

September 27, 2015

What Does the Bible Teach?

Matthew 22:23-33

Matthew 22:23-33 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?" 29 Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. 30 At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. 31 But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, 32 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." 33 When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.

I love this story. Several years ago a ranger was leading a group of hikers to a fire lookout in the Yellowstone National Park. The ranger was so intent on telling the hikers about the flowers and animals, he considered the messages on his two-way radio distracting, so he switched it off. Nearing the tower, the ranger was met by a nearly breathless lookout, who asked why he hadn't responded to the messages on his radio. A grizzly bear had been seen stalking the group, and the authorities were trying to warn them of the danger, but he wasn't responding. Could that be our story? God is trying to communicate with us but we just aren't listening.

It is one of the great questions of life. What is God trying to communicate to you? What are you doing to draw near to God? You can answer that question by answering these questions: How much time have you spent in prayer? How much time have you spent on meditating on God's will for your life? Has anyone here fasted lately? Has anyone here served God lately by helping a forgotten person? How much time have you spent reading the Bible? Let me say this clearly. The true church is not an organization; the church is an organism. We are part of the body of Christ. That is what the scripture lesson is telling us today. Let us look at the scripture lesson.

We are in the twenty-second chapter of Matthew. Jesus is in the temple courts teaching about the Kingdom of God. According to verse twenty-three, the Sadducees went to Jesus with a question. Before we look at their question, let us look at the Sadducees, themselves. Don't confuse the Sadducees with the Pharisees. While the Pharisees were religious legalists, the Sadducees were more far more liberal. They were interested in the things of this world, politics and power. Yet, in spite of this fact, this group of theological and Biblical lightweights went to Jesus with a complex question. This is the question:

A man dies, leaving his wife without children. Should his brother marry her, and whose wife will she be in heaven? That same drama is played out seven times. That sounds like one complex family with issues. I would have a few questions for the bride. Do you buy a new wedding dress each time, or do you keep using the same one? The question is based on the levirate law, Genesis 38:8. So why did they ask such a complex question? The reason is simple. They are trying to trick Jesus. However, the Master sees through their trap and responds in verse 29, *"You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God."*

Jesus is speaking to the Sadducees of his time, but he could be speaking to the people of our time. Could it be that we live in a generation that does not know the scriptures? Could it be that we are in a generation that does not know the power of God? So to speak, we are wandering around the Yellowstone National Park with a bear stalking us. God is trying to communicate with us, but we aren't listening. When was the last time you thought about the power of God? When was the last time you read the Bible? The George Barna research group tells us only 20% of all Christians read the Bible on a daily basis. That means 80% of all Christians don't read the Bible. Are you planning on reading the Bible today?

Recently, Tyndale House Publishers conducted a survey asking Americans why they don't read the Bible. According to them, there are three reasons.

1. They don't have time to read the Bible.
2. The Bible is too hard to understand.
3. The Bible is irrelevant.

I do not understand how the Bible can be irrelevant? The Bible teaches us the basics of life itself. Maybe the reason we struggle in life is that we can't learn from someone else's mistakes. The Bible gives us that opportunity. The Bible teaches us what is really important. So today I don't want to talk about the value of studying the Bible verse by verse. I want to look at the Bible in more general terms. In general terms, the Bible teaches us to do three things. Those three things are my outline for my message today. Tomorrow afternoon my journey back to Russia will begin. For this reason I am preoccupied with the "Evil Empire." I will illustrate those points from my experiences in Russia. So if you are ready to begin, say, **"Amen!"**

1. Love Life

First, the Bible teaches us to love life. Psalm 118:24 says, *"This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it."* Are you enjoying this day? Are you enjoying your life? The Bible teaches us to love life! And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

This will be my twelfth trip to the former Soviet Union. The best part of the trips have been the people who have gone with us. I don't have a clue how many have gone with us through the years. The teams have been made up of both men and women. The youngest was a fourteen-year-old boy from Wooster. The oldest was our own Walter

Wills, who was well into his eighties. With all the diversity in our groups, there was one thing in common. Everyone had someone in their life who tried to discourage them from going. At one point on every trip, we share those discouraging words. People have told us to be aware of the water, the food, the weather and the people. According to those people, Russia is a dangerous place! We laughed at all those warnings because we have always had a great time. With all the differences in our team, the one thing we had in common was a great confidence in God. We knew God was with us. As the scriptures say, *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"*

