

Matthew: On Earth As It Is In Heaven

The Power of God * Matthew 22:23-33

Good morning, my name is Jeremy, I'm blessed to be one of your pastors at Harmony Bible Church, and doubly blessed to be able to open the Bible with you today and look at what God has to say to us. Let me just say in all honesty that if we weren't going through the gospel of Matthew from front to back, there is a good chance the passage this morning might get skipped over. Maybe you've been going to church your whole life and have never heard this passage preached. I don't know if I'm allowed to say this or not but it's an odd passage. But yet all of the synoptic gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke record this maybe 5 or 10 minute conversation Jesus has with a group called the Sadducees. And you'll see in just a minute that it's, well, different.

But so I know that you are all awake and tracking with me this morning, let's take a minute for some audience participation time, ok? Without even reading the passage yet, I think I can help answer the question, "Does this passage have *anything* to do with me?" I want you to know that right up front. Because if this passage doesn't have anything to do with you, I want you to feel free to get up, go get some coffee, have a cookie or something and maybe just take a walk for the next 35 minutes or so, because I don't want this to be a waste of anybody's time.

So here we go, I'd like you to raise your hand if you are married. It doesn't matter if the spouse is with you this morning or not, but if you are married, just put up your hand for a second. Ok, good.

Next, if you have lost someone, a family member, someone you loved, a friend, and they have passed away, go ahead and raise your hand. Ok, good. Sorry to all you people who have raised your hand so far, you have to stay.

Finally this morning, everyone in this room, I want you to raise your hand if you believe that at some point in the future... unless Jesus peels back the clouds and comes back... that at some point in the future, you, yourself, will die. Wow, look at that! Apparently you all read that shocking new research that came out just this week that stated this. Are you ready for this? New research shows that 1 out of every 1 persons die. It seems to be true *even* for us Americans, 1 out of every 1 Americans die. This is shocking.

Look, this passage this morning is enormously important to every single person in this room. See, we don't like to talk about death too much. Talking about death is uncomfortable, kind of makes us feel awkward. And this might strike you as odd, but for the *sake of the gospel* going forward, I would almost rather perform a funeral than a wedding. It's true, maybe you're thinking, "you're sick, Hess" but look at what Ecclesiastes 7:2 says, *It is better to go to the house of mourning (a funeral) than to go to the house of feasting (a party), for this is the end of all*

mankind, and the living will lay it to heart. You see at a wedding usually nobody is thinking about Jesus or the gospel, all they are thinking about is how pretty the bride is, or the party after the wedding, and wondering if Uncle Larry is going to get sauced and make a fool of himself on the dance floor. But at a funeral there is a casket front and center and whether people will admit it or not, every one is sitting there wondering, "what's going to happen to me." What happens when we die? And as we'll see in just a second this passage speaks of weddings, and marriages, and death, and promises, and what happens after death. So no checking out, this passage pertains to every single person in this room. Let's read it:

²³ The same day Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection, and they asked him a question, 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.' ²⁵ Now there were seven brothers among us. The first married and died, and having no offspring left his wife to his brother. ²⁶ So too the second and third, down to the seventh. (so each brother that married the woman died) ²⁷ After them all, the woman died. ²⁸ In the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her." ²⁹ But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. ³⁰ For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. ³¹ And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: 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." ³³ And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.

In this passage we are going to look at a rebuke from Jesus and a promise from Jesus, but before we can get there I think we have to explain at least two things in order to have a good understanding of any of this. So allow me to at least briefly cover two things first, who are these Sadducees, and second, what's up with this seven husbands thing.

Now we haven't heard much about the Sadducees up to this point in Matthew, mostly up to now we have heard about the Pharisees, these guys, the Pharisees, are the religious conservative guys. They were the guys who were all about the Law, about justice, all about morality, they were totally into "works" righteousness, keeping the rules, adhering to the rituals, and Jesus' as we have seen up to now rips these guys, because they are all justice and all "show," but no mercy. The Sadducees were *almost* the polar opposite of the Pharisees.

