

In the Next Life...

Matt. 22:23-33

So we have turned our attention to the special teachings that Jesus gave during the week of His passion, teaching that has defined Christian thought from then until now. This is the case again in the approach of the Sadducees who did not believe in a resurrection and who sought to demonstrate that by so believing Jesus had become just another speculative teacher who did not know what He was talking about. Instead, Jesus' answer confounded them and still guides all thought about the next life that can be considered Christian.

The subject of the next life is one that has attracted broad and intense debate. People believe all kinds of stuff about the next life and even former lives. They love to share their ideas and they don't like to be told they're wrong. I would put speculations about reincarnation, the next life, UFO's, and life on another planet somewhere in the universe together in that such thinking is very attractive to many but is generally suspended from our Biblical foundations and dwells in the realm of imaginations and speculations that often are driven by human experience and intelligence rather than by divine revelation.

Here is an example of what I mean, I just read a book about George Patton, the great American general of the 2nd World War. Patten was a Presbyterian who believed that he must have been a great general in an earlier life at the time of the Roman Empire. As he led his army across Europe in the 2nd World War, he felt as if he gone that way before and sometimes knew what was around the bend before he got there leading him to believe that he must have been there in this earlier life. Patten's speculative conclusions were based on his experience of what he felt and on his ability to reason and reach conclusions that were informed by his knowledge of history and the actual campaigns fought by the Roman armies across Europe. These factors do not make Patton's conclusions true or accurate. They explain how an intelligent and rational individual can hold onto beliefs that from the perspective of Biblical revelation are actually absurd.

You may not like hearing this but reincarnation is not possible from a Biblical perspective because it ignores the distinction drawn between human and animal life in the Biblical account of creation. Humans were made in the image of God and all animal life was not. God valued human life above that of the animals in that He gave them dominion over the animals so that the animals were all named by Adam. When Adam and Eve sinned, God covered them with the skin of an animal demonstrating the lower regard attached to the animal in comparison to humans. Also, Patton's ideas of having lived before as another human cannot survive the word found in Heb. 9:27, "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment." The idea of life on other planets in the form of human like creatures where we would think of ourselves as just one of many worlds and the compulsion to search space in order to discover these worlds is completely inconsistent with the concept of one God who created this world seeking relationship with the humans He created by giving the rational minds and free will so that they could choose alienation from God which God then purposed to overcome by a redemption carried out by the death of the Son of God and by His resurrection from the dead. Jesus is said by Hebrews to have been offered once to bear the sins of many... UFO's are not evidence of space travel by beings more advanced than ourselves. There are many legitimate explanations and among them would be the spiritual beings the Bible has revealed that share the world we live in. Elisha revealed to his servant the horses and chariots of fire that surrounded him and protected him from the Syrian army. Angels and demons are all around us and we cannot see them but they exist and they have historically appeared at different times and circumstances. UFO's could be a strategy of the devil to distract those so inclined from a Biblically based foundation - this is speculation also so I am not invested in it but it is speculation that has roots in Biblical revelation rather than in just human experience and intelligence. Let me challenge you to submit your mind and all of your thoughts to God and to the truth that He has revealed to us by means of His word.

All of this to emphasize our need to discipline our thoughts and submit them to the revealed word and will of God. If we reject Biblical revelation in favor of human experience and imagination this is an expression of rebellion against God.

If you reject God's revelation in respect to these matters, will you find His revelation in respect to morals and spiritual principles any more convincing?

So let's come back to the question of the next life. The Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection. They had rejected the witness of Scripture which describes the nature of human life with the term forever in passages too frequent to name. One example could suffice, David concludes the 23rd Psalm with the words, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Against this Bible based teaching of life after death the Sadducees had their arguments which were based upon human experience and imagination. The example they cited of the woman with 7 husbands and no children was an absurdity but one that was based on a reality could have been troubling to them. Notice that they would not have been so troubled if their story had been told in the opposite, a man with 7 wives in heaven? No problem! But, for them, the absurdity of a woman with more than one husband in the next life was enough to "prove" that there could be no next life.

Jesus' answer confronted their neglect of the clear teaching of Scripture. They did not deal with the many scriptures which spoke of forever as a trait of human existence. They, instead, lifted their own experience and feelings, their imagination and intelligence above God's revelation. The resurrection was impossible for in such a life some women would have more than one husband. Since this was impossible, the resurrection was also impossible. Next, Jesus revealed something about life after death that no one knew before He said it, "In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels of God in heaven." From this statement we can observe the following:

1) Included in Jesus' concept of marriage was the natural outcome of procreation. Jesus was saying that just as the angels do not have babies now, we will not have babies in the next life either.

2) This thought implies that the purpose of procreation and the resulting family unit is primary to marriage. The Bible includes the purpose of companionship in marriage that is to last 'till death do us part but even this is normally experienced

in the context of the extended family that results from having children who grow up and marry and have children and who continue to live in relationship with the broader family.

3) The perception of man and woman as individuals rather than as couples in the next life suggests the spiritual responsibility of the individual be it male or female, husband or wife in this life.

4) Also implied would be the idea that there would have been no advantage in being either male or female in this life in respect to our standing in the next life. The patriarchal culture that has been very nearly universal in human experience was part of the fall and will not survive into the next life.

5) This word also suggests that in the next life our focus is God centered as we think of the angels rather than scattered in the way that we experience our earthly lives.

Jesus added, "But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead but of the living." This word also has great significance.

1) These saints of old had a present, living consciousness as Jesus spoke and had existed in such a condition since the time of their departure from this life.

2) The nature of their existence allowed them to be presently and actively known by God.

3) Their individual identity was intact. They were recognizable.

4) Existence and life implies their ability to know and be known by one another.

5) Such a state suggests the possibility of some form of embodiment.

Jesus' teaching here is foundational to what Paul would teach about the next life. Paul got his stuff from Jesus. Think deeply. Consider every angle you can come

up with. But, begin your thinking with Jesus' teaching and do not contradict it. Do not elevate your own mind or experience above that which God has graciously revealed. He has made these things known for our benefit, instruction and comfort. Submit your thinking to all that God has revealed in His word.