

It's good to see all of you today. It's been a long while since I've done this. I really feel a bit out of practice to be honest. So with that being said, before we begin today's sermon, will you pray with me.

PRAY

So to dive into this passage with two confrontations between Jesus and the religious leaders of the day, let's go through the passage just one more time together.

Matthew 22:15-33

Paying the Imperial Tax to Caesar

15 Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words.**16**

They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. **17** Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?"

18 But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? **19** Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They

brought him a denarius, **20** and he asked them, “Whose image is this? And whose inscription?”

21 “Caesar’s,” they replied.

Then he said to them, “So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

22 When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

Marriage at the Resurrection

23 That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. **24** “Teacher,” they said, “Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for him. **25** Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. **26** The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. **27** Finally, the woman died. **28** Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?”

29 Jesus replied, “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. **30** At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.**31** But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, **32** ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.”

33 When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.

Who are the Pharisees?

First, to understand this first story we have to recall who the Pharisees were. The Pharisees were a group of religious leaders who held strongly to the idea that the written Torah, which are the first five books of the Old Testament, were written by God through Moses. The Sadducees held this same view. The Torah was central to the Jewish faith and still is to this day. So any good Jew held to the importance of the Torah. And these religious elite were looked up to and respected by many.

Now to understand why the Pharisees were upset we have to go back just a little bit and put some context into this passage. Remember all that has

happened in the chapter before. At the beginning of chapter 21, Jesus has just come through the city of Jerusalem, the holy city, riding on a donkey and all the people have shouted and declared him as king. And the Pharisees and Sadducees knew what the scripture in Zechariah. And when the people had begun shouting “Hosannah” they knew the Psalms and what the common people were referencing. Then he enters the temple courts and drives out the money changers. Then when the chief priests question his authority to do all this, he tells them they can’t understand it. They are too blind to see what is right in front of them. He tells them that tax collectors and prostitutes will enter the kingdom before they will (v31) and that the Kingdom of God will be taken away from them and given to the people (v43). In verse 45, they look for a way to arrest him, but can find none due to the large crowds following Jesus. So you can see why they are upset and frustrated.

The Oral Torah

There are differences that must be pointed out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees that is a key to our story. Not only did the Pharisees hold to the idea that the written Torah was so important, they also held to the idea

that there was an oral Torah that consisted of oral laws, interpretations and traditions transmitted by God to Moses and memorized and passed down to the generations.

These oral traditions were key to their belief that without these oral traditions and understandings, the Torah was not complete and could not be fully understood. So now let's go back to the first part of our passage: "Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him (Jesus) in his words (v.15)." They were going to try and trap him in the oral traditions that they knew.

But here is the thing, the Pharisees don't go to try and trap Jesus himself, they send their own disciples. Their students. Their reserves. Their back-up team. I think they knew that Jesus himself knew what they were trying to do. They didn't want to be embarrassed. If it worked, great. But if not, who knows what ridicule they would suffer and how much more support Jesus would gain.

The plan was to try and entrap Jesus by incriminating himself in his own words. They then would have the ammunition they needed to go to the Romans and ask for execution.

But these disciples are yet to become experts of the law. They are not as skilled as the Pharisees themselves, whom Jesus has already silenced before.

Matthew also records that the Herodians were there. Now I am uncertain as to why they were there with the disciples of the Pharisees, but what we do know is they of course have political investment in this as they are trying to advance the cause of the Herodian family in the region. Remember, they have a fear of losing their kingdom to this guy. Herod Antipas wanted control of his father's (Herod the Great) territory. Jesus here is seen as a common enemy to both sides.

The trap part 1

By calling Jesus "teacher" they are showing a sign of respect, but as we know, this is all a ruse. They want to make Jesus feel good. They want

him to let his guard down. If they truly meant what they said, they would follow Jesus themselves. But they don't. It is clearly a power move.

They try to butter him up and they lay it on thick. They call him a "man of integrity (v16)" They say they are aware he teaches the way of God "in accordance with the truth (v16)" and that he isn't swayed from his viewpoint because he knows what those people are trying to do. Which is ironic, because that is exactly what they are trying to do.

Then comes the question: "Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?"

Jesus reads right into this. He knows what their plan is. He knows they are trying to trap him in his own words. He knows they have tried to build him up, before tearing him down. Yet, he knows he has to answer them. He knows he has to play their game. He can't just walk away. So he reverses the situation on them. He takes the coin and points out what is on the coin.

If you look at a denarius, the head of Tiberius Caesar is on one side and on the other side the Roman goddess, Pax, the god of peace.



Jesus says since Caesar's head portrait and inscription are on the coin they can give that to Caesar. He is saying a lot in this statement.

What kingdom will you put first?

This is saying a lot about his kingdom. There were already rulers and kingdoms set in place in the world Jesus came into. As there are in ours as well. So the kingdom that Jesus came to establish is completely different from other kingdoms of power and rulers have in mind. For almost all others, to gain political power or establish kingdom rule, you must tear down the prior kingdom's rule and power. We even see that today in our American political party system don't we. Often times we see all the things the prior political party has done have to be torn down and the new party

¹ <http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/sear5/s1763.html>

has to do the exact opposite. Sure, maybe sometimes it is for good reason, but this is not the case for Jesus. He is going to operate within the system that is already in place. Which is what we have the challenge of doing as well.

