

In the Resurrection . . . (Part 1)

Introduction

The Text

²⁷ There came to him some Sadducees, those who deny that there is a resurrection, ²⁸ 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. ²⁹ Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife, and died without children. ³⁰ And the second ³¹ and the third took her, and likewise all seven left no children and died. ³² Afterward the woman also died. ³³ In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife.”

³⁴ And Jesus said to them, “The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, ³⁵ 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, ³⁶ for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. ³⁷ 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. ³⁸ Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him.” ³⁹ Then some of the scribes answered, “Teacher, you have spoken well.” ⁴⁰ For they no longer dared to ask him any question. (Luke 20:27–40)

Beautiful and Broken

A. Megan was kind enough this past week to give me a day away. She could see I needed it, just time to be alone with the Lord, and refresh a bit, so she encouraged me to go. And it was an amazing time for me.

1. Whenever I can, I like doing this circuit, as I think I’ve even told you, where I drive up into the windy backroads of the redwoods and then come down on the beach, and then take Highway 1 back around to Santa Cruz up the 17 and back home.
2. So I started out, got some coffee, and just took my time going up and coming down on the beach there and it was just perfect. The sun was out, the wind was mild, I had this little cove all to myself, just praying, reading, writing, exploring—enjoying the day. And I probably stayed there for a good three or four hours. So grateful.
3. And then I got in my car and I was cruising south down Highway 1 towards Santa Cruz, I had my windows down, humming to myself, incredible view of the Pacific, just stoked.
4. And then I saw it. The black charred hillside stretching out for what seemed to be miles. All along my drive in I was thinking I might see some of this and never did. And to be honest, I had gotten so caught up in the day, just the beauty of it all, that now the scene almost startled me. I went from humming and carefree to silent and a bit somber.
5. The whole place smelled like a campfire that had just been put out for the night. And it just went on. At one place I saw what seemed to be water flowing in from the hillside there to the ocean, and the water was running black. So it was this crazy experience.
6. On the right side of Highway 1 you’ve got this cloudless sky, crystal blue water, just stunning. And then on the left side of Highway 1 you’ve got something that looks like it came out of a nightmare, just haunting. And these things are running side by side like this.

- B. And I just thought: here it is, a vivid reminder of the fact that this world we're living in is both beautiful and broken; both glorious and (as Paul would say) groaning; it is significant but it is not ultimate. There's much to enjoy and be grateful for, but it's not going to last.
- C. So I found myself reflecting: Where have I been placing my hope lately? What has my heart? Where am I leaning my weight? What am I living for? Am I living for this world, treating it as ultimate, or do I have my eyes set on that world that's coming in Jesus?
 - 1. As Jesus would put it in the Sermon on the Mount: Am I storing up my treasure on earth or in heaven, because wherever my treasure is, that's where my heart is.
 - a. When's the last time I thought about eternity, the resurrection, heaven, and really been moved by it? Am I treating this world like it's not on fire, like it's going to last, like it's my final destination, like it's my home?
- D. Hasn't 2020 been forcing you to ask some of this stuff too? The way it's been stirring up stuff for you—maybe with money, work, fires, health, politics, etc.
 - 1. We've all been having these thoughts: This place is beautiful, but it's broken, glorious in many ways, but it's groaning, it's significant and substantial, but it's not ultimate. What am I living for? What am I doing?
- E. Now, I say all of this up front here because I think these are the kinds of issues this text is trying to press on us. You may have already caught onto that, but I'm going to start to bring that out for us now.
 - 1. I'm going to organize my thoughts under two headings in particular: (1) A Disingenuous Question (vv. 27-33); and (2) A Dazzling Answer (vv. 34-40).

(1) A Disingenuous Question (vv. 27-33)

Under Fire

- A. So we remember here that Jesus has been under fire ever since arriving in Jerusalem and especially after cleansing the temple. The religious leaders in and around the city were fed up.
 - 1. Back in [Luke 19:47-48](#) we read: “⁴⁷ The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy him,⁴⁸ but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on his words.”
 - a. They wanted to get rid of him but feared a popular uprising against them since many of the Jews were excited by what He had to say, though on the whole most of them were misinterpreting and misunderstanding it. So these prominent men and religious leaders have to find a backdoor into this.

