

Title: Strike Three!
Text: Matthew 22.23-33
Theme: Jesus believed the Bible
Series: Matthew #105
Prop Stmtnt: Jesus used the Bible to support his own teaching.

Read Text:

One of the guys in our church was sharing the other day how every Monday at work, a particular guy would come up with what he thought was a stumper that would disprove the Bible and Christianity. It was like clockwork. And every week, this brother would answer him and would tell him that he had to come up with something better than that. This went to the point where this guy would try to recruit others. Even when you answer their questions, it really doesn't matter does it? They are not asking the questions looking for an honest answer. They are not asking the questions in faith, they are asking the questions in antagonism. It does not matter what you say, they do not want to believe.

That is exactly what is going on in our text. This is the third time that Jesus has been confronted on this day; first by the Pharisees, then by the disciples of the Pharisees along with the Herodians, and now by the Sadducees. Each time they think they have a stumper and each time they swing, they miss. This is strike three. By now, these guys are looking desperate and the truth is, they really are desperate. This is pathetic. They are trying to take on Jesus and obviously, they are way out of their league. And they don't know it. They hate being exposed as being wrong and what is worse, they hate being told that they are sinners, who need a Savior. But, they are, just like you and me. They are sinners who cannot rescue themselves. They cannot save themselves. They cannot be religious enough or moral enough or get a label or take a class that will cover them. They need Jesus. They need the one that they are so prone to resist. So do you.

I. **Believing only part of the Bible does not mean that you believe the Bible.** (23)

The Sadducees were a group of religious leaders in Israel who along with the Pharisees made up the Sanhedrin. In many ways they were like two opposing political parties that both vied for power and influence in Congress, except their Congress had a decidedly religious component to it. The Pharisees started out as being the party of the common man. The Sadducees were more the party of the aristocrats. The Pharisees started out trying to protect the law. The Sadducees tried to protect their wealth. In the end they were all trying to protect their power and influence.

The Sadducees only accepted the Pentateuch (the 1st five books of the OT) as being authoritative. And since, they really did not see anything in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy about the afterlife, they did not believe in the resurrection. If you do not believe in the resurrection, then there is very little motivation for leading a life with too many morals because you do not have any hope. You might as well do everything you can for yourself now. So, the Sadducees were considered to be too loose, while they considered the Pharisees to be too uptight. And much of their disagreement

centered upon the issue of the resurrection. In fact, this was such a huge area of debate that several years later, the apostle Paul was arrested in Jerusalem and was brought in before the Sanhedrin in order to be tried. In his opening statement he said, "It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial." That was a brilliant move because instantly civil war broke out in the Sanhedrin. Luke says, "a great clamor arose." No kidding! They started fighting so much between themselves, that they basically forgot about Paul. In fact, these guys got violent. The fighting got so bad that the soldiers charged with escorting Paul got him out of there because they were afraid that he was going to be "torn to pieces."

The Sadducees "who say that there is no resurrection" are guilty of placing their word and their opinion over God's word. They only accept the parts of the Bible that fit with how they want to live. They only accept the parts of the Bible that fit with their worldview. Since they cannot conceive of a resurrection it must not be a possibility.

That happens all of the time, doesn't it? The fact that we cannot conceive certain things, or figure certain things out, we assume to mean that they cannot possibly happen. That is not correct. We are the creation. God is the Creator. We are finite. He is infinite. The finite cannot fully comprehend, nor fully define the infinite. When God says that he spoke the universe into existence, we should not expect to understand that from our perspective how exactly that happened. When God says that a virgin is going to conceive and bear a Son, and that this Jesus is God and man, it is not our place to say, "that can't be possible." Who are we to determine what is possible or not? The fact that I can't raise someone from the dead does not mean that God can't. God does not look to us as the gauge for what he can and cannot do. He already has and he will do it again! When you consider a promise of God that you cannot figure out, you can respond one of two ways: 1) You can say, "I have no idea how this is possible, therefore, I don't believe it." Or you can say 2) "I have no idea how this is possible, therefore, I can't wait to see how God is going to pull this off." Seriously, the heart of the problem with the Sadducees was that they sat in judgment of the Scriptures. They thought that they had the authority to determine what parts they would believe or not.