The Sadducees were this group of wealthy aristocrats of the day. They were more interested in politics and getting along with Rome and hanging on to power. They held high positions of power and they held onto those positions through the family line so in their council which was called the Sanhedrin, it was the Sadducees that were to select the Chief Priest. They were highly educated people, but didn't really relate well to the common person. I guess I'll just say it, they were educated, elite snobs. Not only that, but they didn't believe at all in the supernatural. They believed in God, but they believed in a very stripped down non-supernatural version of the faith. Look at what Luke records in Acts 23:8 - *For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.* They didn't believe that God cared or could interact with the daily lives of people. They didn't believe in angels, or demons. They did not believe in any afterlife. They didn't believe that

there would one day be a day of judgment. They thought – that once we were dead – the soul perished with the body and that was it, lights out. By the way, they only believed in the five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. They did not hold anything outside of those books as authoritative. So for them everything was relative.

Labels for people can be a little dicey, but if they fit, they fit. The Sadducees of Jesus day were the liberals of the day. And they disliked the conservatives of the day, the Pharisees. And of course the conservative Pharisees disliked the liberal Sadducees. And **both** of them hated Jesus. Now, hold on to that for just a minute, we'll get back to that line of thought, but let's make sure we understand what's going on with this wild scenario and the question they ask Jesus.

Just a minute ago we saw that the Sadducees come to Jesus and they said, "Moses said that if a man dies having no children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up children for his brother." What they are talking about is something called levirate marriage – It was actually a very merciful provision in the Mosaic law, it comes from Deuteronomy 25, in ancient cultures where people lived day to day barely making it, if a woman got married and the husband died before they could have children she was in a terrible situation. She couldn't just go out and get a job, she had no children to care for her, and because she had already been married, she was unlikely to be able to get someone else to marry her. And so in Deuteronomy 25, Moses provided by saying that if a man died and his wife was childless, his brother or another family member was to marry her and keep his brother's family line going, and keep her in the family. So it was actually a very merciful way of dealing with widows. Now that's all background and really has nothing more to do with what we are talking about. And honestly, the Sadducees were just throwing this hypothetical situation at Jesus to make him look foolish. They didn't believe in the resurrection, and all indications are that this levirate marriage wasn't practiced any more at the time Jesus walked the earth. So all of this is essentially people playing games with Jesus.

If they were actually interested in how this would all work out in the resurrection they could have just stopped with the widow losing 2 husbands. But they didn't do that, the scenario they give Jesus is that there were 7 brothers, one after the other, after the other marrying the widow and then dying, hoping that Jesus would have to come to the conclusion that this would be an absurd problem that could never get sorted out and that Jesus would say, "You know, you're right, this resurrection thing is a fiasco." And you know, this week I couldn't help but try and picture husband #6 on his wedding day. You know, up front with the minister, "Do you take this woman?" and I can just see his eye's about this big and he's just pouring sweat.

See the Pharisee's, the religious conservatives, thought Jesus was a liberal, and the Sadducees thought they smelled a conservative, they thought Jesus was a Pharisee type. And if Jesus just laughs along with the Sadducees and says, "Yeah you guys are right, this resurrection stuff is impossible," Then the Pharisees will be able to label Jesus and discredit Him. But if Jesus tries to come up with some convoluted answer about how these seven husbands and this widow are somehow married to this one, but not to that one, then the liberal Sadducees will just be able to shake their heads and mock Jesus as some crazy off the chart conservative.

But Jesus doesn't do either, he rebukes them. He just slaps these guys and says – you're just wrong. Your whole argument is flawed.

I want to stop for about three or four minutes and try and have us learn something from this rebuke. I think there is something very important we need to realize about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Because the gospel is unlike any human party or political ideology. You see, the liberal Sadducees, they hated Jesus and they rejected the gospel. Because in their mind, their God thought just like they thought. Their God was all about love, and acceptance, and because there was never to be a day of judgment – eh – what's it all matter? Everything is relative. But this morning Jesus rebukes the liberal Sadducees and said, "You're wrong." But all along in Matthew, Jesus also rebuked and battled the conservative Pharisees. And the Pharisees hated Jesus and the gospel because they were completely into judgment, and wrath, and morality, but they didn't want to hear anything about care for the poor, compassion for the weak, and forgiveness for the sinner. Both sides oppose the gospel and so one thing I think we should all be ready for, just know it's coming, is that if you're a Christian and the better grasp we have of just what the gospel is, just about everybody, or at least people from both sides, are going to think you're an idiot. That's a bit of an overstatement, but it's true. Here's what we need to understand. Jesus Christ and his gospel is unlike any human party or ideology. It's not a form of liberalism. It's not a form of conservatism. But it's also not something just in the middle!

