

“A REASON
TO NOT
BELIEVE”

MATTHEW 22:23-33



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by Pastor Tim Dodson
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Matthew 22:23-33 *The same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him and asked Him, saying: "Teacher, Moses said that if a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up offspring for his brother. "Now there*

were with us seven brothers. The first died after he had married, and having no offspring, left his wife to his brother. "Likewise the second also, and the third, even to the seventh. "Last of all the woman died also. "Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her." Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven. "But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." And when the multitudes heard this, they were astonished at His teaching.

Here again we have those who just obviously don't get it. Repeatedly we see these guys try to trap Jesus...to back Him into a corner and befuddle Him with a conundrum. Incredibly, that game continues even today some 2000 years later. Despite His win-loss record, there will always be those who will stand in line to be next up to play "Stump the Messiah." Perhaps they are the same folks who keep thinking the Vikings will make it to the Super bowl!

All of us have or will shortly have one of those nonsensical conversations with a "hard hearted" disbeliever. For there has always been those folks who will fixate on speculative questions and difficulties in order to deflect the need to wrestle with the claims of Christ in the gospel. This is in no way prohibiting or even meant to discourage the honest search for scriptural truth and answers! But people will often grab hold of some obscure Bible difficulty or an inconsequential doctrinal debate in order to keep from having to face the clear claims of Christ, the historical record and to dance out of a troubled conscious. Because such folks know that if this guy Jesus is for real, then they have some serious issues to face.

There are a plethora of these "riddles" designed to baffle us simple minded Christians. Some are legendary, like "Can God create a rock so big he cannot lift it?" If we say yes, then we concede that there is something God can't do because God would then create a rock which He couldn't lift. The thing God couldn't do would be to lift the rock. On the other hand, if we say no, then we also concede that there's something God cannot do. Namely, create a rock which He can't lift. Either way, our answer will then support their contention that if there is a God then He is not omnipotent, or so it seems.

But the definition of omnipotence does not mean doing what is naturally contradictory. God doesn't make square circles, dry water, or one ended sticks. He can and does however create stuff out of nothing, make ax heads float on water, and make animals speak in a human tongue. He can make a guy walk on water, make a 90 year old woman get pregnant and give birth to a healthy son, and things like that. But God isn't on record attempting to usurp His own divine power, creation, and natural laws. That is not the definition of Omnipotence.

In our text today, we find the Sadducees attempting to confound the God in flesh like it's a game of TV "Jeopardy." Can you imagine? "*History of Creation for 500*" ... "*What is 'I made everything.'*" They did not believe Christ to be the Messiah, therefore He was not deity. Certainly we are left wondering which is first...belief then 'faith and trust', or 'faith and trust' then belief? It's a "chicken-or-the-egg" scenario. But we can certainly gather by their behavior that they indeed did *not* believe that Jesus was anything but a charlatan.

While both the Pharisees and the Sadducees were part of the organized religious world in that day, there was a significant difference between them in doctrine. We have the same problems today. Because the Mormons, the JW's, the Catholics and the Unitarians all claim the title of "Christian" despite having differing and even categorically opposing theological positions. The Sadducees were the religious liberals of that day. They did not believe in angels, predestination, hell, and most importantly they did not believe in the afterlife and the resurrection of the dead. Therein the old joke goes "that's why they were 'sad-u-see.'"

What we have in this passage is the only direct encounter between Jesus and the Sadducees. Could it be that Jesus had even less time for these boys than He had for the Pharisees? At least the Pharisees believed in the authority of the Word, and therefore there was room for discussion. These guys apparently got together and schemed up the best plan to publically belittle this "would be Messiah." For this was certainly more than a spur-of-the-moment theological question...more than even a *philosophical* question. It was even more than a bad joke. It was *planned*. It was a *thought out strategy* to undermine this up and coming religious leader.

It was a *scheme*...a *strategy* of attack, which is the worst of such evils by those who take the position of belonging to God. But I have certainly seen it over the years! Not just having been on the receiving end of temper tantrums and outbursts of emotion, but literally thought out designs of attack and evil perpetuated by people who at the same time wear the mantle of Christendom and carry a fish emblem on their car. So what was occurring herein was not and *is* not a unique or rare occurrence. In John 15:20 Jesus reminds us that "...*a servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.*"

The question posed was bent toward the extreme, if not the ludicrous. 7 husbands would place the answer to this "game show question" into the category of the nonsensical. But the answer that they sought was not a legitimate answer, they sought the public demeaning of Jesus. They wanted to kick Him down. They wanted to mock both Him and the concept of resurrection. Do you see the pattern of their questioning? It is a common position for people who do not want to face up to the words of Christ to latch onto any difficulty they can find. They will grasp at any nuance that they can raise in order to keep from dealing with the gospel. They will reject any detailed teaching and any opportunity to learn and opt instead for something they read on the internet or heard in passing in bar from the drunk guy at the end of the counter.

