

Luke 20:27-40 Children of the Resurrection

You would think that all the Jews of Jesus' time would have believed in the resurrection, but there was a certain group of Jews, called the Sadducees, who did not. They thought it was a ridiculous idea, and they presented Jesus with a question that was designed to show how absurd the idea of the resurrection was.

The answer that Jesus gave to this question gives us some insights into what life in heaven will be like. He tells us some things here that we perhaps would not otherwise know about the afterlife for believers.

Before we look at the text, we should explain who the Sadducees were. It says here that they "deny that there is any resurrection." That's why they were *sad, you see*.

The Sadducees believed only the Pentateuch, the first 5 books of the Bible, and those books don't say much about resurrection. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection because they believed in the other books of the Hebrew Bible.

The Sadducees also denied the immortality of the soul; they believed that the person died completely when his body died. Because they did not believe in eternal life, they emphasized enjoying life here and now. The Sadducees teamed up with the Pharisees in their mutual opposition of Jesus. Jesus warned his followers to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees" (Mt 16:6). It seems as if the Sadducees as a group died out after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

Let's take a look at this question and answer and see what it tells us about the resurrection and the eternal state. Remember that this occurred on Tuesday of the Passion Week. Jesus is still in the temple, surrounded by people, including many of the Jewish leaders. The Pharisees had already tried to discredit him publicly, and now the Sadducees give it a try.

I. .28-33 The Sadducees' question

- A. It's another attempt to entrap Jesus and discredit him publicly. Several members of the Sanhedrin had just tried that in the previous passage (cf. vs. 26a), and now some of the Sadducees try it again.

1. .28 Note that the Sadducees refer to Jesus as “Master,” that is, teacher. They are probing him regarding his teaching. Is he following the Scriptures in his teaching or not?
 2. Since the Sadducees recognized only the teachings of Moses, their concern was whether Jesus believed what Moses taught.
- B. .28 It’s based on the OT practice of Levirate marriage.
1. The passage the Sadducees are referring to here is Deut 25:5-6, and that text refers to a practice that came to be called Levirate marriage.
 2. At that time, under the OT law, a man could have more than one wife. We see many examples of that throughout the OT.
 3. If a married man died without leaving children, the dead man’s brother or close relative could take the widow as his wife. The first-born son of that union would be considered to be the replacement of the dead man, and then he would carry on the family name.
 4. In Latin, the word “brother-in-law” is Levir. When a man married his brother’s childless widow, that was called Levirate marriage.
 5. Is there a biblical example of this? Yes, the whole book of Ruth is based on the practice of Levirate marriage. Boaz married Ruth, who was the childless widow of Boaz’s near relative.
 6. Failure to care for a widow in this way was considered to be a great sin (Deut 25:7-10). God expected his people to provide for childless widows in this way.
 7. So the Sadducees use Levirate marriage as the basis for their fictional story.
- C. .29 It’s based on a far-fetched, hypothetical situation in which multiple brothers married the same woman, and then died without producing children.

1. You kind of wonder what it was about this woman that caused all seven of these men to die after marrying her. After the first few brothers died, you'd think that the others would be rather reluctant to marry this woman. But, of course, this is just a hypothetical story.
2. .33 "Whose wife will she be in the resurrection, because all had her as wife." Their assumptions seems to be that this is a huge problem for the whole concept of resurrection. If seven men being married to the same woman is ridiculous, then the whole concept of resurrection was illogical and absurd. To them, it disproved the possibility of resurrection.
3. .33 "the resurrection" that they are referring to here is the event in the last times when the souls of the dead are reunited with their bodies. The Sadducees focused on the here-and-now and did not believe in the resurrection.

II. Jesus' answer

A. The rebuke (not included in Luke)

1. The parallel passages in Matt and Mark both tell us that Jesus said, "You are mistaken/deceived (*πλανάω*), not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God."
2. He accuses the Sadducees of not knowing the Bible. Note that the authority that he appeals to is the Scriptures. Spiritual error often comes from a failure to know the scriptures.

App: That is still true today. All spiritual error boils down to a failure to understand and apply the Bible. If we don't know the Scripture, we're likely to get into error. If we want to avoid error, we must know the Bible.

Hos 4:6 *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. ...*

3. Jesus is here claiming to be an authoritative teacher of the Hebrew Scriptures. He's asserting that he understands what the Scriptures teach on this matter, and he appeals to a passage that the Sadducees would agree is inspired. He is right, and they are wrong in their understanding.
4. The Sadducees also failed to account for the power of God, which is able to reunite the soul and the body in the resurrection.

