

Sunday, September 15, 2024 | Holy Week

Week 4 | Luke 20:27-40 | "Is There an Afterlife?"

Last week, we talked about money, politics, and religion. Though we're often told not to bring up such topics, the Lord is perfectly content to address all three, even when they've converged on a single topic: taxes and religion. The religious leaders, thinking they get Jesus in trouble with either the public or the Roman authorities, asked, "Is it lawful to pay tribute to Caesar or not?" Jesus replied, "Render to Caesar the things that our Caesars's and to God the things that are God's." In other words, just as it is right to pay one's taxes because the currency bears the government's iconography, so is it right to give of ourselves to God because we bear God's image. Contrary to what the religious leaders thought, this was not an either/or type of situation but a both/and. The government is owed its coin, AND the Lord is owed his copies.

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**READ:** Luke 20:27-40 (ESV)

<sup>27</sup> There came to him some Sadducees, those who deny that there is a resurrection,<sup>28</sup> and they asked him a question, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, having a wife but no children, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.<sup>29</sup> Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife, and died without children.<sup>30</sup> And the second<sup>31</sup> and the third took her, and likewise all seven left no children and died.<sup>32</sup> Afterward the woman also died.<sup>33</sup> In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife."

<sup>34</sup> And Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage,<sup>35</sup> but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage,<sup>36</sup> for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.<sup>37</sup> But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.<sup>38</sup> Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him."

<sup>39</sup> Then some of the scribes answered, "Teacher, you have spoken well."<sup>40</sup> For they no longer dared to ask him any question.

Today's passage is all about the *afterlife*. Many throughout history have reflected on the brevity of life. For instance, in her memoir on Winston Churchill, V.B. Carter quoted him as saying, "Curse ruthless time! Curse our mortality. How cruelly short is the allotted span for all we must

cram into it!... We are all worms,' he concluded. 'But I do believe that I am a glow-worm.'" In a similar vein, the Psalmist says, "For my days pass away like smoke, and my bones burn like a furnace" (Psa. 102:3). Likewise, Job, at the lowest point in his life, said, "Remember that my life is a breath; my eye will never again see good" (Job 7:7). Even James, the half-brother of Jesus, once asked his readers, "What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes" (Ja. 4:14). Every great man has contemplated life's transience. A healthy awareness of one's own mortality inspires greatness; such an unwavering obsession keeps a person from wasting what little time they've been given.

However, while a wasted life is a pitiful thing, if a life, even a profitable one, is all we have, what do we really have? Paul said, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (1 Cor. 15:19). Should the greatest person live a most productive life only to die and cease to exist, what good was that life? Such a nihilistic view of reality inspires no hope, only despair.

This is why the resurrection is of utmost importance. It is the resurrection that gives life its profound meaning. If there is life after death, then what we do in this life truly matters. Good deeds will be rewarded, and evil deeds will face justice in eternity. The resurrection is the source of hope that makes life meaningful; it assures us that our actions have eternal significance.

This passage is divided into **two** portions:

- i. Vs. 27-33—The Sadducees propose an **apparent contradiction**, attempting to show that the resurrection is a **fantasy**.

The Sadducees were a religious sect within Judaism. They were distinct in **three ways**:

- First, while they were the minority in the population **when it came to power, the Sadducees held the majority**. This is because, unlike the Pharisees, who were mostly made up of laymen—i.e., commoners, the Sadducees were mostly (but not all) made up of members from the Levitical priesthood—i.e., aristocrats. They held the most seats in the Sanhedrin and, as such, ruled the Temple and set the political agenda for the nation. Though a relatively small group, they held unilateral control over the state of Israel.
- Second, the Sadducees **prioritized the first five books of the O.T.**—i.e., Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—over the prophets and the poetic literature.

- Third, because of their emphasis on the Pentateuch, **the Sadducees denied the existence of angels and demons and rejected the doctrine of the resurrection**, which comes up again in Acts. 4:1-2. This is because such a principle, while present in the Books of Moses, as Jesus' himself pointed out by quoting Ex. 3:6 (cf. Ex. 6:4; 15:1; Num 15:31; 18:28; Deut. 31:16), is more fully developed in the other O.T. books (cf. Psalm 16:9-11; Job 19:26-27; Isa. 26:19; esp. Dan. 12:2). This denial of the resurrection put them at odds with the Pharisees who staunchly believed there was, indeed, an afterlife. Once, Paul used this very controversy to pit the two Jewish sects against one another to avoid being beaten (cf. Ac. 23:6-9).