A country music star who claimed to be a Christian was publicly saying things and doing things that did not sound like being a Christian and someone asked her about that one day. She quoted her grandmother (which country music people tend to do, right?) who told her one day that she reads the Bible like she eats fish. She eats the meat, but spits out the bones. Eating the meat and spitting out the bones works well when you are eating fish, but not when you are reading the Bible. Think about that. When you read the Scriptures, you are reading God's Word and you, the reader are saying, declaring, labeling what parts belong in the meat column and what parts belong in the bone pile to be discarded. 1) Who are you to say what parts are meat and what parts are bones? And 2) How would you know what parts are meat and what parts are bones? Do you look at the Bible that way? Do you only accept the parts that fit within your beliefs and ignore the parts that don't? Listen, we believe it all! That does not mean that we understand it all perfectly, but we believe it all!

II. **Using one part of the Bible as an excuse to deny or disobey another part of the Bible means that you do not understand the Bible.** (23-28)

For the second time the Pharisees are stumped by Christ (v.22), so the Sadducees take a shot at him. For as much animosity as there is between these two groups, their hatred of Christ trumps their hatred and distrust of each other. It is amazing how people's hatred of God and his Word will unite otherwise sworn enemies. In fact toward the end of the book of Revelation we read of the time when "the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him." How do you get the kings of the earth and their armies to gather together? You find an enemy that they all hate. Find an enemy who is a threat to the kings. The enemy of the beast is the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the enemy of the kings of the earth is the King of Kings.

But, by the way (as an aside) that is about all that the world can come up for unity. We are unified to the degree that we can find an enemy that we hate more than we hate each other. I've been in churches like that. The only thing that holds them together is the fact that they hate others even more than they dislike themselves. It is a sad way to live. No wonder they are sad, you see.

Seriously, the Sadducees now come after Christ and they are trying to use one part of the Bible to prove why they don't believe another part of the Bible. They take a law from Deuteronomy (25.5-10) and create a scenario based on that which they think proves their point of the absurdity of a resurrection. They probably used this story in their debates with the Pharisees in an effort to win the debate.

The Sadducees (v.24) are referring to what is called the Levirate law (or the brother-in-law law). If brothers lived together and the brother who was married died before his wife conceived a son, then his brother was to take his sister-in-law as his wife in order that she may have a son and that the land of her husband's may be able to stay in the line of her husband. This law, while a bit messy, was for the protection of the widow, and the protection of the land so that it would stay in the family (tribe) as it was intended for the nation of Israel in the OT. So, the Sadducees tell this story as if it actually happened. It sounds pretty incredible, and difficult to believe that this actually took place, but I guess it is possible. There are a couple of accounts in the Apocrypha that may have been the idea for this story, but we really don't know. The first brother gets married and dies before he has a son. So his brother takes her for his wife and the same thing happens to him and to the third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh brother. Now, as you can imagine this story has been the source of endless jokes about the woman and her cooking or other things, but seriously, if something like this actually took place, we have to give kudos to these brothers for their commitment to the law. And, if the first brother was married during a time of war and all the brothers were involved in the fighting, then now your heart develops some great sympathy for this woman. But, for the Sadducees, they think that they are on to something here. Because, if there is a resurrection, then all of these brothers cannot have the same woman in the afterlife as their wife at the same time. Right? So, whose wife will she be?

What are the Sadducees doing? They are using one part of the Bible as a reason to not believe another part of the Bible. They think that they are trapping Jesus into giving his stamp of approval on polygamy in the afterlife or saying that there is no resurrection. Again, they think that they have just forced him into a lose-lose situation. As we will see again, Jesus is never trapped by us. No one will ever stand before God and stump him with a question that he cannot answer.

