

It's Up to You 2026 (Week 1) - Will We Be Married in Heaven? (Matt. 22:23-33)

Yesterday's Sermon Summary

1. The first sermon in our summer Q&A series kicked off with an exploration of a "hard text/passage" in the gospels ([Matt. 22:23-33](#); [Mark 12:18-27](#); [Luke 20:27-40](#)), one that struck a very personal chord with one congregant.



2. In this passage, the Sadducees ask Jesus a trick question. Who are the Sadducees? A small but powerful religious leadership group that was wealthy, catered to the higher ups in their culture, and controlled the Temple in Jerusalem. They also didn't believe in resurrection or "the afterlife." They also only accept as authoritative the books of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy) in the Old Testament.

3. The Sadducees spin quite the ridiculous tale for Jesus based on the principle of "levirate marriage" (Deut. 25.5): what if a woman's husband died and they had no children, and what if she cycled through her deceased husband's seven brothers, being married to each one, and in the end all of them die? Now comes the question - who will she be married to in heaven? The irony, of course, is the Sadducees don't believe in resurrection. They're using this absurd tale both to embarrass Jesus publicly and disprove resurrection in one fell swoop.

3. We'll examine the two major pieces of Jesus' response in a moment but a few preliminary observations: a) to this day we really don't know what Jesus means that we will be "like the angels of God" in the resurrection so best not to speculate about it, and b) the response to Jesus' answer is telling - in Matthew's gospel, the crowd was "astounded" by what He said, in Luke the religious leaders dared not ask another question of Jesus, and, most humorously, in Mark Jesus flat-out tells the Sadducees, "You are quite wrong."

4. The first major part of Jesus' answer to the Sadducees can be seen in the sentence, "For in the resurrection people neither marry nor are given in marriage." This refers to the unquestioned, assumed cultural practice of giving, even forcing, women into marital relationships, often with the exchange of money (e.g. a dowry). In short, women were a kind of property, certainly less of a person with little agency or dignity.

5. No one - let me underscore NO ONE - in Jesus' day called that cultural norm into question. Yet Jesus is the lone voice who is willing to criticize the uncriticizable and put that presumption on blast. In Luke's version of this story, Jesus declares that this practice is not "worthy of a place in the resurrection" (Lk. 20:34-35). Two commentators on this story (theologian William Placher and church historian Justo Gonzalez) conclude "Marriage, as it existed in Jesus' culture, could not be a part of God's good eternal human state" and "In God's new world of justice, peace, and freedom, people are not 'given' to or forced into marriage with others."

6. So this story is meant to make its readers (in this case us) wonder - what do we currently take for granted in our own culture, 21st-century America, that will have no place in God's Kingdom and thus will be reversed in the resurrection? There are many studies of shared American values that reveal most of us prioritize productivity ("you are what you do or what you've done today"), individual rights over and against the collective good, busyness as a measure of the good life, etc. How might Jesus - His example and teaching - show us that these need to be tempered, even changed, in order for us to live as a part of God's Kingdom?

7. Bottom line, all of us should anticipate that we are going to be surprised, even shocked, in the best possible way by heaven. You might even conclude that there will be quite a learning curve for us. Heaven will not be limited by our culture's limited moral, relational, social, economic imagination. As John Senior, professor of religion at Wake Forest writes, "Resurrection will explode our boundaries of goodness...No one will be disappointed in resurrection life."

8. The second major component of Jesus' response to the Sadducees is found in His citation of Exodus 3.6 (note - one of the books of Moses, that mattered to His testers), "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," to which Jesus adds, "He (God) is God not of the dead, but of the living." Jesus highlights the tense of the verb in Exodus 3.6 - "I AM the God," not "I WAS the God." That is telling because in the text of Genesis and Exodus Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been dead 400 years minimum by the time we get to Exodus 3 and the burning bush. And yet God says in that O.T. verse that those patriarchs are not lost in oblivion, and that God's relationship with them has not been stopped by their earthly demise.

9. This shows us that the best we can do as we face our own mortality is to trust God to be faithful to us. God is not limited by death; death is limited by God. As PCUSA New Testament scholar Anna Case-Winters writes, "Resurrection is real because God is real. Though resurrection has not happened yet, God guarantees that it will. The point is not what happens when we die but the strength of God's loyalty to those God loves."

10. So will we be married in heaven? Well, we can now see that this passage in Matthew, Mark, and Luke doesn't really answer that query clearly. But we do know that God is love and all who remain with God remain with love ([1st John 4.16](#)), so if heaven is "remaining with God" (and it is), then heaven will be full of love. So will we be married in heaven? Who knows? But we will know each other in heaven by name, including our spouses, we will love them far more than we do now, and in fact we will love everyone exceedingly more as well. Jonathan Edwards, the famous early American preacher/theologian said that "every saint in heaven is as a flower in God's garden, and holy love is the fragrance and sweet odor that we all send forth."

A Prayer for the Week

A Prayer Adapted from Matt. 22.23-33:

Gracious and faithful God, who reveals Yourself not as the God of the dead but as the God of the living: I give You thanks for a love so fierce and unwavering that even death itself cannot undo it. Forgive me for the ways I so often limit Your Kingdom to the boundaries of my own imagination, trying to squeeze it into our narrow habits of control, our rushed schedules, and our fleeting cultural norms. Awaken me even now to a resurrected life that is so much larger, so much freer, and so much better than anything I could design for myself. Grant me a foretaste of Your eternal shalom in which all barriers of exclusion fall away, and where I am freed to love and be loved without fear, hypocrisy, or reserve. Encourage those among us who are walking through declining health, grief, or great instability, and anchor us all in the certainty of Your everlasting embrace. I am forever grateful that You are not only the God who redeems but the God of resurrection, amen.

Explore More this Week

- The text we explored during the sermon is one of several questions asked by the religious leaders of Jesus during Tuesday of Holy Week in the courts of the Jerusalem Temple, all of which are meant to trip Him up. You can read the whole sequence here - [Matthew 22.15-46 NRSVUE](#)
- If you want to learn more about how the PCUSA understands or describes the biblical witness about heaven and resurrection, start by reading the closing section of The Declaration of Faith (1977) - [Declaration of Faith - Hope in God](#)
- Here's a piece on how the PCUSA over its history has described "heaven" and "resurrection" in a humble, open-ended way: [Presbyterian Mission Agency Life After Death](#)
- Here's a presentation by imminent biblical scholar N. T. Wright on resurrection, Christ's and our own: [The Resurrection of Resurrection](#)