

## SERMON FOR SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2025

### Luke 20:27-38

In today's Gospel lesson the Sadducees asked Jesus a very silly question about the resurrection. Obviously, they weren't seriously looking for an answer. They were trying to trap Jesus into saying something that would get him in trouble.

But many people were then and are now very serious as they struggle with the question the Sadducees raised with Jesus. "After this, what's next?" Is this life, this world, all there is? What, if anything, happens after we die? And what does the answer to that question mean for us while we live?

One of the encouraging trends in our postmodern world is the new openness to faith and belief. Folks who operated from a modern rationalistic, scientific worldview who often rejected faith claims as being intellectually indefensible are now coming to the realization that such claims are not as indefensible as they had imagined. However much times may change and developments may warrant new openness to faith, there will always be those who rigidly cling to their preconceived notions of the way things ought to be. The Sadducees were such people.

In the Gospels, the Sadducees frequently did whatever they could to make Jesus' life miserable. Many have often erroneously believed that the Sadducees were the liberals of their day because they denied a belief in the resurrection. In fact, they were the extreme conservatives of their day. Their rejection of belief in the resurrection was based on a strict interpretation of the Torah, in which resurrection is not mentioned. So, when the Sadducees ask Jesus about the resurrection, they are not really interested in knowing about the resurrection or considering what Jesus has to say on the matter. Instead, they pose a riddle that is on the level of "Can God make a stone so big he cannot lift it?"

They refer to the custom of levirate marriage and concoct a scenario that could conceivably happen but would be highly unlikely. Suppose a man with six brothers gets married and then dies. The wife marries the brother who then dies. This cycle repeats itself until the wife has been married to all seven brothers. In Mark's account, Jesus tells the Sadducees that their whole premise is wrong because they do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God.

Luke's account shows Jesus using an interesting explanation to answer the Sadducees' question. Jesus tells them that the purpose of marriage in this life, which is fleeting and temporal, is to propagate the race, as well as to provide companionship. In the age to come, which is eternal, there is no longer any need to propagate the race. Therefore, the question of marriage becomes moot in eternity.

What is interesting is the interpretation Jesus gives to the story of Moses at the burning bush. Jesus uses the Scripture that the Sadducees will accept as authoritative and "puts a spin" on it that they hadn't considered previously. Moses demonstrated the reality of resurrection.

It was Moses who addressed God as the “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” Of what value would it be to address God as the God of a bunch of dead people. God is not the God of the dead but of the living. Jesus gave such a compelling answer that he earned his critics’ grudging respect.

“Well said, teacher,” they replied. And from that time on, although they were plotting his death, they didn’t dare try to test him anymore.

The Sadducees show us the danger of becoming so locked into a particular way of thinking and viewing reality that we are no longer open to anything new. Certainly, the truth of the Scripture does not change. But changing times open new ways of viewing that reality. The rigidity of the Sadducees caused them not only to miss out on the joy of knowing Jesus as the Christ but also brought on them the condemnation of crucifying the Lord of Glory.

In all of the changing views of reality we face, let us also be encouraged by the truth that there will be a “great, gettin’ up mornin’” when we are raised to spend eternity with the One who never changes.

Though the Sadducees had asked a silly question Jesus knew there was a serious reason for it. While the Sadducees themselves didn’t care about the afterlife, Jesus knew many who were listening to him did. Jesus’ answer had to do with the eternality of God in the face of our, all too often, short and painful lives.

Rather than directly confront the Sadducees with their silliness, Jesus went deeper to explore the nature of life in the eternal Kingdom of God, and the importance of living by the values and promise of that Kingdom now.

The first thing Jesus does is gently make it clear that “this age,” our life now, is connected to, but different from, “that age,” what comes next. What the Bible calls “the Resurrection” is not simply life as we know it now going on forever and ever, amen. Life now is life dealing daily with the looming threat and reality of disease and decay—what Martin Luther called “Sin, Death, and the Devil.” In this world, there is no avoiding those things, they surround us, and if we are not careful, they control us.

We try not to sin, but we do. We try not to get sick and die, but we do. And it is in our efforts to avoid sickness and death that we too often sin, and make “deals with the devil,” betraying our eternal values for time-limited survival and success. But Jesus tells us life as resurrection people is not like that. We do not have to fear decline and death. We do not have to make deals with the devil to survive. Why? Because whether in this age or the next, God is with us. As we hear at the end of our lesson, “Now he is God, not of the dead, but of the living.”

Here’s the tricky part: what difference does the promise of the Resurrection make in how we live our lives now? How does the eternality of God not only comfort us concerning the death of our loved ones, but also give meaning to our lives as we live, day-by-day, in this age while anticipating the age to come?

It does two things.

- First and most obviously, is that it removes from us the fear of death as a motivator of our actions. When self-preservation, or the preservation of our family, or the preservation of our “life-style,” is removed—we are free to pursue, in the words of Philippians (4:8) “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable. . .” without concern for what such a stand in life might cost us.
- Secondly, it helps us remove the artificial barriers we have built up between “us” the good, and “them” the bad, in this world. Eventually, we realize that we are all misfits on a journey of self-discovery that leads us through death into the true life.

And so, we walk together through this age as a family of faith, of people who fit together partly because we don’t fully fit anywhere else.

Knowing ourselves to be truly citizens of God’s kingdom, we live by kingdom rules now—rules like “love your enemy,” and “turn the other cheek,” and “do unto others,” and “the one who saves his life will lose it, but the one who loses life for my sake will gain it.”

Rules which seem silly and make no sense in a world ruled by death and the search for survival—but which make serious and perfect sense in a world centered on hope and faith in the never-ending love of God.