App: Ultimately, all religious arguments come down to our source of authority and whether we are understanding that authority properly. The highest authority is the Bible, and we must be very careful to interpret it correctly. We should be able to substantiate our beliefs by appealing to the Bible. If we don't have chapter and verse to support our views, then we are wrong, like the Sadducees were here.

It's highly unfortunate that many professing Christians today do not know the Bible well enough to tell truth from error. Biblical illiteracy is rampant today; people simply don't know what the Bible teaches.

Illus.: According to a recent poll, 30% of evangelicals apparently reject the deity of Christ, the 46% believe that people are good by nature, or the 22% think that gender identity is a matter of personal choice.¹

It's obvious that many professing Christians today simply do not know the Bible and do not hold a biblical worldview. Those are the people who are susceptible to error, just like the Sadducees.

If we want to avoid spiritual error, we must know the Bible.

B. .34 A fact pertaining to "this world/age"

1. He's not referring to "this world" in a negative sense, but only in the sense of this era/age. We are not yet living in the time of the resurrection. We are living in this age, not the age to come.
2. Humans in their present earthly life commonly get married. Marriage is common here and now, in this age.

¹ 2020 State of Theology poll, Ligonier Ministries.

App: I highly recommend it; marriage makes “this world” much more enjoyable and tolerable.

C. .35-36 The facts of the eternal state

The Bible clearly teaches that there is an eternal state. We continue in conscious life after death. As soon as Christians are “absent from the body,” they are “present with the Lord.” The unsaved enter conscious torment upon their deaths. So there is a world to come.

.35 Jesus describes those in the eternal state as “worthy to obtain that world.” He does not mean that anyone earns/merits eternal life. We have eternal life only by virtue of God’s grace, not because of our works (Eph 2:8-9). Eternal life is for those whom God considers worthy, and that worthiness comes through the righteousness of Christ being credited to the believer by means of repentance and faith. Only the saved will “obtain that world.”

1. .35end There is no marriage in the eternal state.

- a) The Sadducees assumed that marriage would extend after death, but Jesus exposes that as an error.
- b) Marriage is for life on earth; it’s not an eternal condition.

App: I suppose some of us may be rather disappointed that our marriages will end when physical life ends. Remember that our marriage bonds remain “’til death us do part.” Death dissolves the marriage bond.

The Bible does not clearly reveal what the nature of our relationships will be on the other side of death, but we won’t be married. We will no doubt enjoy relationships with other believers. We will be surrounded with love, affection, and joy. We will lack nothing in heaven. Our enjoyment of all things God provides will be intense. Our need for companionship will be met by God himself and by all the saints in heaven.

We can be assured that whatever we have in heaven will be much better than what we had on earth, so we should not worry about the fact that we will no longer be married.

2. .36 There is no death in the eternal state.

a) Saints will *not* be producing children.

(1) Of course, one of the reasons for marriage is that marriage normally produces children. Because people die, we need children to be born to replace us. If that didn't happen, humanity would eventually die out.

The Sadducees believed that they extended their lives through their children. That was their sense of eternal life—passing life along through your descendants.

But eternal life is not merely having many descendants. The age to come will have a different kind of life.

(2) In eternity, no one will die. There will be no need to produce children to replace those who die, so there will be no need for marriage. There is no need to “be fruitful and multiply” in heaven.

b) .36b Saints are equal with the angels. That is, equal in the sense of having eternal life and having glorified bodies. Angels are eternal, and believers will have that same eternal nature.

Also interesting is the fact that the Sadducees did not believe in angels. Jesus here affirms the existence of angels and tells us that we will be like them in the eternal state.

c) Being equal with the angels doesn't mean that we *become* angels.

We should not get our understanding of angels from the Christmas movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*. We don't get our wings every time a bell rings.

D. .37 The Scriptural basis of the resurrection

After dismissing this far-fetched, fictional story about the seven brothers married to the same woman, Jesus goes on to teach that Moses himself believed in the resurrection.

1. The OT has many references to the resurrection of the body -- Ps. 16:9–11, Dan. 12:2; cf. also Job 14:14; 19:25–27; Ps. 17:15; 73:24–26; Isa. 26:19; Ezek. 37:1–14; Hos. 6:2; 13:14 (cf. 1 Cor. 15:55)² The concept is taught or implied quite strongly.
2. Jesus picks out one particular passage that assumes the resurrection. And that passage is in the book of Exodus, one of the books that the Sadducees held as authoritative.
3. In the passage about Moses and the burning bush (Ex 3:6), God is referred to as the “God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” These patriarchs of the Jewish faith had died long before the time of Moses. The fact that they are living implies that the resurrection will happen.
4. From the Jewish point of view, eternal life must by necessity be life in a body. They didn’t envision disembodied spirits floating around for all eternity. Man is a union of body and soul, and salvation is a complete restoration of body and soul. Existence without a body would be incomplete. Thus, a resurrection of the body is required.
5. 1 Cor 15 is the resurrection chapter of the NT, and that passage tells us that the body that went into the ground is like a seed. The body that comes out of the ground at the resurrection will be *like* the original body, but it will be glorified and perfected. In the eternal state, believers will enjoy a perfect body unified with a perfect soul.