The Sadducees propose a **ridiculous hypothetical** where a woman is married once and then remarried another six times through the levirate system (cf. Deut. 25:5-10; i.e., Book of Ruth). But each marriage ends with the death of the husband, without the woman ever giving birth. Eventually, the woman herself dies. The Sadducees then ask, "Of the seven brothers, who will be her husband in the resurrection?"

The Sadducees erroneously believed that this imagined scenario undermined the concept of a resurrection. Their point was that because the woman was married seven times, **all seven brothers had equal claim to her**. But such an irreconcilable contradiction cannot possibly exist in the perfected state of eternity, right? **That would be illogical**. God is not a God of confusion; there are no discrepancies in his character. Therefore, the resurrection must be untenable.

**This is an argumentative technique called "reduction to the absurd," or, as it's known in philosophical circles, *reductio ad absurdum*.** This logical fallacy takes a claim to an **absurd** proportion to criticize the result, thereby demonstrating that the initial claim is false (i.e., If the earth were flat, people would've fallen off the edge by now; ergo, the world must be round). To be clear, this technique is powerfully persuasive and not, in and of itself, an underhanded tactic. It can be used for great good, as Galileo famously used *reductio ad absurdum* to show that heavier things **do not** fall faster than lighter things. If they did, you'd be able to tie a lighter rock to a heavier rock, and because of drag, both rocks tied together would fall slower than if the heavier rock was falling by itself.

**Don't miss this:** the religious leaders are using **every tactic** in their arsenal to try and silence Jesus.<sup>1</sup> In 20:1-8, they belittled Jesus by questioning his authority **but failed**. In 20:19-26, they tried sabotaging him in the eyes of the public and/or the government by asking him about taxes, **and, once again, they failed**. And now, in 20:27-32, they've attempted to discredit him

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<sup>1</sup> Bock, Darrell L., *Luke 9:51-24:53*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), p. 1626.

by demonstrating his flawed logic. **If, as they propose, Jesus is wrong about the resurrection, what else is he wrong about?** But as we'll see, just as before, ***they will fail in this attempt, too.*** It was not the Lord who needed a lesson in philosophy but the religious leaders. In fact, they will fail so spectacularly *for the third time in a row* that they will no longer question him in public (vs. 40).

ii. Vs. 34-40 – The Lord counters with ***divine revelation***, showing that the resurrection is a ***certainty***.

Given Jesus' response, the Sadducees make ***two*** mistaken assumptions:

First, the Sadducees assumed that the afterlife was similar to this life; it's ***not***. They thought that if death was the only thing that could dissolve a marriage, then in a state of eternal existence, married couples would be married for all eternity. Which, if true, creates significant contradictions for people who've been married multiple times.

But, as Jesus points out, ***those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.*** Unlike how people get married in this life, ***there will be no marriage in the afterlife.*** Do not make the same mistake that the Sadducees made. This life has far more in common with the afterlife than the afterlife has with this life. While there are similarities, eternity will be ***fundamentally different*** in almost every conceivable way.

In fact, the comparison Jesus gives is that we'll be ***equal to angels.*** This means we'll more closely resemble ***angelic beings*** in eternity than ***human beings***. This is ***not*** to say we'll have wings, ***nor*** that we'll be sexless. Scripturally speaking, angels do not have wings; cherubim and seraphim have wings, and they're more animal-like than humanoid (cf. Isa. 6; Ezek. 1). And angels also appear to have gender (cf. masculine pronouns of Dan. 8:15-17 and Lu. 1:26-38). The similarity between our resurrected and angelic states is that, like angels, we ***cannot die anymore***—i.e., ***we'll be immortal.***

Okay, but why does becoming an immortal being call for the termination of marriage? One of the key reasons to get married, ***especially in a Jewish context***, was to carry on the family name. Given that all people die, it was necessary to produce heirs so that the promises of God, which were land and family-specific, would not go unfulfilled. A family line dying off was unthinkable and could even be destabilizing to the nation of Israel. This is why something like levirate marriage (a practice that is utterly foreign and likely bizarre to Western sensibilities) was even

necessary. God went to great lengths, providing contingencies so that no Jew would be without an heir.