For those of us who accepted the call to live with Jesus in his kingdom, which is already established here on earth, we have a choice. Obviously. We have an obligation to abide by some of the governing authorities and rules set in this world and country we live in.

And giving to God what is God's shows that God is sovereign over all things. We are to use all that we have to glorify and honor him. This statement implies that even the coin just given to Caesar was God's first to give us.

What kingdom will you put first? What comes to my mind are lyrics from a song by Derek Webb's "A King and a Kingdom," which may be controversial for some. The chorus goes like this:

My first allegiance is not to a flag, a country or a man
My first allegiance is not to democracy or blood
It's to a king and a kingdom²

So after hearing all of this, what do the Pharisees do? They are simply amazed and walk away. The group known for using their words have nothing left to say.

The Sadducees

Now come the next group. The Sadducees now have their turn. They quote the scriptures as they are known to do. In theology, they were the conservative group. They took to just the five books Old Testament and took that literally. They The Sadducees, who we have already read in the passage, do not believe in the resurrection. This is the very thing they challenge Jesus on. They go to the Torah. They state what Moses said found in Deuteronomy 25:5-10

5 If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take

² <https://genius.com/Derek-webb-a-king-and-a-kingdom-lyrics>

her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her.**6** The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.

7 However, if a man does not want to marry his brother's wife, she shall go to the elders at the town gate and say, "My husband's brother refuses to carry on his brother's name in Israel. He will not fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to me." **8** Then the elders of his town shall summon him and talk to him. If he persists in saying, "I do not want to marry her,"**9** his brother's widow shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, take off one of his sandals, spit in his face and say, "This is what is done to the man who will not build up his brother's family line." **10** That man's line shall be known in Israel as The Family of the Unsandaled.

The trap part 2

The question is: "Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her? (v28)"

What they are trying to do here is show that Jesus is just an ordinary man and is not qualified to discuss or teach matters of theology. This would

mean that any ruling authority he goes against, it would not matter what Jesus said because his authority would be gone.

By asking him a question about resurrection, they want to tear down that belief in and of itself and anyone, who may have that belief. Including Jesus himself.

They also assume that resurrection will be exactly like this life now. And as Jesus points out, it won't be.

This beautiful resurrection

He points out that their belief that there is no resurrection is their first mistake. Their second mistake is that they are underestimating the power of God.

He points out that resurrected humans will not continue to live the same way as we did in the past. We will not be married or given to marriage as we are in this world. So what does that mean?

Some of us may be disappointed hearing that. Look this is is a difficult passage that brings up a lot of questions. Will we know our spouse on the

other side of the resurrection? Will we recognize them even? Will we be angels? I don't know honestly and I bet we may have different opinions on that. I'd like to think that my grandparents are spending time with each other in heaven and have been reunited. But who knows? But here is what I think. And I'm going to offer my opinion.

While the passage states that relationships will change at the resurrection, I don't think that means that relationships, friendships, or whatever else will end. We were created to have a desire for relationship with one another on this earth. Some desires for relationship run deeper than just friendships. In this case a relationship with a spouse. For some of us it may feel like it fills an empty hole we have inside of us. It's like the line in Jerry Maguire, "you complete me". But on the other side of the resurrection we will be complete. We will be made whole. We will all love each other with all we have. There will be no sin, so there will be no jealousy of anyone else or any thought of being possessive.

Like in Hebrews 10:14 says, "For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy."

Or in 1 Corinthians 15:22: “For as in Adam we all die, so in Christ we all will be made alive.”

So it will be different. We will be made whole and be satisfied and complete just how God intended.

And as it says in Revelation 21:2, “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.”

We will be the bride of Christ.

Now back to our passage.

Lastly, in verse 32, Jesus goes back again to the resurrection pointing out some key members of the faith in Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and stating that God is the God of the living. He is quoting from Exodus 3:6 which says, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac

and the God of Jacob. At this Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God.”

So God speaks to Moses and states to him that even though these patriarchs of the faith have passed away, he is still currently their God. Meaning, they are dead in this life, but have been given new life in Christ and the resurrection is real.

He is stating that God has a relationship with us that goes beyond death. He will continue that relationship with us at the resurrection.

Conclusion

So what can we do with these stories?

1. Think about the word and talk amongst one another about these things.

Especially in things that we don't understand or have questions about we need to have discussions. We can't just assume our answer is correct, everyone knows the answer, or agrees with the same answer we have.

It is ok to have questions. It is ok to not know the answer. We will be confronted on things. But hopefully, we can discuss with one another and be civil. Even if we have different opinions. Hopefully though, we can find common ground in the word and what Jesus says.

2. Put the kingdom of God first.

This is key to what Jesus taught here today. His kingdom and way of life should come before any kingdom of this world. And if we accept that and live that way, we will live with one another at the other side of this life.

3. The resurrection is real.

We may have questions about it. We be confused of what it will look like. I like to picture it as a big family reunion. One of those where you are excited to see everyone. Even your crazy aunt or uncle. I'd like to think we

want to be there and see everyone in our family there. So lets try to make that happen and live that way.