



Matthew 22:23–28

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?”

Reflection

In Agatha Christie’s famous novel ‘Murder on the Orient Express’ internationally famous Belgian detective Hercule Poirot boards a train to travel from Istanbul to London. Before long he is approached by one of the passengers. This passenger, Mr Samuel Ratchett, an American businessman, claims that his life is in danger and seeks to hire Poirot’s services. Poirot isn’t interested, and so declines, and then on

the second night of the journey Mr Ratchett is murdered, his body is found the next morning in his compartment having been stabbed twelve times. For the remainder of the journey Poirot sets about finding his killer. The plot twists and turns as Poirot investigates every one of the people travelling with Mr Ratchett in the first class compartment. Infuriatingly and intriguingly he finds that all thirteen people travelling in the coach had some link, tenuous or otherwise, with Mr Ratchett, and therefore all potentially had some form of motive for his death. At the end of his investigation, with all thirteen suspects sitting in the restaurant car together, Poirot ingeniously deduces the identity of the killer, not one of them, but all of them – with twelve of the thirteen suspects each stabbing Mr Ratchett's body one time so

that no-one could know who delivered the fatal blow. They all had a hand in his murder.

It's the same in Matthew's gospel. They all had a hand in Jesus' murder. In chapter 21 and 22 Matthew is at pains to show us that the chief priests, the elders, the Pharisees and their disciples, the Herodians, and Sadducees, working together, all had a hand in his murder. They all had a hand in Jesus' murder.

Today it's the Sadducees turn. As a little child I was taught that they were 'Sad-you-see' because they didn't believe in the resurrection. And what a sad world this would be if there was no resurrection from the dead! And that's what the Sadducees believed. In fact they believed in no

spiritual life whatsoever, no angels, and no afterlife; when you're dead you're dead, both your body and your soul. So it's no surprise that they were materialists, political powerbrokers who'd taken control of the temple in Jerusalem, controlling the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council, and had also struck up a good working relationship with the Romans. And as you can imagine they were no happier than any of their other uneasy partners in crime about Jesus' growing influence amongst the people. And so they try and discredit Jesus' authority as a teacher in front of the people. They come to him with a theological trap, hoping to catch him off guard and make him look foolish,

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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?”

Their hearts are black and their question is borderline ludicrous. It comes out of a couple of verses in Deuteronomy 25 which protected women in a culture in which a widow would otherwise become destitute upon the death of her husband, and also

a culture which highly valued the continuance of the family line. For these reasons and the good of society if a younger brother was willing, it was encouraged that he marry his elder brother's widow in the event of his brother's untimely death.

If not twisting Scripture, they're coming very close to doing so by thrusting such an unlikely scenario on Jesus. One of the commentators I read pointed out that in an ancient society, and in fact, probably in our day as well, the likelihood of anyone marrying a person who's six previous partners had gone to an early grave must have been extremely remote. Imagine walking down the aisle as number seven?! Hardly likely. And yet here they were so smugly coming to Jesus as if they'd proved with their logical conundrum the absurdity of

his beliefs in the resurrection; beliefs by the way shared by the majority of Jews in Jesus' day.

Why were the Sadducees so anti the resurrection? It's because they only held the first five books of the bible to be the Word of God, those books written by Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. That and the fact that they'd become very comfortable with how this present life was playing out for them; why complicate it with nonsense about the next?

As you can well imagine Jesus has a few thoughts on their theology which we'll hear about tomorrow. But for today I'd like to take you back a couple of days to a town outside Jerusalem, just before Jesus rode

into Jerusalem. Jesus is comforting Martha at the death of her brother Lazarus, whom Jesus is about to raise from the dead. Here's what Jesus says to her,

23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; 26 and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Do you believe this? Because the resurrection changes everything. If you believe in Jesus Christ, in his death and resurrection by which he purchased forgiveness

for your sins, if you believe in Jesus you will live, even though you die. This changes everything. The Sadducees had nothing to live for except for the now. They were materialists, in it for the here and now. 'Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die' – that was their mantra. The mantra of the modern world is the same, and just as it was for the Sadducees, it's a recipe for a wasted life.

John Piper tells the story of a couple he read about in the February 1998 edition of Reader's Digest who took early retirement from their jobs in the Northeast of America, five years earlier when he was 59 and she was 51. He'd done well in business, she'd excelled in her career, superannuation accounts full to overflowing, the whole world at their feet. They were

living the dream. They bought a fifty foot cruiser, had it crewed to some of the most beautiful beaches in the world, and spent their retirement cruising the Caribbean, the Amalfi Coast, and the South of France. Living the dream. The last great work of their life – collecting sea shells. Can you picture them before Christ at the great Day of Judgment: “Look, Lord. Here’s my shells.’

That’s the story of a wasted life and yet this is the best scenario that a world without hope of resurrection can dream up. The reality is so much better for those of us who believe! Please think deeply now about how the resurrection changes everything. Savour this truth and let it refocus you today. Ask yourself honestly if the reality of the resurrection has really sunk

in to your outlook on life, or are you simply aspiring to the low flying dreams of our culture? Then pray for yourself and for opportunities to share the eternal life-altering reality of the resurrection with those all around us who are pinning all their hopes and happiness on what is reality is little more than the chasing of seashells.