I mean, what is the gospel? Well, it's *at least* this: God is a God of justice. Sin and evil have brought a great misery into the world, and God is a God of justice and he can't just overlook that. He hates sin and he hates evil, **but** Jesus Christ has come into the world to satisfy God's justice. Jesus came and lived a perfect life, and he died the death that we deserved to die, in our place, and he has satisfied God's justice so perfectly that when I believe in Jesus, and I rest in Him – I am completely accepted on the spot by sheer grace.

Pharisees and Sadducees, both of that day, and of this day want to pick and choose their gospel. But the **true** gospel isn't a form of either of those two. See the Sadducees did not believe there *was* a God of justice, didn't believe in a judgment day, didn't believe in a God who would punish sin. But the Pharisees didn't believe that this God could be satisfied, but that **we** through our good works, and our religiousness, that we had to do it. We had to satisfy God, but look, in their mind, in the mind of the conservatives, God was a demanding God. But the God of the gospel is even more demanding. The God of the gospel – Jesus – says you must be perfect. There is nobody who can do it except Jesus! Do you see this? The God of the gospel – the true God – is more conservative than the conservatives! But on the other hand, the Sadducees, the liberals, say we believe in a loving God, we believe in a God who accepts everyone, we don't believe in a God of wrath and of judgment. But Jesus Christ, the gospel, the true God is more loving than the God of the Sadducees. Because the biblical God loved so much that he suffered and gave up his Son on the cross, and in amazing love offered complete forgiveness while we were his enemies!

Look, I just want us to see that the gospel of Jesus Christ rejects both liberalism and conservatism equally. It is **not** one or the other, and it is not just the perfect balance of the two. The gospel is completely off the spectrum! It is unlike anything. God is more loving to us

in the gospel than we could ever imagine and yet he is so demanding that we submit and trust in him alone. It takes time to grasp this and we can expect that we will be attacked as Jesus was for it, and we need to be patient with people around us. If there's parts of the gospel you love and parts you choose to ignore, you haven't grasped the gospel. Let's get back to the text.

Jesus doesn't just tell them they're wrong and walk away, but he tells them *where* they went wrong, and it's in his response where we see an incredible promise that I hope will cause us to think and be encouraged this morning. Let's look at it: ²⁹*But Jesus answered them, "You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. ³⁰For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. ³¹And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: 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."* ³³*And when the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching*

First, in verse 29 Jesus tells the Sadducees they are wrong for two reasons. First because they don't know the scriptures. Now the Old Testament isn't chock full of direct references to the resurrection, but it's far from silent on the matter. Let me show you two places that Jesus didn't go to in his argument. Look at Daniel 12:2 declares, ²*And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.* Jesus didn't quote Daniel. Look at Job 19:25-27 with me, *For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth.*²⁶*And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in^[b] my flesh I shall see God ²⁷whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!* Job knows that after he dies, after his body has turned to dust, he will see God but not just as a spirit, but he says in my flesh I shall see God. But Jesus doesn't go there, why? These are straightforward – very hard to say these verses are talking about anything but the resurrection of the dead. The reason Jesus doesn't quote these or others is that he knows that the Sadducees don't hold these books as authoritative. Remember, the Sadducees only hold the first five books, the Torah, as the actual written Word of God. And so in verse 24 of Matthew this morning, they start by saying to Jesus, "Moses said," and Jesus goes, ok you guys want to bring up Moses, we'll talk about Moses. And so he quotes scripture that every single one of these guys would know from memory and he meets them right where they are at.

Jesus quotes Exodus Chapter 3, it's the interchange between Moses and God just before God sends him to Pharaoh. Here it is, ⁶*And he said,*(this is God speaking to Moses through the burning bush) *"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."* *And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.* You see, Jesus is a very smart guy. He points out that when God is speaking to Moses – Abraham, Isaac & Jacob have been dead for 100's of years, he doesn't say, "I was the God of Abraham. I was the God of Isaac." He says, "I AM the God of Isaac."

