his widow behind. Then, because the levirate laws required that the next brother marry her so that she can have a child, the next brother takes her as a wife. But when he dies the *next* brother takes her as a wife and so on.

After this poor woman has had seven husbands, all the while never having a child, she dies as well. And that leaves us with a question: whose wife was she? To put it in our context we might say, "Which husband should she be buried next to?" But their real question isn't about burial plots, it's really about the future state. Not just what will it be like for her in the resurrection, but what will it be like for any of us?

And you see, the Sadducees don't *believe* in a future state. They think it's absurd. They don't believe in a resurrection. And this crazy situation is the way they want to bring doubt into the discussion.

They seem to think that if only people thought a little more about the idea of the resurrection they'd realize that it's just crazy. After all, if the resurrection is real, this woman's going to have seven husbands in the afterlife!

So what does Jesus do? He sidesteps the problem because they've made a fundamental mistake in the phrasing of their question. Jesus says, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God."

He condemns them at the most fundamental level. They aren't even asking a biblical *question*. These teachers of the law are biblically illiterate.

Their question assumes the wrong things about the afterlife. For one thing, the Sadducees talk as if marriage in the afterlife is a given. And he says that is most certainly isn't. "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (v. 33).

Sometimes people look at a verse like that and when someone dies – they mean well when they say this – but they say, "Heaven has another angel." Well that isn't true. When someone has Christ as Savior dies they do pass into God's presence, but they don't become angels. Jesus isn't saying that when we die we become angels. He is saying that we become *like* angels in the sense that angels also don't marry.

But Jesus has another argument to make in response to this story. In verse 32 here is how Jesus reasons. First Jesus doesn't argue from the nature of man, but from the nature of God. Notice how he quotes from Exodus chapter 3: "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

Jesus is really arguing that “look, God keeps his promises. He promised life to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” If there’s no resurrection, then God didn’t keep his promise to them. But God *does* keep his promises. Therefore the resurrection *will* happen. Abraham will rise up. He will receive eternal life. God will keep his promise.

And Jesus’ most important statement here is that the Sadducees would have known that if they knew the Scriptures. He tells them, “You are quite wrong.” Quite wrong. They couldn’t be more wrong. If Jesus was having the conversation to day we’d call that a mic drop. Discussion is over.

Let me make one application here. Jesus reserves for himself the right to anytime tell us, “You are quite wrong.” Our God is a God who disagrees with us. Tells us when we’re wrong, and corrects us.

So many today say that they can’t be Christians because they disagree with the Bible’s teachings about different things. Marriage, divorce, Sabbath, women pastors... the list goes on. And they say, “Christianity can’t be true because I don’t agree with it.”

We’re in a moment where some of the Bible’s teachings are very precious to people in the world around us. The bible teaches that there is a such thing as human rights, because we are made in God’s image. Modern people do like human rights. The Bible teaches that we are all equal. The ancient people like the Greeks and Romans of course, never would have agreed with this. They would have said, “Actually some people are naturally born better than others, and it is fitting for the best and the strongest to rule over the inferiors and the weak.” Christianity came along and introduced the idea of human rights and human equality – two things that people today for the most part treasure and believe in.

So much of Christian teaching is approved of heartily by people today. But people are also selective.

Your modern western liberal would probably say, “I like this human rights thing.”

But then the Bible says sex is only for within marriage and the same people throw their hands up, “This is crazy! Who could possibly live this way? Self-denial? That’s impossible.”

Or they see that the Bible says that it’s sin for a man to sexually desire another man, and they think, “Well I guess I can’t believe in God.”

Perhaps the problem really is us, not God. We change. Our culture changes. Our tastes change. But God stays the same. You see, there has always been something in God’s word to offend all people, ancient or modern.

Ever since the fall of man, God has been in the business of disagreeing with human beings and correcting us.

Let's think about his a moment: if God is real. And if he knows everything. And if He is right that we're really sinners who get things wrong... wouldn't we expect God to disagree with us? Wouldn't we expect God to correct us on some really important things?

How weird and suspicious would it be if we met the God who made heaven and earth, and found out that everything we think and believe... He thinks and believes, too. If he just agreed with us on everything. It would be comical.

Here human beings are: these unhappy, suffering, miserable creatures, and God just says to us, "Nah, you're great. Everything about you is perfect. Everything you think is correct. You've been doing everything right. 2024. Congratulations. You made it. You figured it all out. I really have no notes for you at all." Can you imagine anything as ridiculous as that? I feel like if God did that we'd all look around and be like, "If we're so great, why are we so sad?" "If we're so great, then why do things seem so wrong?"

Perhaps the answer is that there really is more to the story: perhaps we aren't as great as we might think that we are.

Many today want God to be like a mirror image of themselves: "I'll believe in you if we agree with me, God." But part of being a Christian is that we do often hear God speak to us and say, "You are quite wrong."

So I would say to those here who perhaps are not yet Christians, please consider that the Christian account of things is correct: something is desperately wrong with us. We're not right about everything. We are fallen. We are sinners. And because of this, mankind is sick and troubled to its core. We were noble and upright, but something happened; just like the book of Genesis tells us. Consider that if we were so great and had things figured out, then why is there so much misery around us? All of us have to answer this question. Would it really make sense for God to come to us and say that we're great as we are, as miserable as we are? The Christian account of these things is that something is very wrong with us. Just like the book of Genesis tells us, there is a beauty and nobility that we once had, but we fell from it, and we want to go back. But unless we submit to the creator and find peace that only Christ provides, we will persist in our fallen state and in our misery.