However, while an heirless family was a real possibility in this life, such concerns are inconsequential when discussing the eternal state where death is no longer present. At that point, alternative solutions, such as levirate marriage, become irrelevant along with marriage itself. If there is no more need to carry on the family name via marital relationships because everyone will live forever, then there is no need for marriages altogether. **In the resurrection, marriage, as an institution, will have fulfilled its purpose and will be discontinued.**

**QUICK ASIDE:** Should it disturb you that there will be no marriage in eternity, let me give you ***two things*** to consider:

- 1.) **In the resurrection, *all of reality* will be perfected.** The ***“worst”*** day in heaven is ***better*** than the ***best*** day on earth. This means that even if there is a supposed “loss,” such as with the marriage bond, we can rest assured that the ***gain*** of eternal life will be far better than any “deficit” we may experience. Paul said that ***“no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”*** (1 Cor. 2:9). Whatever eternity is going to be like, one thing is certain, it will be ***better*** than anything we can imagine.
- 2.) **In the resurrection, *every relationship* will be perfected.** The affection, closeness, and familiarity that two married couples experience in this life will not be diminished in any way but ***heightened***. Even as good as a marriage can get in this life, it is but a reflection of Christ’s love for the Church (cf. Eph. 5:32). So, when Christ returns for his bride—i.e., the Church—we’ll experience a love, joy, and satisfaction with the Lord the likes of which ***even the best*** marriages will pale in comparison. Not even death will have sway over such relationships. So long as both husband and wife have a profession of faith, ***their bond with each other may change*** in eternity, but it will ***not end***. In fact, spouses who’ve been separated by death will be reunited again, and, together, they will be with the Lord forever, never to be separated again (cf. 1 Thess. 4:17). **This is part of the reason why it is so important *not* to be “unequally yoked together with unbelievers”** (cf. 2 Cor. 6:14). Christians ought to marry within the household of faith. By doing so, both husband and wife forge a unique relationship that’ll last for an eternity. Yes, Christian marriages may dissolve at death, but that is the end of the beginning. In eternity, that kinship will metamorphize into something more substantial and beautiful.

Second, Sadducees assumed they were reading the Scriptures correctly; they were not. As mentioned, the Sadducees claimed to prioritize the first five books of the O.T. They did not have a high view of God's word but a low one. They thought everything in the Pentateuch was non-negotiable, and everything after was up for debate. This is, of course, wrong. All of God's word is equally valid. A high view of the Bible is crucial in understanding truth as revealed through the Bible.

But rather than correct their flawed views regarding Scriptural preservation, Jesus shows that the doctrine of the resurrection is as much a part of the beginning bits of the O.T. (cf. Ex. 6:4; 15:1; Num. 15:31; 18:28; Deut. 31:16), as it is in the rest of it (cf. Psa. 16:9-11; Job 19:26-27; Isa. 26:19; esp. Dan. 12:2). In his response to the Sadducees, the Lord points to Exodus 3:6, "But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him." Ex. 3:6 was a passage in a book that the Sadducees regarded as authoritative. And here, Jesus shows that the promise of eternal life came before Moses; it has been an undeniable fact since the Abrahamic covenant! God could not be Abraham's, Isaac's, or Jacob's God if there was no resurrection since they never experienced the promises made to them by God. They died before seeing the great nation of Israel come into being. So, unless there is life after death, God is God of no one. But God spoke of being Abraham's, Isaac's, and Jacob's God in the present tense; ergo, either the patriarchs are still alive, or there must be a resurrection.

So, essentially, Jesus said, "Dear Sadducees, any aversion you might have to the resurrection due to the supposed contradiction brought about by levirate marriage is unfounded. Marriage is a critical part of "this age" but not of "that age"—i.e., the eternal state. And, just so we're clear, the resurrection is an undeniable fact; it's real. The patriarchs knew this, Moses knew this, and you, oh religious leaders, ought to know this too."

### **So, what's the takeaway?**

God will resurrect all those who make Him their God. Is the LORD the God of INSERT YOUR NAME HERE?

Does God hold the same place in your life that he had in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? The Lord claimed them as his own. He was the "God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." What about you?

**READ:** John 6:39-40 (ESV)

“And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

In John 14:6, Jesus says, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” To come to the “God...of the living,” you must come through the Son of God. You cannot come to God and obtain eternal life any other way. The only way to life is through Christ.

If you were to die today, where would you spend eternity?

## **Video Description:**

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SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

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**Pastor's manuscript can be found here:**

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Season 39 | 4