

Loving the God of Life

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Matthew 22:23-40 (ESV Adapted; Cf Mk 12:18-34; Lk 20:27-40; 10:25-28)

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 as next of kin must marry his wife and raise up seed for his brother.' [summary of Deut. 25:5-6]

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. 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've gone astray**, 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**?' [Exod 3:6] He is not God of the dead, but of **the living**."

³³ And when **the crowd** heard it, they were **astonished at his teaching**.

³⁴ But when **the Pharisees** heard that he had **silenced the Sadducees**, they gathered together. ³⁵ And one of them, **a lawyer**, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ "Teacher, **which is the great commandment in the Law?**"

³⁷ And he said to him, "**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind**.' [Deut. 6:4-5] ³⁸ This is the **great** and **first** commandment.

³⁹ And a **second** is like it: '**You shall love your neighbor as yourself**.' [Lev. 19:18] ⁴⁰ **On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets**."

Exodus 3:5-8 *God speaking to Moses at the Burning Bush*

⁵ "Take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. ... ⁷ I have surely seen the affliction of my people ... ⁸ and I have come down to deliver them"

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

⁴ "Hear, O Israel: The LORD (*Yahweh*) our God, the LORD (*Yahweh*) is one. ⁵ You shall love the LORD (*Yahweh*) your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

Leviticus 19:18-19

¹⁸ You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD (*Yahweh*). ¹⁹ You shall keep my statutes. ... You shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor shall you wear a garment of cloth made of two kinds of material.

Matthew 5:43-45, 48

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' [Lev 19:18; Ps 139:22]

⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who oppress you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ... ⁴⁸ You therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Matthew 7:12

¹² "So whatever you wish others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

Galatians 5:14 Cf. **Romans 13:8-10; James 2:8**

¹⁴ For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Priests of Tradition against Foolish Faith

Tensions rise as Jesus teaches in the Temple. He has challenged and condemned the priestly aristocracy that ran the Temple. He answered the Pharisees and Herodians about the tax. Now the Sadducees, the theological organization of the leading priests, return. They opposed the Pharisees, rejecting resurrection, tradition not in Genesis-Deut., angels, etc. [Act 23:8] Temple tradition and priestly standing was all. Resurrection and judgment was a threat. It's the here and now of ritual, liturgy, temple that matter, not faith in some future life. They bring a question to show that Moses' law [Dt 25:5-6] has no place for resurrection life. It's intended to make the idea of resurrection look silly. Just think of the soap opera!

Resurrection Life and the Power of God

Jesus firmly agrees with the Pharisees on the basic teaching! Sadducees miss on the basics: the scripture and the God it reveals. They assume resurrection is resuscitation to ordinary life rather than transformation / new creation. When death is destroyed, there's no need for new offspring. Only the relationship, love, delight, identity of marriage remains. The Sadducees know the scripture Jesus quotes [Ex 3:6], but they don't "know" it – what it says about God. God say "I am" not "I was." Abraham is not only past but present with God. Resurrection is God's "No!" to death. It can't crush his creation of life – God's power. Every life matters. Each of us can receive God's Spirit, God's life. Physical death can't even destroy the our natural life/soul/*psyche*. Only God can do that. God cares for the life he creates. Resurrection takes death/suffering seriously and affirms God's creation power. People are astonished as with his Sermon on the Mt. Resurrection reveals the heart of God.

Finding the Greatest Commandments

The Pharisees return with a challenging question but not a trick question. How can Jesus both agree and disagree with them? They sometimes spoke of core commands like Mic 6:8. But their basic intent was to elaborate the law to touch every part of life; to call all Israel to carefully implement every law of tithing, purity, Sabbath, etc.; thus create a holy nation. The question has the implication that Jesus exalts some commands and ignores others. How else could he welcome sinners (against the law)? Jesus says "Yes!" There is a "first" and a "second" command. All the Law and Prophets depend on these. They form a kind of lens through which to see the meaning of everything else – a basic guide to interpretation. He starts in a well-known center, the "Shema:" "Hear, Israel..." – a core statement of faith and relationship. Note that it is a commandment that could never be enforced in court. Not like laws about murder, oaths, divorce, even Sabbath: "Love God with all your heart." The second he picks from a clause in Lev 19:18, among other regulations. Jesus says it's most important. Why? It's unenforceable! Because it corresponds to the character of God and our relationship with God. Jesus interprets/expands its meaning: Love enemies [Mt 5:43-48].

How do I Love the God of Life?

Jesus says the heart of God has always been for us. God acted in love to save his creation by saving Israel. He has always been the God of life. He called them to a relationship of love. Not an alliance with one nation-state regulated by law, excluding all others. A passionate love for God is acted out in loving justice and service for "the least of these" [Mt 25:40]. Only when we see what God counts most important, can we understand cross and resurrection.