² William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, vol. 11, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 906–907.

6. The idea that the soul can exist without the body is not a Jewish or Christian idea. The ancient Greeks held that the body is merely the prison house of the soul and that the soul alone could go on existing eternally without a body. But that's not a biblical idea. The Bible assures us that God will resurrect the body and reunite it with the soul. And our glorified bodies will exist throughout all eternity.

A couple of details from the text to point out:

.37 The word "calleth" is in the present tense, implying that Moses' words in the Scripture continue to speak. The words of Scripture stand written and continue to be authoritative for us today. As the AH tells us, "He being dead yet speaks."

App: Jesus had great confidence in the Bible, and we should share that same confidence. God still speaks to us from the Scripture. It's not just a record of dead history. Moses and the prophets still speak to us today. It's our responsibility to listen and learn.

.38 Likewise, "he is not a God of the dead..." Not "he *was* the God..." but "he *is* the God." This is another present tense verb, implying that God still is the God of Abe, Isaac, and Jacob. Just as God still lives, so the patriarchs still live.

- E. Another rebuke (not included in Luke)

The parallel passage in Mark tacks on the words "You are therefore greatly mistaken/deceived." The Sadducees were in grave error in their disbelief of the resurrection, and Jesus boldly accuses them of failing to understand the Bible.

App: BTW, pointing out theological error is appropriate at times. If a person is mistaken in their understanding of Scripture, don't feel bad about pointing it out and correcting it. Jesus did it, the apostles did it, and Christians have been doing it for many centuries.

But before pointing out someone else's error, make sure you know the truth and can prove it from the Bible.

III. .39-40 The responses

A. .39 Some of the scribes admitted that Jesus had answered well.

1. Perhaps these were the Pharisees among the group. They also believed in the resurrection, so on this point, they agreed with Jesus, and they complemented him on his answer to the Sadducees.
2. That doesn't mean that these people became disciples of Jesus, but they simply agree with Jesus on this topic. They still didn't accept him as the Messiah, but they agreed with him about the resurrection.

B. .40 They stopped asking him questions. They finally figured out that further attempts to trap Jesus in his words would be useless.

When Jesus answered their questions, the Sadducees and Pharisees were the ones discredited, not Jesus. Jesus was so brilliant and profound in his answers that the people were even more impressed by him. That's exactly what the leaders of the Jews did not want, so they just quit asking questions for a while.

C. The crowds were astonished. (not in Luke)

1. The parallel passage in Matt (22:33) says, "when the multitudes heard this, they were astonished (ἐκπλήσσω) at His teaching."
2. So once again, an effort to discredit Jesus publicly had just the opposite effect.

The primary thing we see in this text is the wisdom of Jesus. Even the most cunning and sly of the Jewish leaders could not trick him. His teaching was so profound that even his enemies had to admit that he answered questions well. As a true master of the Scriptures, he silenced his opponents once again.

Of course, this whole text revolves around the certainty of the future resurrection. According to the authority of both the Hebrew Scriptures and of Jesus, the resurrection is a fact. Some people will be resurrected to eternal life, while others will be resurrected to eternal destruction. Only those whom God determines to be worthy will enter that coming world. And it's only through repentance and faith that God makes us worthy of that great privilege. We can't earn a resurrection to eternal life; all we can do is accept the gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus.

Hopefully, our marriages here on earth are very good. But eternity will be much better. We won't be married, but we'll even closer and more meaningful relationships with God and with others. What God has prepared for us in heaven is much better than anything we can imagine. All the saints of all the ages are right now in heaven with God; he is the God of the living, not the dead.

I hope that you are astonished at the profound teaching of Jesus. I hope that you believe in him, not only as a great teacher, but as your Lord and Savior. Rom 10:9

I hope that you are not greatly mistaken in what you believe about Jesus and the resurrection, as the Sadducees were. Great theological error can cost you your eternal soul. Make sure that you "shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection of the dead." Recognize that Jesus is the master teacher of the Scriptures, and trust in him to grant you eternal life.