Look, Jesus said, "You should know the scriptures." And up until now I've found myself feeling like this message has been an exegetically sound parsing of the scriptures. We've done our homework, we know who the Sadducees are, what Levrite marriage is, why Jesus used this

verse, instead of that verse, and that's all well and good, but we have to see and experience the power of God in these verses if it's going to give us hope! I pray I can adequately show you this.

When God is talking to Moses in the verse Jesus quotes, he's using language that's very rare and very loving. When he's talking to Moses, he goes on to say in that chapter and throughout the whole book that he wants a very personal and covenantal relationship with the people. He wants it to be so close and so personal that when either God or the people speak of this relationship they can use possessive pronouns when they talk about each other. Now I didn't do all that well in English class, but let me just give you an everyday example of what I'm talking about.

There's an equivalent of this in the English language. Let's say you don't even know me and you hear me talking about "my Mindy or "my Kaitlyn" when you hear me talk like that, you are going to assume that I'm talking about either my wife or my daughter right? Listen, I don't care who any of you guys are in this room, you don't get to refer to my wife as "My Mindy." You don't get to do that. See the only time you're allowed to use possessive pronouns when you are speaking of another person is when there is a deep, voluntary, self-giving, covenantal relationship between those people. When the relationship is so intimate, those are the only people we dare speak of as "owning" as my Mindy.

Another way to look at this is like this: sometimes my daughter can get just a tad upset because it seems like everywhere she goes, people will refer to her as "Jeremy's daughter." There goes Jeremy's kid. You're Jeremy's girl right? And she rolls her eyes and says "Yeah, my name is Kaitlyn!" But see, when God sets his love on you, he has no problem with that. He's perfectly happy to be called "Isaac's God" – or "Kelly's God." He wants that kind of relationship with you and with me. He wants you to call him "my Daddy." That's why it's so significant when God is speaking to Moses and He says, I am the God of Abraham!

Jesus says that when God enters into *that* kind of love relationship with someone, think of the implications! It means that our relationship can never go into the past tense. When you love someone, when you really love someone, whether it's a baby, a child, or a spouse, the greatest horror you can have is for the relationship to go into the past tense. There is nobody in the world who wants to ever have to say, "I *had* a son, or I *had* a wife." You want to say, "I have a wife." When you love someone, you don't ever want that relationship to go into the past tense. You don't want anything to come between you. But we can't help it. Why? Because we are human beings and we're limited.

But what if God loves you? What if God is committed to you. What if God is in a voluntary deep self-giving relationship with you? He has given himself to you – you have given yourself to him. What that means is something amazing. God can never be the God of the dead. Can you feel the beauty and the power of God in that? God can never be the God of the dead because He has entered into a covenantal relationship with you and you are his and he is God! It can never end! When God is speaking of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, he is talking about his relationship with them in the present tense, because God, when he places his love on you

and you and him enter into a relationship with each other, that relationship can never end. It can never go into the past tense. He will never lose that which is precious to him. Look, if you love someone and you don't want that relationship to end. Would God's love be somehow *less intense* than our love? Would his love be thinner somehow? Of course not! God's love for us is a billion times more intense than our love for other human beings. And if you can't bear for your relationship to go into the past tense, how could God?

And so what Jesus is saying to us this morning is that his love makes you eternally real. His love makes you absolutely solid and permanent. We never pass away – we never go to nothing. So let's take that truth, let's *know* the power of God and take that into this discussion of marriage in heaven.

Here's the picture the Sadducees are trying to paint. I'll just use myself as an example. So look, I'm married, I'm crazy in love with my wife, but what if something happens to me? What if on the way home today a big truck squashes me and my seven passenger Dodge mini-van with the bad shocks on it, and God calls me home? My wife Mindy is a very attractive woman! And while I've put some "man-repellent" on her by having two kids with her, she's still beautiful. I'm assuming that some guy is going to snatch her up. And so 100 years from now when we are all in heaven, am I going to walk up to her and say, "Hey babe! ...who's that guy?" The Sadducees are saying, what if that happens seven times? If it's awkward with two, think of how awkward it would be with seven! But Jesus says, look, at the resurrection, there isn't marriage. Your whole argument means nothing because – there isn't marriage. And this is where some of you might want to reach over to your spouse and grab their hand and say "Baby, if we ain't married in heaven, then I don't wanna go!" In verse 30 Jesus tells them, you're wrong because there isn't marriage in heaven. But that's not their main problem. Their main problem is that they don't know the power of God! Jesus is saying you have no idea of the magnitude of the transformation that God's going to bring us. So that means that when Jesus says there's no marriage in the resurrection. He can't mean, he can't mean that the future state will have less intense love than we have now. He's just said, you don't know the power of God! Let me tell you about the power of God. In the resurrection, the love we have with one another and the Lord, or better put, the love we are going to have with the Lord and all other lovers of God around his throne is going to make the greatest marriage that has ever been look like nothing in comparison. The most intimate, erotic, intense, mind-blowing marriage will look like a dewdrop compared to an atomic bomb. Jesus is teaching that in the life after this one, the love that we will experience forever will make marriage as we know it now seem so lacking.

