

July 21, 2019

“About the Resurrection”
Matthew 22:23-33

FCF: Resistance to taking the afterlife seriously

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Jesus alone has authority to speak on the resurrection.
(magnet) We must heed what He says.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Skeptics of the supernatural will voice doubts about life-after-death (**READ quotes**):

- Bertrand Russell, “I believe that when I die I shall rot, and nothing of my ego will survive.”
- Carl Sagan, “I would love to believe that when I die I will live again, that some thinking, feeling, remembering part of me will continue. But...I know of nothing to suggest that it is more than wishful thinking.”
- Elon Musk, “I think you cease to exist. I hope I’m wrong in a positive way. But most likely, you’re just gone.”
- Woody Allen, “I don’t want to achieve immortality through my work. I want to achieve it by not dying.”

Such skepticism is hardly new. It’s been around a long time. In fact, there was a group of folks in Jesus’ day that held similar views and pressed Him on His. How did He respond?

SCRIPTURE READING: [Matthew 22:23-33](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

This weekend is the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing. Some of the most memorable words were when Neil Armstrong radioed (**READ quotes**): “Houston, Tranquility Base here. The Eagle has landed.” To which Charlie Duke said, “Roger, Tranquility Base. We copy you down. We’ve got a bunch of guys about to turn blue. But we’re breathing again.” As mission commander, we know why Armstrong was speaking. Who was Charlie Duke? He was CAPCOM. There were dozens of people at mission control. But only one was to speak directly to the crew. Only one. No one else was given that authority. Just him. He was CAPCOM.

It’s a question of the authority to speak in play in Matthew 22. Last week, we heard the Herodians challenging Jesus on political matters. Next week, we’ll see the Pharisees challenging Him on moral issues. This week, we’ll look at how the Sadducees challenge Jesus on theological grounds. It’s a series of three attempts to ensnare and discredit Jesus. Each one fails. And with each one, Jesus not only answers the questions but gives insight into the topic used against Him.

“What happens to us after we die?” they ask. This is where they are trying to catch Him. But trying to catch Jesus, to ensnare Him, is a fool’s errand. They needed to be listening and learning from Him, not trying to trick and trap Him. For as the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus alone has authority to speak on the resurrection. We must take heed to what He says.

We see that in the three things that the resurrection gives us, according to Jesus. First, the resurrection gives us something to believe in. Second, to hope in. And, third, to live in.

I. BELIEVING IN THE RESURRECTION

First, believing in the resurrection. That is, the fact of it and Jesus’ clear teaching on the reality of a re-embodiment, the promise of the coming future resurrection of all God’s people.

A) The Question to Jesus

Let’s start by taking a look at this question put to Jesus (**READ Matthew 22:23-28**).

1. Who they were

The Sadducees were of the aristocratic families in Israel, controlling the activities of the Temple, and accepting only the Pentateuch. And they were pragmatists as far as the Roman occupation.

2. What they assumed

They assumed that there was no resurrection, no life-after-death. The soul dies with the body.

3. How they approached Jesus

So how did they approach Jesus? By using the custom of levirate marriage. The idea was that the surviving brother of a childless man was obligated to marry his sister-in-law so as to provide for her needs and carry on the line. Out of that, these Sadducees create a hypothetical scenario.

B) The Answer from Jesus

How does Jesus answer? (READ Matthew 22:29-32) “You are wrong - deceived, lost.”

1. About the power of God

About what? Two things. First, the power of God. They assume the next life is but a sequel of this one, that God has no power to bring a radical newness. Which is why Jesus says what He does about marriage. I don't want to say much about this but it would seem that, in the next life, we will have relationships with such depth, joy, and love that marriage will no longer be a thing.

2. About the Scriptures

So they were ignorant of the power of God. And ignorant of the Scriptures as well. Knowing they held only to the Pentateuch, Jesus takes them to Exodus and the burning bush. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were long dead. But the LORD spoke of being “their God” in the present. So they had to be alive. His covenantal faithfulness to us cannot be severed, not even by death.

So with the question and the answer, we see the rightness of believing in the resurrection.

Application:

Let's think about death for a moment. What happens? The brains stops emitting electric waves; the heart ceases beating; muscles relax; motion stops. Decay begins with the organs and the smallest of cells. The idea being, if you revive, you were nearly dead but not really dead.

Human beings have no way to reverse death. But the living God can do not only that but resurrect. And He can place us in a transformed creation, a perfected people in a perfect world. This is what Jesus is saying, what it means to believe in life-after-death, in the resurrection.

And He alone has the authority to speak on the resurrection. We must heed what He says.

II. HOPING IN THE RESURRECTION

Which takes us from believing in the resurrection to hoping in it, from thinking on it to counting on it. Look at Paul's words in 1 Corinthians (READ 1 Corinthians 15:33-37, 42-44).

A) The Image of the Seed

Paul uses the image of a seed to help us understand the relationship between our mortal body and our resurrection body. The idea being one of both great similarity and difference.

1. Sweet discontinuity

For starters, there is a sweet discontinuity between them. The present body is natural and earthly, subject to weakness, decay, and death. But the resurrection body, like Jesus', will be eternal, imperishable, immortal, and spiritual - meaning indwelled and sustained by the Holy Spirit.

2. Shocking continuity

So there is a sweet discontinuity between the present body and the resurrection body. But there is also a shocking continuity as well. It's still us, renewed and recognizable. Just as it was that first Easter when the disciples recognized that it was Jesus, so too His risen disciples will one day be able to recognize one another. Because it's still us. Which will make for quite a reunion.

Illustration:

Think of it this way. Summer is a time for movies. One of the biggest was back in 1975.

