

“God’s Promises: Records and Receipts”
 Pastor Sam Richards
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 Texts: Matt. 22:23-33

One man saved, two drug dealers (at least) repenting, three inmates blessed and one healed and I hardly addressed the message I had prepared on “things eternal.” I hardly got started *when Biblical authority was challenged*. “What about the apocrypha-- all the books ripped out of the Bible? What about them?” “Oh, my,” I replied, ‘who told you that books were cut out, or, as you say, ripped out of the Bible? That is not how the canon was achieved. The books you mention were never in the canon of Scripture so as to be ripped out. *They didn’t attain the standards of authenticity or of antiquity—meaning they were not genuine and not composed early enough in the first century so as to be included.*” The scripture read tonight, from the controversies of Matt.22, namely vv. 23-33, deal with eternal life, resurrection life. My intention is to speak to you about the importance of focusing on “things eternal” (heavenly life) instead of “things temporal,” things of this world. And you suddenly want to digress and to talk about things not even in the Bible. Why?

We tidied things up a bit and I resumed with, “Okay so here we have a controversy about resurrection brought by people who do not even believe in resurrection. Interesting isn’t it. We began this evening with someone questioning Biblical authority who, most likely, doesn’t believe in the authority of Scripture. A high view of Scripture holds it to be the true, inerrant and unimpeachable word of God, divine revelation—that’s the position that I hold—so let’s see if we can move our assessment of Scripture, including Christ’s words higher, **words**, that he declares, **shall never pass away** (Matt. 24:35) and which **teachings** form a **firm foundation upon which to build one’s house/faith/life**. (Matt. 7:24-28) Jesus’ teachings/doctrines are on a par with the Torah, the ten commandments.

Then the man who asked about the Apocrypha piped up again. “Oh, that’s legalism . . . Old Testament stuff, we live under grace.” “True, we do live under grace. But, perhaps, before we nullify all that went before, we should consider the Lord Jesus’ assessment on the law which he and Paul both considered perfect:

14 “You are the light of the world. A city set on a [a]hill cannot be hidden; 15 nor does *anyone* light a lamp and put it under a [b]basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16 Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

17 “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not [c]the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

19 Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches [d]others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever [e]keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

20 “For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses *that* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven¹.

Listen carefully. We, if we are saved, are the **light of the world**—we are believers and to use the task has been given of manifesting the light we have as the redeemed to that **our Father in heaven is glorified**. (v.16) The whole “Sermon on the Mount” is geared to believers—not to the world, not to unbelievers! What Jesus says next affirms his position on **the law**—far from nullifying **the law** Jesus declares **not one jot or one title shall pass from the law until all be fulfilled**. Has it? Has all been fulfilled? The next sentence is particularly troublesome for “nullifiers,” for those who claim we have left **the law** behind. And remember who is speaking! Jesus’ whose words are **eternal**, right? **Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven**. Is there to be a made rush for last place? Okay, now a word for “continuists,” those who **keep and teaches them** (i.e. who teaches **the least** of the commandments!) **shall be called great**. **Grace dictates that those who love the Lord their God with all their soul, heart, mind and might, do fulfill the law, the prophets and all the commandments even as they love their neighbors as themselves**. Would you have the mind of Christ on the Law?

So, back to our passage and the liberal, highly educated Sadducees:

23 On that day some Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) came to Jesus and questioned Him, 24 asking, “Teacher, Moses said, ‘If a man dies having no children, his brother as next of kin shall marry his wife, and raise up children for his brother.’ 25 Now there were seven brothers with us; and the first married and died, and having no children left his wife to his brother; 26 so also the second, and the third, down to the seventh. 27 Last of all, the woman died. 28 In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had *married* her.”

29 But Jesus answered and said to them, “You are mistaken not understanding 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 But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: 32 ‘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.” 33 When the crowds heard *this*, they were astonished at His teaching.

I remind you, these folks were raising a hypothetical *because they denied resurrection* (heaven and hell, and judgment day). And the example is ludicrous because of the contempt they felt toward the whole subject matter, and Jesus along with his disciples. It is so refreshing that Jesus simply tells them they are wrong! And that on two grounds: first

¹ **Footnotes**

- a. Matthew 5:14 Or *mountain*
- b. Matthew 5:15 Or *peck-measure*
- c. Matthew 5:18 Lit *one iota* (Heb yodh) or *one projection of a letter* (serif)
- d. Matthew 5:19 Gr *anthropoi*
- e. Matthew 5:19 Lit *does*

they misunderstand **the Scriptures** and second that they underestimate **the power of God**. They are in err—it's not that they have an erroneous opinion, a different opinion. The proof of the resurrection is not experiential (the raising of Jarius' daughter, or the son of the widow of Nain, or even Lazarus **who had been dead for four days** and was now up and wailing around quite evidently alive!) No. The proof of resurrection lies in the very identity of God, **in his very name: I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. . . I am the God of the living as well as God over the dead!** That's right, The truth of resurrection does not lie in the history, or in our experience of others being raised from the dead, or in its demonstrable facticity. God heals, because he is our self-declared healer. Not only is God the God of the living, but apparently, *Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are living before him and*, as their wives are not mentioned, they live individually, not as married men (monogamously, or polygamously).