One of the reasons I return to Russia time and time again is to have an adventure. I get tired of talking about the same old things - sports, weather, politics. Occasionally, I need to experience something new. However, I also understand Russia isn't for everyone. I understand if you don't go because of health. I understand if you don't go because of money. I understand if you don't go because it is something that doesn't interest you. I don't understand if you don't go because you are afraid. Fear has a way of paralyzing us; faith has a way of mobilizing us. Have you ever been paralyzed by fear? Listen to what I am about to say. When I travel I pack my common sense. I don't go out of my way to be in danger. I stay with someone else. I follow the rules. I have a translator. I protect my passport. I have never felt unsafe in Russia. That leads us to an interesting question.

What is there in life that you still want to do? What is there in life that you would do if you weren't afraid? *This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.* Today is the day to start living! Life is a wonderful gift, don't waste it. There has never been a moment in your life when you were orphaned by God. He is with us right now! And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

2. Love Others

Second, the Bible teaches us to love others. In the parable of the Good Samaritan everyone who should have cared for the victim walked to the other side of the road. The only one who cared about the man was the most unlikely candidate, the Samaritan. What was Jesus trying to say? Love one another! The Bible teaches us to love others. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**

At the very heart of all these trips are children. Every team has loved playing with the children. It is quite comical. At first, the children and staff are cautious of these foreigners. Americans can't be trusted. However within a few days we had full access. We have played card games and watched Russian football. We have played Twister and tried to speak Russian. We have given them gift bags and they have given us gifts. They have presented musical programs. We learned their names, but we also learned something more important. They are just like us. It has been true of every trip. In a short time, their differences disappear and the similarities appear. A retired teacher once said it best, "I learned kids are kids!" I have learned people are people. Can I be honest with you? There is a part of me that wishes I wasn't here. There is a part of me that wishes I was there. There is more to life than a clean, well maintained building.

Through the eyes of God, the only thing that really matters is people. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"

3. Love God

Third, the Bible teaches us to love God. John 3:16 says, "*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*" Your only response to God's love is to love God in return. The Bible teaches us to love God. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"

In the city of Saint Petersburg, Russia there are three magnificent cathedrals. There is Kazan Cathedral. It took ten years to build and was completed in 1811. It was named after the Russian general who defeated Napoleon. He is buried within the church. There is Saint Isaacs. It took forty years to build and was completed in 1858. It is the home of the fourth largest dome in the world. Finally, there is the Cathedral of Spilt Blood. It is built on the spot where Czar Alexander II was assassinated in 1881. His son, Czar Alexander III, ordered the construction, which was completed in 1907. It is a magnificent structure. The interior is decorated with ten square miles of mosaic tiles. Her history is fascinating. During the communist era it was used as a warehouse. During World War II it was used as a morgue. Today, it is being reopened as a church. I like these three cathedrals individually, but I love to think of them together. Except for the seventy years of Communism, it is impossible to separate Russian history and God. The two are interrelated.

How easy is it to separate your personal history from God? Do you only remember God during your hardships? That is not good enough. You need to remember God every day. You need to love God every day. The Bible teaches us to love God. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"

This is the plan. Kathryn and I leave for Russia tomorrow. Our plane takes off at 4:00, so we will leave for the airport about 1:00. The day will begin in Canfield, Ohio and end in Moscow, Russia. It is a ten hour flight from New York to Moscow. When we arrive I will be exhausted. I will be too tired to read or write. However, I will do two things. First, I will locate my passport. Your American citizenship is extremely valuable. Second, I will locate my Bible. I always travel with my Bible. The Bible is important to me; I hope it is important to you.

The Bible is important because it teaches us what is really important. What does the Bible teach us? First, the Bible teaches us to **love life**. Your time in this world is a great gift. Are you living or are you hiding under the bed, afraid? Second, the Bible teaches us to **love others**. Are you looking at how people are different? Or are you looking at how people are the same? Third, the Bible teaches us to **love God**. How is your life expressing your love for God? John Wesley said, "*I am a man of one book.*" I hope your one book is the Bible. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"