

XVIII TRINITY 2016

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

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ST. MATTHEW 22.34



Last week it was the treachery of the Pharisees...this week enter the Sadducees with their own slant on undermining Jesus.

The Sadducees had just tried to trick Jesus with a question about marriage in heaven: If a woman outlives her seven husbands and then she finally dies...which husband is she married to in heaven.

Some Pharisees came to Jesus because they heard he had “silenced the Sadducees”. We know a lot about the Pharisees...Jesus has many encounters with them...but just who are the Sadducees?

According to First Century Jewish historian Josephus, the Sadducees were an aristocratic sect within Judaism...a social and economic elite. They regulated relations with the Romans. Many Sadducees were priests who maintained the Temple and offered sacrifices.

Sadducees did not believe the soul is immortal or in an afterlife. They did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. They were the antithesis of the Pharisees, who did believe in the resurrection of the dead.

Jesus “silences the Sadducees” by showing them how foolish their question is. There won’t be any marriage in heaven because, like the prophet Habakkuk wrote, we will be like angels in heaven. There will be no need for marriage. Jesus also tells them they don’t know their own scriptures, because if they did, they would know the God they claim to believe in, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is the God of the living, not the dead.

The opportunistic Pharisees seize the moment to try to trick Jesus with a question of their own about the Great Commandment: Love God above all else and love your neighbor as you want to be loved. Jesus, of course, knows what the Pharisees are up to...he frustrates their efforts to entrap him with a definitive statement about unconditional love...which is not something the Pharisees wanted to hear. He has “silenced the Pharisees”.

Jesus knows his time is short...he turns the tables and asks the Pharisees what they think about the Messiah. They answer that he will be a descendant of King David. “OK, smart guys”, says Jesus, “Why in Psalm 110 does King David call his descendant ‘Lord’”.

“Lord” is a title of respect and would have been used by a younger person in addressing his elders. A father or uncle would never have called his own son or nephew “Lord”. Why then does David call his descendant “Lord”?

Psalm 110 begins “The Lord said to my Lord; sit here at my right side until I put your enemies under your feet.” In Psalm 110, “The Lord” refers to God; “my Lord” refers to the Messiah. The Lord God says to Jesus, you are the Messiah, now take the place of honor and sit down at my right side.

The only way God would say to Jesus to take the place of honor at his right side; the only way David could call his own descendant, Jesus, his “Lord”, is if Jesus and God are made of the same stuff...Godness!

Saint John records an encounter Jesus had with the Pharisees in which he makes the outrageous claim he existed before Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. When the Pharisees challenge Jesus’ sanity for making such a statement...he identifies himself as I AM...he calls himself by the name reserved only for God. Jesus has just signed his own death warrant...and there is no turning back.

The Gospel concludes by telling us the Pharisees couldn’t answer Jesus’ question about King David and they didn’t ask any more questions. They didn’t have to...they had everything they needed to get him arrested. The Pharisees believed in heaven...the Sadducees didn’t...both rejected Jesus...both rejected God.

Jesus’ radical claim to being the Messiah and God’s Son was too much for the Pharisees to accept. What do we think of his claims? His death warrant makes possible for each of us a place in heaven. We believe what Jesus said about himself...he is the God of the living, not of the dead.

