

Expository Thoughts On Matthew - Matthew

22:23-33

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Transcript

This passage describes a conversation between our Lord Jesus Christ and the Sadducees. These unhappy men, who said that there was "no resurrection" attempted, like the Pharisees and Herodians, to perplex our Lord with hard questions. Like them, they hoped to entangle him in his talk and to injure his reputation among the people. Like them, they were completely baffled. Let us observe in the first place, that absurd skeptical objections to Bible truths are ancient things. The Sadducees wished to show the absurdity of the doctrine of the resurrection and the life to come; they therefore came to our Lord with a story which was probably invented for the occasion. They told him that a certain woman had married seven brothers in succession, who had all died and left no children. They then asked, "whose wife" this woman would be in the next world, when all rose again. The object of the question was plain and transparent. They meant, in reality, to bring the whole doctrine of a resurrection into contempt; they meant to insinuate that there must needs be confusion, and strife and unseemly disorder if after death men and women were to live again. It must never surprise us if we meet with like objections against the doctrines of Scripture, and especially against those doctrines which concern another world. There never probably will be wanting unreasonable men who will intrude into things unseen and make imaginary difficulties their excuse for unbelief. Supposed cases are one of the favorite strongholds in which an unbelieving mind loves to entrench itself. Such a mind will often set up a shadow of its own imagining, and fight with it as if it was a truth; such a mind will often refuse to look at the overwhelming mass of plain evidence by which Christianity is supported, and will fasten down on some one single difficulty which it fancies is unanswerable. The talk and arguments of people of this character should never shake our faith for a moment. For one thing, we should remember that there must needs be deep and dark things in a religion which comes from God, and that a child may put forth questions which the greatest philosopher cannot answer. For another thing, we should remember that there are countless truths in the Bible which are clear and unmistakable. Let us first attend to them, believe them and obey them. In so doing, we need not doubt that many a thing now unintelligible to us will yet be made plain; in so doing, we may be sure that what we know not now we shall know hereafter. Let us observe in the second place, what a remarkable text our Lord brings forward in proof of the reality of a life to come. He places before the Sadducees the words which God spoke to Moses in the bush: "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (i.e. Exodus 3:6). He adds the comment, "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living". At the time when Moses heard these words, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been dead and buried many years; two centuries had passed away since Jacob, the last of the three, was carried to his tomb: and yet God spoke of them as being still his people,

and of himself as being still their God. He said not, "I was their God," but "I am." Perhaps we are not often tempted to doubt the truth of a resurrection and a life to come, but, unhappily, it is easy to hold truths theoretically, and yet not realize them practically. There are few of us who would not find it good to meditate on the mighty verity which our Lord here unfolds, and to give it a prominent place in our thoughts. Let us settle it in our minds that the dead are in one sense still alive. From our eyes they have passed away and their place knows them no more, but in the eyes of God they live and will one day come out of their graves to receive an everlasting sentence. There is no such thing as annihilation; the idea is a miserable delusion. The sun, moon and stars, the solid mountains and deep sea, will one day come to nothing; but the weakest babe of the poorest man shall live forevermore in another world. May we never forget this! Happy is who can say from his heart the words of the Nicene Creed: "I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come." Let us observe in the last place, the account which our Lord gives of the state of men and women after the resurrection. He silences the fancied objections of the Sadducees by showing that they entirely mistook the true character of the resurrection state. They took it for granted that it must needs be a gross, carnal existence like that of mankind upon earth. Our Lord tells them that in the next world we may have a real material body, and yet a body of very different constitution and different necessities from that we have now. He speaks only of the saved, be it remembered: he omits all mention of the lost. He says, "In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels of God in heaven." We know but little of the life to come in heaven. Perhaps our clearest ideas of it are drawn from considering what it will not be, rather than what it will be. It is a state in which we shall hunger no more nor thirst any more; sickness, pain and disease will not be known; wasting old age and death will have no place. Marriages, births and a constant succession of inhabitants will no more be needed: they who are once admitted into heaven shall dwell there forevermore. And, to pass from negatives to positives, one thing we are told plainly: we shall be "as the angels of God." Like them, we shall serve God perfectly, unhesitatingly and unweariedly; like them, we shall be in God's presence; like them, we shall ever delight to do his will; like them, we shall give all glory to the Lamb. These are deep things, but they are all true. Are we ready for this life? Should we enjoy it, if admitted to take part in it? Is the company of God and the service of God pleasant to us now? Is the occupation of angels one in which we should delight? These are solemn questions. Our hearts must be heavenly on earth, while we live, if we hope to go to heaven when we rise again in another world (Matt 22:34-46). In the beginning of this passage we find our Lord replying to the question of a certain lawyer, who asked him which was the