So let's submit to the correction of God's word. I'm not just talking to unbelievers. I'm talking to Christians here, too. You may be smart. Highly intelligent. You may know a lot. But have you reckoned with your limits? You will never be infallible. You will never be inerrant. You need to be corrected. When was the last time that God's word changed your mind about something? When was the last time that God told you that you were wrong, and you admitted it?

In this passage Jesus calls these men to submit themselves to God's Word. Let's hear that correction, too and respond with obedience: let's hear the correction of the Scriptures.

Let's do the same.

So that is the first point today: the Correction of the Scriptures.

## 2. The Comfort of the Resurrection

The second point is the comfort of the resurrection. The idea of comfort is a turn for us, because so far it's been a seemingly academic discussion among these scholars. And the one forgotten person in the narrative seems to be the wife in the story. This story appears to have a basis in reality.

It seems this may have actually happened and isn't just a hypothetical. Look at verse 25: "there were seven brothers among us." So yes, it seems like this woman in the story is just a tool to make a point. But let's not be like them. Let's think of this poor woman. She's lost seven husbands. Seven! She's buried seven men. Not only that, but experiencing the loss of a spouse is a deeply lonely experience.

On top of *that*, she's dealing with the pain of childlessness. She seems to be a person who would like to have children but may not be medically able to have children. Especially back in the days of Jesus childlessness wasn't just an emotional reality, it was a material reality, too. Having sons who could labor and work would be a great help to a widow. Having daughters who could help mind the house was a great help, too.

On top of all these other pains, think of her isolation. She had lost seven husbands by the end of the narrative. Seven. You find yourself wondering how she handled it. How did others handle it? Was there a stigma around her? Did people steer clear? They're still talking about her, clearly. Do you think the seventh son married her *eagerly*? After six other brothers married her and died was he maybe just a little hesitant to marry this seeming black widow?

And let's just forget about the Sadducees and their agenda for a moment. There's a very real question here: What is the future like for *this* woman? What can she expect? What's her future going to be like. Eventually the day will come where she will fall asleep for the last time. And as she closes her eyes for the last time, what should she expect? Will there be a man waiting for her to be her husband on the other side?

Maybe we can put the question this way: will the shape of things to come be the same as what we're experiencing now? Will life be like this... just more of it?

And Jesus has an answer. His answer is, "There's a different order coming. It's a better order. And it's different."

You see, in some ways, Jesus is telling us something about our identity. Here's one insight for you: The resurrection tells us that who we are, and who we will be is not the sum total of our actions and relationships in this life. What we do matters, but what we do isn't who we are.

For example: are you single? Maybe you are glad to be single, or maybe you're not. But either way, your singleness is not who you are.

You have something you do for a living. Maybe you like your job, or maybe you don't. Those things are true of you, but your job is not who you are.

Here you go: I pastor a church. My father all his life did a job he hated, as far as I could ever tell. Yet here I am, and doing what I wanted to do since I was 17 years old. This is my dream job. There's nothing else I'd rather do. But guess what? Pastoring may be what I do, Pastor may be what you call me, but this still isn't who I am.

You have family relationships. Are you a mother? A father? A grandparent? Those things are true of you, but they are not ultimately *who* you are. Those things aren't your identity.

Here this many times married woman dies, and come to find out, that's not who she is, either. The fact is in the resurrection, our relationships will change. We'll be like angels. We won't get married anymore. Or at least not in any way that we currently find familiar.

We will be so different, so changed, that we can scarcely imagine it. We'll be different. Our needs will be different. Our wants will be different. Our desires will be different. And best of all, our sin will be gone. Which is very different. That's right. Our sin isn't who we are, either.

The hurt and loneliness of this life doesn't persist, nor does the state of affairs that brought about those pains to begin with. That's not who you are.

Change is coming. Things won't stay like they are.

"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

Where is our hope? **It's in the one who wipes away the tears.** Our hope isn't our loved ones. They'll be a happy benefit of the next life. We'll still know them, we won't be strangers, but things will be different too. No, our hope will be in the tear wiper. Jesus.

Because as wonderful as our loved ones are, here's the one thing that we know doesn't change: Who Jesus is, and who we are in him.

Do you want an identity that the world can't shake or change or take away? Everybody is searching for that. But the world can't give it. If you want an unshakable identity, then come to Christ. And this isn't just pie in the sky stuff that we can have some day when we day.

All of this is comfort that we have now. Today. The tear wiper is with us now. He invites us in to who he is now, not later.

Because of the resurrection, and because of Christ, ultimately who you are is not a husband. You aren't a wife. You aren't a kid. You aren't an employee. You aren't a parent first and foremost. Above all else, you are a child of God who is secure in and defined by Jesus Christ, who will never change, never reject you, never leave you, and never disappoint you.

## **Conclusion**

Jesus says to the Sadducees, and he says to us today, "If you had known the power of God to raise the dead — you would have known that a resurrection is coming, and that the problems that you worry about will become a non-issue because something better than marriage lies ahead for all of us — both married and unmarried." Praise be to God.