

Luke 20:27-38

²⁷Some of the Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) came to him. ²⁸They asked him a question, “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies leaving a wife but no children, his brother should take the wife and raise up children for his brother. ²⁹So there were seven brothers. The first took a wife and died childless. ³⁰The second took her as a wife, ³¹and so did the third, and in the same way the seven died and left no children. ³²Finally the woman died too. ³³So in the resurrection, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as a wife.”

³⁴Jesus said to them, “The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. ³⁵But those who are considered worthy to experience that age and the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. ³⁶In fact, they cannot die any more, for they are like the angels. They are sons of God, because they are sons of the resurrection.

³⁷“Even Moses showed in the account about the burning bush that the dead are raised, when he called the Lord: ‘The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ ³⁸He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all are alive to him.”

Children of the Resurrection

I.

For people of the 21st Century it’s difficult to imagine, but people didn’t always marry for love. For the second time in 2019 I’m going to mention Fiddler on the Roof. I’m sorry about that, but it fits. A whole new concept was developing in Tevye’s home—love. No longer were his daughters willing to consider arranged marriages—they wanted to marry for love. “Do you love me?” Tevye asked his wife of many years. She really had to think about it, since their marriage was arranged.

“Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies leaving a wife but no children, his brother should take the wife and raise up children for his brother” (Luke 20:28, EHV). Indeed there *was* such a law. It was called the levirate law. One of the reasons marriages were so often arranged was that property was passed down through the family line. Property in Israel was to continue to belong to the family to whom it had been given when the people entered the promised land. If there was no clear heir, the family property would have to be passed on to someone else. Preserving the family name and ties was of utmost importance to the people.

The levirate law indicated that if a husband died, the responsibility for maintaining his widow and any children was to fall on the man’s closest male relative. If she had no children at the time of her husband’s death, the brother was expected to marry the widow. The firstborn from the new marriage was to be regarded as the child of the deceased.

From the Sadducees perspective there were several reasons for trotting out this old ordinance from Moses. First of all, the original intent of the law didn’t have that much influence at the time of Jesus. Secondly, since the law came from Moses, Jesus would *have* to take their question seriously. Third, they could twist the law to the extreme to make Jesus have to bend like a pretzel to try to answer their question. Finally, they didn’t believe in a physical resurrection from the dead, anyway; they were certain that this life is all there is. Jesus would squirm trying to answer a question they believed was irrelevant.

II.

The Sadducees ceased to exist as a group or movement not long after Jesus' resurrection from the dead. But the idea they held so firmly—this life is all there is—still continues. Those who deny Jesus want to take away Jesus' resurrection, and with it, *our* resurrection from the dead. It seems as though every year at Easter time there is a new story from some so-called "expert" or group of "experts" who claim to have found new evidence to suggest that the disciples made everything up. The Bible's eye-witness accounts are just a collection of stories. Go on living your life as you please. Since there is no God, there is no one to answer to after you die.

In fact, a few decades ago many celebrities stated their reason for choosing cremation after they died. They didn't believe there was a God, or that there would one day be a resurrection from the dead, but they would have their bodies cremated and the ashes scattered, just in case. If it turned out that God is real, they thought they would be able to make certain he wouldn't be able to put them back together again.

Today, perhaps, materialism has taken over the positions once occupied by atheists. Many don't really give much thought to spiritual matters at all. There is no time for spirituality. No time to have a dogmatic approach to atheism. No time to believe much of anything.

Perhaps that's the case in your own life. Day to day living is more important than any serious discussion of death or the resurrection or of sin. You are too connected to TV or some kind of streaming service, to your phone, and to all the information out there you are able to access at a moment's notice. You are too worried about your coming retirement, or the monthly bills, or a family member. You can't get worried about what will happen after death. You can't be bothered with thoughts of the resurrection.

That's the Sadducee attitude.

III.

"Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies leaving a wife but no children, his brother should take the wife and raise up children for his brother" (Luke 20:28, EHV). The Sadducees picked the levirate law to ask Jesus about. They carefully conceived their question to try to back him into a corner. If he didn't deny the resurrection after their hypothetical question about 7 men marrying the same woman, he would be forced to explain the relationship of 8 people after the resurrection. Their whole purpose was to show just how ludicrous the resurrection was.

Jesus wasn't fooled by the Sadducees question. This question was asked of Jesus during Holy Week. He *knew* that the Sadducees would be part of the crowd chanting for his death. He knew that he was soon to be put into a tomb. He knew that a mere three days later, he would come out of the tomb with no assistance from anyone.

The whole premise of their question was wrong. "The people of this age marry and are given in marriage" (Luke 20:34, EHV). Marriage is a fine institution. God made it, so it *must* be. But marriage was designed by God for *this* life.

"But those who are considered worthy to experience that age and the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. ³⁶In fact, they cannot die any more, for they are like the angels. They are sons of God, because they are sons of the resurrection" (Luke 20:35-36, EHV). Jesus latched on to the angels to talk about what the resurrection would be like, perhaps in part because the Sadducees didn't believe in angels, either.

Notice that Jesus didn't say believers *become* angels, but that in the resurrection

believers will be *like* the angels in a couple of ways. Angels don't have bodies, and the Bible tells us that in the resurrection we will have glorified bodies like Jesus' own resurrected and glorified body. But we *will* be like the angels in the fact that we will no longer be subject to death. We will also be like the angels in the area of our personal relationships. There will no longer be the same kind of relationships we have on this earth. In the resurrection, we will neither marry nor be given in marriage.

Jesus calls us children of the resurrection. As is the case in so many other Bible passages, Jesus chooses the word "sons" rather than "children." Only sons could inherit in those days. Jesus makes it clear that in the resurrection *every* believer is the kind of child that inherits all that he has to give us in eternity—life with him in all the glories of heaven. Through faith we are already children of God, but after the resurrection we will have received the full inheritance that is already ours by faith.

IV.

"Even Moses showed in the account about the burning bush that the dead are raised, when he called the Lord: 'The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.'³⁸ He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for all are alive to him" (Luke 20:37-38, EHV).

The Sadducees had used the levirate law handed down by Moses to come up with a ridiculous hypothetical situation to trap Jesus. Think about the poor woman in their hypothetical. How miserable she would have been if *this* life is all there is!

They had used the law of Moses to make their appeal. But had they ever noticed the way Moses, himself, talked about God? Moses referred to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Though they had long since died, Moses spoke of them as Patriarchs of the faith who live on. One day their souls will be reunited with their bodies, just as ours will. God is the God of the living.

Live as that kind of child of the resurrection. Live as one who knows without question that Jesus will be returning for *you* one day, too. This life is *not* all there is.

Sometimes in *this* life things are *not* all rainbows and unicorns. Sometimes things are tough—very tough. But the promise of the resurrection lives on—the promise of a time when there will be no more—no more pain, no more sorrow, no more tears.

Instead there will be Jesus—and all the believers you have known on earth, though your relationship with them will change. All of us will be children of the resurrection, reunited with our Lord and Savior forevermore. Amen.