And yet, I see way too many examples of people using one part of the Bible to excuse their disobedience or ignorance of another part of the Bible. Let me give you an example and I will warn you that it is a little touchy with some of you. (so take a deep breath and just hear me out before you put up your defenses) I think that you know that I love the gospel. I love telling people about the gospel. Let me speak at a funeral, I am going to explain the gospel. Let me perform a wedding and I am going to explain the gospel. Let me get into a conversation with an unbeliever, and I will look for opportunities to get to the gospel. I love to encourage you to share the gospel. I love the fact that we not only support missionaries, but that we send missionaries around the world to spread the gospel. I love the fact that we do that because I believe the Bible that tells us to go into all the world and make disciples of people from every people group. I want us to send more and support more. My son and daughter-in-law and grandson are planning to spend much of their adult lives in a 3rd world country in order to share the gospel. Now, what you may not know is that I not only believe the gospel and the great commission, but I believe in the doctrine of election. I believe Ephesians 1.4-5 that says that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world and that he in love, predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to his purpose. I believe that God, in eternity past elected (chose) and predestined (pre-determined) who would believe on him and according To Rev. 13.8, before the foundation of the world was laid, God wrote everyone of their names in the book of life of the Lamb. Therefore, I dare not use the Bible's command to preach the gospel and share the gospel and send forth the gospel as some reason to reject the clear teaching of Scripture on election anymore than I can use the Scriptures teaching on election as some convoluted reason to reject the clear teaching of Scripture regarding the great commission. In fact, it is the doctrine of election that drives my passion for evangelism. Do you know why? Because that is exactly what drove Jesus! He said, "I have other sheep that are not of this fold." (referring to Gentiles who had not yet come to faith in Christ, but were elected because he calls them sheep) "I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice." Do you see how that fits together? Missions and evangelism is going into your world and shouting out the gospel and watching his sheep come running home! Don't pit evangelism against election. Embrace them both because they both make much of God!

III. **Jesus is the final authority.** (29-30)

In the first full blown recorded sermon that Jesus preached (Sermon on the Mount; Matthew 5-7) Jesus quoted from the OT Scriptures repeatedly. He set it up by saying, "*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them.*" Jesus then went on to quote or refer to specific passages by saying, "*You have heard that it was said*" and then after referring to that text about

murder, adultery, divorce, making oaths, or retaliating he then said, “*but I say to you.*” And he would not contradict what had been written but would give further explanation about what had been written. But think of that for a minute. Jesus refers to the Scriptures then he quotes the Scripture and then he adds to the Scriptures. He is the only One who can do that, because he is the Word. Jesus is the final authority on the Bible because he is the final authority. In our text, Jesus is doing a similar thing. The Sadducees are trying to prove that there is no resurrection. Jesus just flat out tells them, “You are wrong!” And then he gives additional revelation. Jesus tells them “You are wrong.” And says that they are wrong on two levels. 1) You don’t know the Scriptures and 2) You don’t know the power of God. When he said that you don’t know the power of God he was saying that you are ignorant about God’s power as it relates to the resurrection. You do not know what God does by means of the resurrection. You do not know what life is like after the resurrection. Therefore, for you to take what you assume life would be like after the resurrection as a reason to discredit and reject the resurrection is absurd.

You cannot look through the lens of your earthly experience and expect to get a clear vision of life in the resurrection. In this life there is marriage but there is no marriage in the afterlife. Just because there is marriage now does not mean that there is marriage later. Therefore, your scenario about the woman with 7 husbands who were brothers is completely irrelevant. When Jesus said this, he just blew up a lot of images of eternal life, didn’t he? There is no marriage in heaven. Some of you cannot image heaven, not being married, while others of you cannot imagine heaven, being married! Do not raise your hand indicating which group you are in.

Now, hold the phone! Because what Jesus said here should not depress you in anyway, but should in fact thrill you. Let’s say that you have an amazing marriage! Is there anyway that heaven is going to be less than what we have on earth? Not a chance! But, marriage here is a dim reflection of THE Marriage of Christ and his bride in eternity. What that means is that:

- You will love your spouse better in heaven than you do now even though he or she will not be your spouse. (related question, will I know others then in terms of how I know them now? E.g. husband, daughter, father, etc.)
- You will not give up anything in a sense of loss. You will give up what is inferior because you will get what is supreme. If you were to die tomorrow, you would not lose out on a thing because every gift, experience and relationship points to the real thing that is ours forever with Christ. (golf, pet Gigi)
- Do not pity those who live and die without ever being married. Those who die without ever being married but are in Christ skip the dress rehearsal and go right into the party. Pity those who live and die who never trusted Christ.

IV. **Jesus is the perfect interpreter of the Bible.** (31-32)

In verses 31-32, Jesus now takes these guys to school pointing out that they do not even know the Scriptures. And what he does is nothing short of a verbal slam dunk right over them. He points out that in Exodus 3.6, when God is revealing himself to Moses, that

God identifies himself in this way: “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” The logic of Jesus’ point is on the verb tense. I am is a present tense verb. In other words, God told Moses, that I am presently the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, even though these three had been dead for several hundred years, God is still presently their God, because they are still present. If they were not still alive in some manner, God would have said, “I WAS the God of”. Jesus then says, “He is not the God of the dead, but of the living.”