And some people ask, will we know each other? Of course we'll know each other, you're still going to be you. When God is describing in Exodus this unbreakable covenant love relationship with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, he calls them by name. You're still you, and His love for us is very personal and it's permanent! Look, my Dad has loved and married two women, both of them have gone to heaven. He will know Trudy, and he will know my Mama Sharon. And he will have a kind of love for Trudy and Sharon that will be supreme. But it won't be of such a nature that they are weird or awkward around each other. The intensity of the love that they will have for one another will be free from sin, and they won't be looking at one

another as bride or as groom. The groom who will be at the center of attention is Jesus! Jesus himself. And we, believers will be the bride, his bride. We will look at him and adore him as a bride does the groom because we will know how undeserving we truly are to be in his midst. He will attend to our every need. Look at Revelation 21 with me, ³*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴He 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."*

Scripture after scripture describes many different pictures of what heaven will be like. I think it was hard for human minds to describe or even grasp. But one thing is the same over and over again. Jesus Christ is at the center of everything. And he is the focus and he is adored because he is the one who paid the price for every single person to be with him. Without him nobody is acceptable. He is the reward.

So as we close, I want you to take a minute and examine your heart. If you were to make a list of give things you are looking forward to in heaven, would being with Jesus be the number one thing? Would being with Jesus even make the list? Or would your list be made up of things like seeing grandma and no more nagging knee pain? Honestly ok, just be honest with yourself, is longing for Jesus the cry of your heart today? Because the Bible is very clear that heaven is an eternity of reward for those who have spent a life longing to be with the love of their life, Jesus. Being with Jesus is the reward. And here's the thing, especially those who have known Jesus for a while, you know that's supposed to be true, that he's to be the number one desire of your heart, but things in this life have begun to crowd him out. And if you are honest, you know that he's supposed to be your greatest desire... but he isn't. It doesn't do any good to have someone yell at you and say, "Come on, make him number one!" What do you do?

What do you do when your mind is there and your heart isn't? Like, what do you do when you know what your priority should be, you know what sin is, you know what's right, you know what's wrong, you know what you should be doing verses what you shouldn't be doing and your mind knows, but your heart isn't there yet? So you don't feel remorse over something that makes Jesus seem far away, even though you know you should? Are you with me on this? What do you do when there is a gap between your head and your heart?

Throughout the scriptures there's this phrase, "Wait on the Lord." Waiting on the Lord isn't pleasant at all! In fact in one of the most gut wrenching Psalms in the Bible, Psalm 42, David is literally in a fight with himself. He screams, "Why are you so downcast, my soul? Put your hope in God." So his mind knows, "Don't make a god of that." Put your trust in God, make God your priority, put your hope in God. Bow down before God, serve God, walk with God." Why are you downcast, oh my soul? Why am I not buying into this

So, how do you wait on the Lord if this is you today? You place yourself under the waterfall of his Grace, and his promises to you this morning that he has set his love on you, and he will

never ever loose you, and you wait while you walk in obedience. One step at a time, one day at a time. Asking for God to break your heart. Asking for God to restore the joy of your salvation to you, asking God to make him your treasure. Being honest with him about where you are whether that's in the desert or the low part, or the struggle. And you wait. Why? Because they who wait on the Lord, he will renew their strength. They will mount up with wings like eagles. They will run, and no longer be weary; they will walk, and not grow faint. Let's close in prayer.

Scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers.

© 2014 by Jeremy Hess. You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that: (1) you credit the author, (2) any modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include Harmony Bible Church's website address (www.harmonyBiblechurch.org) on the copied resource.