In the beginning of this passage we find our Lord replying to the question of a certain lawyer, who asked him which was the great commandment of the Law. The question was asked in no friendly spirit, but we have reason to be thankful that it was asked at all. It drew from our Lord an answer full of precious instruction. Thus we see how good may come out of evil. Let us mark what an admirable summary these verses contain of our duty towards God and our neighbor. Jesus says, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind." He says again, "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself;" and he adds, "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." How simple are these two rules, and yet how comprehensive! How soon the words are repeated, and yet how much they contain! How humbling and condemning they are! How much they prove our daily need of mercy and the precious blood of atonement! Happy would it be for the world if these rules were more known and more practiced. Love is the grand secret of true obedience to God. When we feel towards him as children feel towards a dear father, we shall delight to do his will; we shall not find his commandments grievous, or work for him like slaves under fear of the lash; we shall take pleasure in trying to keep his laws, and mourn when we transgress them. None works so well as they who

work for love: the fear of punishment or the desire of reward are principles of far less power. They do the will of God best who do it from the heart. Would we train children right? Let us teach them to love God. Love is the grand secret of the right behavior towards our fellow men. He who love his neighbor will scorn to do him any willful injury, either in person, property or character. But he will not rest there: he will desire in every way to do him good; he will strive to promote his comfort and happiness in every way; he will endeavor to lighten his sorrows, and increase his joys. When a man loves us, we feel confidence in him: we know that he will never intentionally do us harm, and that in every time of need he will be our friend. Would we teach children to behave aright towards others? Let us teach them to love everybody as themselves, and do to others as they would have others do to them. But how shall we obtain this love towards God? It is no natural feeling. We are born in sin, and, as sinners, are afraid of him. How then can we love him? We can never really love him till we are at peace with him through Christ. When we feel our sins forgiven, and ourselves reconciled to our holy Maker, then, and not till then, we shall love him and have the Spirit of adoption. Faith in Christ is the true spring of love to God: they love most who feel most forgiven. We love him because he first loved us (1 John 4:19). And how shall we obtain this love towards our neighbor? This also is no natural feeling. We are born selfish, hateful, and hating one another (Titus 3:3). We shall never love our fellow men aright till our hearts are changed by the Holy Ghost: we must be born again; we must put off the old man, and put on the new, and receive the mind that was in Christ Jesus. Then, and not till then, our cold hearts will know true God-like love towards all. The fruit of the Spirit is love (Galatians 5:22). Let these things sink down into our hearts. There is much vague talk in these latter days about love and charity: men profess to admire them and desire to see them increased, and yet hate the principles which alone can produce them. Let us stand fast in the old paths. We cannot have fruits and flowers without roots: we cannot have love to God and man without faith in Christ, and without regeneration. The way to spread true love in the world is to teach the atonement of Christ, and the work of the Holy Ghost. The concluding portion of the passage contains a question put to the Pharisees by our Lord. After answering with perfect wisdom the inquiries of his adversaries, he at last asks them, What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he? They reply at once, The son of David. He then asks them to explain why David in the book of Psalms calls him Lord. If David then call him Lord how is he his son? At once his enemies were put to silence: No man was able to answer him a word. The scribes and Pharisees no doubt were familiar with the Psalm he quoted, but they could not explain its application: it could only be explained by conceding the pre-existence and divinity of the Messiah. This the Pharisees would not concede: their only idea of Messiah was that he was to be a man like one of themselves: their ignorance of the Scriptures, of which they pretended to know more than others, and their low, carnal view of the true nature of Christ, were thus exposed at one and the same time. Well may Matthew say, by the Holy Ghost, from that day forth durst no man ask him any more questions. Let us not leave these verses without making a practical use of our Lord's solemn question, What think ye of Christ? What do we think of his person, and his offices? What do we think of his life, and what of his death for us on the cross? What do we think of his resurrection, ascension, and intercession at the right hand of God? Have we tasted that he is gracious? Have we laid hold on him by faith? Have we found by experience that he is precious to our souls? Can we truly say, He is my Redeemer and my Saviour, my Shepherd and my Friend? These are serious inquiries. May we never rest till we can give a satisfactory answer to them! It will not profit us to read about Christ if we are not joined to him by living faith. Once more then let us test our religion by this question: What think we of Christ?

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