It's not a new thing when skeptics mock at the Bible. Sometimes we can be confronted by a skeptic who makes some sort of crazy far right comment about the virgin birth or the deity of Christ or the participation of the church in current society. They will remark concerning the failure of Christians, or the intolerance of the greater church. They will use remarks like "you are on the wrong side of history," to which I answer, "I certainly hope so, because I don't want to be on side that is the ever changing flavor-of-the-month." We are apt to think that such is all so "contemporary" in its thought and blame the new post-modern thinking in our society. But if we do, we'd be wrong. It's old news. In fact, it's been around for at least 2000 years. Titus 3:3 "*For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.*"

The reasons for our disbelief and rejection of Christ are many. Some will say they reject that there is a God because they can't understand why, if He is there and is all-powerful, that He doesn't do something about all the bad stuff that happens in the world. (*and what they usually mean is bad stuff to THEM*) Sometime they will reject Christianity on the grounds of the poor behavior of His followers, or even any behavior they deem as incorrect, politically or personally! They are disgusted by the hypocrisy of Christians they've known. Or angry at the church down the street because it called them a sinner and an offering plate passed them in a service so obviously all they want is my money. Romans 8:7 *"Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be."*

But the truth of the matter is, the real reason most folks will deny God on any level and reject Christianity ultimately can be boiled down to one simple albeit widespread diagnosis: *pride*. The fact is we naturally want to run our own lives, and we don't want anyone—especially God—to interfere with the way we're living. We want to be in control of everything we do. We like the stuff that the world is offering and don't want anyone to deny us such. And therefore what we definitely do NOT want is clarity and understanding. Such would make it much harder to disregard Jesus and what He said.

Jesus pointed out that these boys suffered from a real ignorance of the Bible and doubt of God's power. Seldom will such naysayers sit still long enough to have a real discussion of scripture, with facts and numbers and historical evidence. They have *already* decided, and don't want facts messing up their philosophy! John 8:43 *"Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word."* John 12:37 *"But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him..."*

The issue is moral rebellion against God in His truth. Their problem is not intellectual. It is moral. They're in rebellion against God and so they refuse to submit to His Word, or even to *consider* His Word. The fact is, there is so much evidence of Christ and His deity and His sovereignty if a man or woman were actually to seek such out. There was of course the account of secular historian Flavius Josephus who was a Jewish priest at the time of the Jewish Revolt of A.D. 66. He was captured by the Romans, imprisoned, set free, and then retired to Rome where he wrote a history of the Jewish Revolt called the *Jewish War*. Later he wrote *Antiquities* as a history of the Jews. It is in *Antiquities* that he mentions Christ. The mention is called the "Testimonium Flavianum" (Ant. 18.63-64). Josephus was born in Jerusalem around A.D. 37. He died around the year 101. This is what he wrote:

"About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who performed surprising deeds and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Messiah. And when, upon the accusation of the principal men among us, Pilate had condemned him to a cross, those who had first come to love him did not cease. He appeared to them spending a third day restored to life, for the prophets of God had foretold these things and a thousand other marvels about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared."

Then there is the accuracy of the Bible itself, a book that even secular scholars concede is quite possibly the most accurately preserved book in history. Author Brant Pitre recently released a book entitled "The Case for Jesus: The Biblical and Historical Evidence for Christ." In "The Case for Jesus" Pitre digs into the biblical and historical evidence of Jesus Christ to answer some major questions: Were the four Gospels really anonymous? Are the Gospels folklore? Or are they biographies? Were the four Gospels written too late to be reliable? Did Jesus claim to be God? What is the evidence for the Resurrection? Pitre details what he calls "recent discoveries in New Testament scholarship" that help to answer these questions, and claims to "pull the rug out from under a century of skepticism."

There is the fact that a worldwide flood exists in nearly every cultural record. Moreover, there is the constant and consistent archeological discoveries that support Biblical accounts. The Dead Sea scrolls...written between 150 BC and 70 AD and discovered in 1947 provided a profound testimony to the reliability of the centuries of transmission of the Bible text, as every Old Testament book found was virtually word for word with today's Bible! There is the incredible intricacies and interdependency of all aspects of the natural world. The incredible rise of the "Intelligent Design" position in scientific circles...a result of man's scientific discoveries within the natural world that prove to be too detailed and symbiotic to be luck: too perfect and balanced to be anything but made by some Creator.

There is of course the 300 plus prophecies that Jesus fulfilled. Some of which are incredibly detailed and time/location dependent. The probability of one man fulfilling just eight prophecies is 1×10^{28} or 1 in 10,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000. 1 person fulfilling 48 prophecies: 1 chance in 10 to the 157th power. 1 person fulfilling 300+ prophecies? All of this also fails to take into account the profound transformation...some might even use the word "miraculous," change that such a belief in Christ has made in His true followers. The arguments and evidence of Jesus would fill volumes. The apostle John seemed to understand this saying at the end of his gospel (21:25) "*And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.*"

One cannot dismiss all that is on the table. And yet mankind exerts such time, energy, and resources to fight against something they say does not exist. Countless books, movies, and websights, all dedicated to proving something doesn't exist! Yet we see no similar efforts to dispel belief in Bigfoot, the Loch Ness monster, or aliens. As Shakespeare wrote in Hamlet, I think these folks "*doth protest too much.*"

To believe that God is a reality, and that Jesus is who He said He is force us into accountability. And that is just what we don't want. Jesus is a big mirror that we don't want to look into. We chant the mantra that we're ok...that we got life under control, all the while mental health in this world is crumbling and man seems more desperate to find meaning and purpose than at any point in history, despite our wealth and plethora of materials, art, free sexuality, science and worldly distractions. The world without Jesus is a sad world, and one does not have to dig deep to see it.

The Bible begins with the words "In the beginning, **God**..." Zephaniah 3:17 says "*The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.*"

2 Timothy 3:1-5 "*But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God...*"

Does that not speak of a fact?

2 Peter 3:5 "*...For this they willfully forget...*"