

## Final Prayer

As this day unfolds, Lord God, Your love unfolds like an opening flower; revealing ever more depths of colour, hue and saturation. May we not benefit from a mere snapshot of Your faithful loving-kindness, but from a high-definition movie of Your magnificent grace! Through Jesus Christ we pray, AMEN

## Prayer

We ask for mercy, Heavenly Father, on all who struggle this day with work, with family, with life itself, and also with faith. Have compassion on all who are depressed, and save them from its cruel destructive web. Give us Your love and understanding as we walk alongside those who suffer in this way; and may they be drawn them back to hope in You. In the name of Jesus, AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Faithfulness

*Pray for the church of God and ask the Lord to help it demonstrate the quality of true faithfulness within the world. May it fulfil its task to make God's Kingdom known.*

### On-going prayers

- Give thanks to God for answers to your prayers
- Pray for your national leaders at this time of economic instability
- Pray for people who do menial but important work for low pay

## Meditation

Treasure your life, though it may seem hard at times;  
For your courage is the starting point of greater things,  
And the Lord delights to use a willing heart.

Enjoy your life, even if you have to work at it;  
For perseverance brings the great prize of joy,  
And the Lord will bless your love of life.

Be careful with your life, it is valued beyond price;  
For the Creator loves each one that He has made,  
And the Lord has given His life for yours.

Give your life away, to friends as well as enemies  
For as you do, you gain far more than you can ever lose  
And the Lord will say to you at last; 'well done!'

## Bible Study - Matthew 22:23-33

<sup>23</sup> The same day the Sadducees, who say that there is no resurrection, came to him and posed Him a question, <sup>24</sup> 'Teacher,' they said, 'Moses said that if a man dies without any children, his brother must do his duty by having children for his brother with the widow. <sup>25</sup> Now, we have a case where there were seven brothers; the first married and died, and having no children, his wife was left to his brother. <sup>26</sup> The same happened to the second, then the third, all the way to the seventh. <sup>27</sup> Finally, the woman died. <sup>28</sup> In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will she be out of the seven, for she was had by all of them.'

<sup>29</sup> Jesus replied, 'You are wrong because you do not know the scriptures or the power of God. <sup>30</sup> For in the resurrection men and women do not marry, just as the angels in heaven. <sup>31</sup> And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what God said to you; <sup>32</sup> "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac,

and the God of Jacob?" He is not the God of the dead, but of the living.'<sup>33</sup>  
When the crowd heard it, they were astonished at his teaching.

## Review

It was now the turn of the Sadducees to try and trap Jesus with a theological question! They had a different strategy from that of the Pharisees, to pose Him not a new conundrum, but an old one. As with all the others, their only interest was to try to expose Jesus. They wanted to see Him squirm under their 'trump' question which no-one had ever been able to answer to their satisfaction, concerning the law and divorce.

The question posed was not merely abstract, however. Leviticus 18:16 forbade a man to marry his brother's wife, but Moses had granted an important exception to this rule designed to ensure the heritage of family lines within Israel, particularly to ensure that property remained in tribal and family possession. This exception was called 'levirate marriage' and is described in Deuteronomy 25:5-10. Here, if a man died (the senior male in a family line), then his brother was required to marry his wife in order to continue the family line; at least to have sex with the woman to produce a son and heir.

**Seven brothers and seven wives** The nature of such 'marriage' was often temporary, but the Greek word for levirate marriage ('anastésie') comes from a word which meant 'to return to help', or 'to stand up for', even 'to raise'. It was no small part of the debate that this word is very closely related to the Greek word for 'resurrection' ('anastasis') meaning 'raised'! In effect, the Sadducees argued that the only 'resurrection' they recognised was that whereby a dead person's lineage was brought back to life through levirate marriage!

It is also worth keeping in mind that the whole story was told from a very male perspective, and there was no particular significance in the 'seven'; it was a convenient exaggeration for the case presented. In those days, women were not treated with disrespect, and men acted according to their own interests by controlling their lives. However, it was still in the interests of women to engage in levirate 'marriage' because it enabled them to live independent lives after the death of their husbands; a somewhat more common occurrence in those days.