In Steven Spielberg's famous movie, *Jaws*, the second victim the great white shark kills is a young boy named Alex Kintner, played by Jeffrey Voorhees. When the crowd realizes what has happened, there's a panic, and everyone in the water goes running back to the safety of the beach. Mrs. Kintner, Alex's mother, stumbles around in the shallows calling for Alex, but he doesn't return.

[imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com), a film and television website, picks up the story many years later:

Several decades after the release of *Jaws*, Lee Fierro, who played Mrs. Kintner, walked into a seafood restaurant and noticed that the menu had an "Alex Kintner Sandwich." She commented that she had played his mother so many years ago. The owner of the restaurant ran out to meet her, and he was none other than Jeffrey Voorhees, who had played her son. They had not seen each other since the original movie shoot.

It's something like that with what awaits followers of Jesus at the resurrection, with the new heavens and the new earth. All pain, death, separation will be undone. Reunions are coming.

B) The Promise of Change

That's what we have with the image of the seed, continuity and discontinuity. But let me press on the discontinuity a bit more. It's good to know it will still be "me" with this new body. But it's not really good unless we know we are renewed. J. I. Packer lists this out well ([READ](#)):

1. Perfect knowledge of grace through limitless extension of our powers of understanding.
2. Perfect enjoyment of seeing and being with the Father and the Son.
3. Perfect worship and service of God, our whole selves set free for love and obedience.
4. Perfect deliverance from all that is sinful, evil, weakening, and frustrating.
5. Perfect fulfillment of all our desires of which we are conscious.
6. Perfect completion of all that was good but had to be left incomplete in this life.
7. Endless personal growth in the encompassing of all these perfect things.

The image of the seed and the promise of change - this is hoping in the resurrection.

Application:

So there is no place for boredom in our thoughts here. As I've said before, there's really no need for a resurrection bound person to have a bucket list. For what is coming will far exceed anything we could cram into the few days we have here. And keep in mind that, according to the Bible, hope is not just a wishing or being optimistic. Hope is a certainty in our outlook towards the future based on the promises of God. That is what it means to hope in the resurrection.

And Jesus alone has the authority to speak on this. We must heed what He says.

III. LIVING IN THE RESURRECTION

Which brings us to the last point, not just believing and hoping but truly living in the resurrection. ([READ 1 Corinthians 15:58](#)) There is a “therefore” to all this meant to shape us.

A) Moral Courage

Part of that is moral courage. How far you can see determines how you then live.

1. Negative example

Here’s a negative example - the Sadducees. What did they believe? That the soul dies with the body. There is nothing else so they lived for life now. Which meant that they were willing to compromise, to do whatever was necessary to hold their power. Including serve the Romans.

2. Positive example

A positive example is the early Church. They were shaped by what scholars now call “the Easter effect” - the historical reality of Jesus’ resurrection and, with that, the hope of their own. Which created a new impulse to love, sacrifice, and serve not just one another but their enemies as well.

B) Deep Resources

How far you can see determines how you then live. That brings moral courage. And also deep resources when it comes to all different forms of suffering and how we respond to that.

1. Her story

Let me tell you about Joni Eareckson Tada. When she was 17 years old, she suffered a spinal injury that left her paralyzed from the shoulders down. She struggled for some time with anger, depression, suicidal thoughts, and spiritual doubts. But in the years since, she has authored over 40 books, become a renowned conference speaker, serves as an advisor in numerous capacities, and labors as an advocate for people with disabilities all around the world. She’s extraordinary.

2. Her outlook

What is her outlook? Here’s an excerpt from a recent article she wrote ([READ CT quotes](#)):

Scripture presents us with this eternal perspective. I like to call it the “end-of-time view.” This view separates what is transitory from what is lasting. What is transitory, such as physical pain, will not endure, but what is lasting, such as the eternal weight of glory accrued from that pain, will remain forever.

As the apostle Paul writes, “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (2 Cor. 4:17). The apostle Peter, too, writes to Christian friends being flogged and beaten, “In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials” (1 Pet. 1:6).

Rejoice? When you’re being thrown to lions?

This kind of nonchalance about gut-wrenching suffering used to drive me crazy. Stuck in a wheelchair and staring out the window at the fields of our farm, I wondered, *Lord, how in the world can you consider my troubles “light and momentary”?* *I will never walk or run again. I’ve got a leaky leg bag. I smell like urine. My back aches. I’m trapped in front of this window.*

Years later, however, the light dawned: The Spirit-inspired writers of the Bible simply had a different perspective, an end-of-time view...Mind you, I’m not saying that my paralysis is light in and of itself; it only becomes light in contrast to the far greater weight on the other side of the scale. And although I wouldn’t normally call (five) decades in a wheelchair “momentary,” it is when you realize that “you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes” (James 4:14).

An “end-of-time” view. Again, how far you can see determines how you then live.

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CONCLUSION:

There's another lesser known individual from the Apollo 11 mission worth our knowing. Steve Bales was 26 at the time and served in mission control as GUIDO, the guidance officer, the man in charge of monitoring the onboard navigation systems and the guidance computer software. The Apollo 11 landing was dramatic. *Eagle* was off course and coming in too fast. Worse, Armstrong and Houston were getting alarms from the guidance computer indicating that it wasn't keeping up with its tasks. If that was true, they would have to abort. So in that moment, all eyes were on Steve Bales. It was up to him to decide "NO GO" or "GO." Based on what he saw, things were GO. So they did. And he was the only one who could make that call.

Back to Matthew 22. The stakes are far higher here. This is not just life-and-death but life-after-death. We need clarity here. We need the only One who can to make the call. Think of the popular ideas of death. "We go to heaven, become angels, float on clouds, and play harps." We need more than these myths, these false signals. We need the facts. We need the truth.

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