It is a brilliant point. He takes a passage from the section of Scripture that they accept and he uses it to point out the fatal flaw of their belief. I think that it is safe to assume that the crowd was well aware of the ongoing feud between the Sadducees and the Pharisees and had probably heard this story about the woman and 7 husbands a hundred times. They were astonished at what he said. He was right. The point is right there in the text. The Pharisees were correct in believing in the resurrection. They were fatally wrong in not accepting Christ as the Messiah. The Sadducees believed neither in the resurrection nor in Christ as the Messiah. But, now Christ has not only demonstrated his wisdom and authority to the Pharisees, he does before the Sadducees. No one can stand before him.

Do the Sadducees change their mind? Do they repent of their unbelief and surrender themselves and their positions to the rightful King who has obviously come to them? No. They were silenced (v.34), but they were not changed. Why not? Pride. Pride is exceedingly stupid. Do the Pharisees see the authority of Christ and recognize his skill with the Scriptures? No and as we will see next week, they keep coming after him. After all, they have already made up their minds about him and no amount of evidence or logic will change them. Pride is exceedingly stupid because it is exceedingly blinding.

It is so difficult to admit the truth about ourselves, our sin and our complete and utter need of Christ. We desperately want to hold on to the idea that we have something good that can contribute to our salvation or to our deserving of or earning forgiveness. In fact, most people would rather die than admit their sin and the bankruptcy of their self-righteousness. They would rather die, or kill Jesus if given a chance. (gospel)

V. **Jesus believes every single word of the Bible.** (31-32)

Now, let’s go back for a second to v.29. Jesus dresses these guys down because they don’t know their Bible and they don’t know the power of God. He then addresses the fact that they don’t know the power of God as it relates to the reality of the resurrection and now he is going to address the first part of that and show them how they don’t know the Scriptures. But, don’t miss this. This statement by Jesus is masterful. It is true that they don’t know God’s power and it is true that they don’t know the Scriptures, but notice the relationship between the two. If you don’t know the Scriptures, you will not know the power of God. What are the Scriptures? They are the words of God. They are the words that are breathed out by God. So now Jesus points out how important the very words of God are. As we have seen, Jesus hangs the entire doctrine of the resurrection on a verb tense. I AM the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. There is an enormous difference between I AM and I was. When God told Moses, I AM the God of Abraham, Isaac and

Jacob, God was not just talking for the sake of saying things. Every word of God matters, even the verb tenses. Every word, that God communicated to Moses, to the prophets, to the gospel writers, to Luke, to Paul, to Peter, to James, Jude and John matters. Every single word matters and to disbelieve, disobey or ignore any of them is to disbelieve, disobey and ignore God. What I am explaining relates to what we call the doctrine of inerrancy, meaning that every word that the writers of the Bible originally recorded was perfect, without error, inspired, infallible, totally sufficient and trustworthy. Therefore, we deny that that any portion of Scripture is marked by error.

Historically, this doctrine is the first one that is attacked, watered down, and then denied. When this happens, it is like the first domino that sets all of the others into motion. Take for example the denominations and churches that say that we believe the Bible on spiritual matters but we do not assume that inspiration and inerrancy applies to the areas of the Bible that speak about science or history. When you deny (and therefore don't know the Scriptures) you do not know the power of God. Practically, this doctrine is undermined when churches choose not to teach the entire counsel of God. That is why I plead with pastors to preach expositively. Preach the whole book. Quit trying to entertain people with topical talk series on raising kids and getting your finances in order. When the primary diet from the pulpit is determined by what you think people want to hear in order to get them to come back, you will most likely not deal with tough passages and tough doctrines. Do you see the connection? Why would I be motivated to not preach the Scriptures to you as the Spirit of God wrote them? Because I would fear that either you can't handle it (implying God made a mistake) or because I don't think it would work (implying that I don't believe it). So, in place of the Bible, I have to come up with something else that sounds meaningful, spiritual, deep, philosophical and helpful, and I may find something to talk about that is like that, but it will be a poor substitute for the power of God which will leave the leadership of this church or any church with trying to come up with some cheap substitute.

If Jesus believed every word, then we have to be a church that believes every word and preaches and teaches every word and be a people who are willing to study, to listen and to reverberate that Word with one another. How can we encourage each other to do that? How can we help each other reverberate the Word with one another? I am going to give you a challenge. Before you leave this morning, find one person and ask them to share with you one thing that stuck with them about the sermon this morning. Then, share one thing with them.

The sermon is not done until we do something with it.