**In the Resurrection – like Angels** The Sadducees presented their story with satisfaction (22:24-28), finishing with the question; 'In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will she be out of the seven, for she was had by all of them' (22:28). Incidentally, the translation of many Bible versions 'she was married to all of them' makes levirate marriage sound more than it really was; little more than sex was involved as we have already seen.

Jesus replied directly and scathingly, accusing the Sadducees of knowing neither scriptures nor the power of God. This was no casual remark, for the Sadducees held only the first five books of the Bible as 'sacred', though they also accepted the Prophets and Writings as sacred, albeit to a lesser degree. Jesus based His ministry, however, not on the laws of Moses alone, but on the re-assessment of that Law by the Prophet's (Isaiah, Jeremiah etc.). In so doing He placed the Prophets on an equal footing with Moses, and regarded all the Old Testament as 'Scripture'. The Sadducees' limited understanding of scripture is the reason why Jesus accused them of not knowing God's Word, or His power.

Verse 30, however, has caused more concern today than the beliefs of the Sadducees! Jesus appears to say that although there is no marriage in heaven, people become 'like angels' in heaven! What does this mean? It means because there is no need for procreation in heaven ('in the resurrection men and women do not marry'), all the problems that accompany procreation, such as lineage and concerns for family rights and property do not exist. Levirate marriage, says Jesus, is simply not relevant in 'the resurrection', where we live 'as the angels' in harmony with our creator and with all we need to do His will.

At various times in Christian history, this verse has been regarded as one which promotes the importance of chastity (because angels, apparently, do not have sex). This is a mistaken interpretation because it flies in the face of all Jesus' teaching about marriage (for example, 19:1-12). Scripture never speaks of angels as perfect beings; they are different to people, and Jesus used them to give an example of the fact that in 'heaven' (or 'in the resurrection'), men and women do not have children.

**Yes, there really is a resurrection!** What Jesus was really interested in doing was to assert to the Sadducees that their precious dogma about the resurrection was wrong. Even though He had countless examples within the Prophets and the Writings (the Psalms for example), including Daniel 12:1-3 and Isaiah 26:19, Jesus restricted His argument with the Sadducees to texts they accepted as sacred. He replied to them by quoting Exodus 3:6, the dramatic moment when God revealed His Holy Name to Moses and said out of the burning bush; 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' (22:32). Jesus' argument was plain and simple; in this scripture God Himself described Himself as living with the forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They could not therefore be dead, but alive in the resurrection!

Jesus' resounding triumph over the Sadducees should not be read as dogmatic about marriage, but it was and is definitive about the resurrection. This is because Jesus Himself went on to prove this after His own death. The Sadducees could do no more to bring Jesus down, however, than the Pharisees, the chief priests, the scribes or the Herodians!

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Did Jesus deal with the issues of Levirate marriage adequately from your point of view; what are our opinions about it today?
2. Discuss in your group what the differences are between people and angels, on earth and in heaven.
3. Is the resurrection something you look forward to, or something you are apprehensive about? Why?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*Societies sometimes place expectations upon either men or women concerning the bearing of children. This is what lay behind the Israelite system of levirate marriage, which was really no marriage at all. There are many expectations placed upon people today; having 'perfect' babies, sexual performance before, after or well into marriage; financial agreements and implications of marriage etc. Every Christian couple would do well to learn to stand against such social pressures and seek the Lord for their life together, rather than the world's somewhat unstable examples of how marriage works!*

### Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Look at the subject of Levirate marriage in scripture using a concordance if possible. Scan the internet and see what it means today to different societies. You may learn some interesting things about people.*
- *Pray for those who find it hard to understand the way Christians talk about heaven, and as you do so, ask the Lord to help you speak about heaven and spiritual things in a way which promotes a good understanding of it rather than feeds people's misapprehensions.*