Next we come to this: **30 For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.** Our life will be asexual, unlike our temporal existence in this life. Marriage is, I think, primarily, a temporal matter; it is an earthbound covenant instituted by God for the purposes of propagating godly seed and maturation of that seed generally, into spiritual adults who are participants in the kingdom of God on earth. It does not save the soul. (Yes, it is true that marriage is presented as an analogy for Christ's union with His bride, the church, and that marriage is eternal—if not heavenly—in nature.) According to the Bible death ends the marriage covenant. In heaven, we are *perfected*; in a real sense we cease to develop, grow and progress and “make decisions as we must do in the here and now.” If our minds are perfected, they are wise, understanding and comprehending minds that need no growth, development, or progress. Heaven is not merely more of the same! We will not be parenting in heaven, or raising children—all will know God and have no need to instruct each other. We will not be dressing and keeping the garden as we were charged to do in Eden, or Paradise. Paradise restored is new and improved, totally built back better!

Rites, which do not save, simply aren't performed in heaven. Heaven is beyond the scope of rites, and ceremony, and beyond liturgy, for ***we will then be face to face with God***. We shall need *no memorials, sacraments, priests, teachers, pastors or prophets* [all temporal things!], and we have no Mediator except Christ with whom we dwell—both within and without. We are changed **in the twinkling of an eye**. *Changing is what we do now, in the temporal realm*; but that changing changes in the eternal, our afterlife. What Christ has done is done—it needs no repetition, replication.

In heaven the grace of God in mercy and through faith is saving and those sanctified by it, the redeemed, both know so and say so.

Confusion between the eternal and the temporal has led, in the past to other such excesses as *sealing* and such as indulgences—the religious notion that the living could buy off time for the dead, those sentenced to Purgatory. In reality indulgences were a fund-raising program for the Papacy. However, the idea that a place exists where the work of atonement proceeds flies in the face of the biblical truth that Jesus' dying fully paid the penalty of sin once for all. His work on the cross was complete, and completely finished. **Praise God**. And God declares us righteous based on that finished work—not on the *sealing* work of the church. Matthew 19:16 is, I think, misconstrued as *sealing power* for

marriage in heaven—**binding and loosening** should be interpreted as registering and emancipation. **Allow me to illustrate:**

When we forgive one another on earth, that forgiveness is registered in heaven—it is firm and fixed. It is a change of standing—your friend is now your forgiven friend!

Or, when one is declared righteous, just as *declared forgiven* **both are articles of emancipation** (freedom from shame, guilty, remorse and one's sinful past), it is so. The apostles cast out demons, healed diseases and proclaimed liberty, both freely and fully and we should imitate them temporally because in heaven that die has already been cast. Yes, there is an urgent ***now, or never*** side to any gospel presentation! Those who are saved, are saved forever—now on earth, and then in heaven. Any sense of salvation being progressive, or remedial must be tempered with the truth of real, immediate and lasting change. To illustrate: it is *as if our shadow has fallen on someone when we pass by*—it fell on this someone **and not someone else!** In doing so, it happens by divine appointment (not accident, chance or coincidence). ***Something finished has come to pass.***

I have come bringing a word concerning the promises of God; they are certain, true and sure built upon his word.. Here's how we know this is a trustworthy statement.

“Your word, LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens” (Psalm 119:89). “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever” (Isaiah 40:8). “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Matthew 24:35)

“I the Lord do not change” (Malachi 3:6). John Wesley wrote that we should remember, master three principles: 1. That things *eternal* are more considerable (weighty, significant, important and valuable) than things *temporal* (things apt for, or pertaining to this present world order); 2. That things unseen are as real/certain as things seen; and 3. That upon our present choices (as made in this life, in this world) certain eternal consequences follow. Therefore we should choose Christ and aim for heaven so that we might be blessed forever—***if we refuse those choices, we may forever be undone***—rendered redundant, vacuous, spent, meaningless, wasted and irrelevant forever. These principles are ***extracted***, as it were, from the teachings of Jesus (Matt. 22:19-32; 24:35) But as you can testify, ***having heard them read this day***, they have Scriptural warrant in the Psalms, Isaiah and in Malachi. **But my words will never pass away**, Jesus declared. They are among the “things eternal.”

While in the world's thinking, “the only constant thing is change,” it is not to be so among us. Revelation is “a word/words from the mouth of God,” received by his prophets and indelibly recorded in Scripture—they are eternal and must never be altered. As Christ is the chief cornerstone of the living temple known as His church, so the Scripture is the foundation of all saving truth—we have both record and receipt!

Amen