2. That's why up in the more immediate context of Luke 20:19-20a we read: " ¹⁹ The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour, for they perceived that he had told this parable against them, but they feared the people. ^{20a} So they watched him and sent spies, who pretended to be sincere, that they might catch him in something he said . . . "

- a. Now those guys as we saw came trying to trip him up with regard to paying taxes to Caesar. But Jesus flipped that trap on them.
 - i. And now here in our text this morning we see something similar going down with these Sadducees. They're trying to trip Him up, get people to turn on Him so they can get rid of Him.

B. With regard to these Sadducees, there are a few things you need to know.

1. For one thing, they represent a sort of opposing religious, and even political party you might say, to the Pharisees. The Pharisees are probably more familiar to you. They show up often in the gospels, but here, in Luke at least, this is actually the first time Sadducees make an appearance.
2. Now, Pharisees, were more popular with the common folk around Israel and they were especially connected with the synagogues throughout the area.
 - a. They held to the whole of Scripture and even went beyond it with the oral law they developed. They were notorious for their extrabiblical traditions and the way they tried fastidiously to apply the law of God to everyday life and uphold it.
 - i. So they were in that sense more conservative, especially than the Sadducees.
3. The Sadducees, on the other hand, came from aristocratic families, of priestly lineage, educated, wealthy. They were not all that popular with the commoner around Israel, but that didn't matter much, because they really had the power. They controlled the temple and its activities in many ways along with the Sanhedrin, or what would have been something akin to ancient Israel's Supreme Court. So they had the power, the money, the education, the prominence, the position.
 - a. It's for this reason that they were particularly inclined to cooperate with Rome. They didn't want things to change. They didn't want a nationalistic uprising. They liked what they had going.
 - b. And adding to this it seems they had a unique take on the Hebrew canon. Many scholars think it likely that they only really accepted the first five books of the OT, commonly referred to as the Law, or the Torah, or the books of Moses. The historical writings, the prophets, they rejected those. And they certainly rejected all the extrabiblical oral tradition stuff of the Pharisees.
 - c. Beyond this, as Luke goes out of his way to tell us here, that unlike the Pharisees, the Sadducees "deny that there is a resurrection" (v. 27). Some think this is precisely because the notion of the resurrection isn't made explicit in the Torah. It

comes out more clearly in the prophets like Isaiah or Daniel (e.g. [Isa 26:19](#); [Dan 12:2](#)).

- d. They thought, then, in other words, that there was no judgment, or heaven or hell, or life beyond this one. They thought the soul just dies with the body (Josephus tells us). So the law of Moses is here to help us live a good life here and now, but there's nothing beyond that.

- i. So, in this sense, they were certainly more liberal than the Pharisees.

- C. Now, interestingly enough, both sides hate Jesus and want to get rid of Him, albeit for different reasons.

1. For the Pharisees, Jesus seemed too liberal, hanging out with sinners and tax collectors, even talking about loving Gentiles, it's too much. He sounds like a Sadducee.
 2. But for the Sadducees, Jesus seemed too conservative, talking about resurrection, talking about judgment and holiness and things. He sounds like a Pharisee.

- D. And there's something for us here. As I've mentioned in passing the past couple of weeks regarding Christians and politics, if we're following Jesus, we're not really going to fit anywhere.

1. We're going to have some positions that are too conservative for the liberals and other positions that are too liberal for the conservatives. Christ's kingdom cuts in both directions and is something that confounds and corrects them both.

The What and the Why

- A. And that's why Jesus finds both these guys coming at Him. But let's look at what the Sadducees are doing here in particular. Let's quickly consider the what and the why of it.

(1) What Are They Doing?

- A. First, what are they doing? Well, they're trying to get rid of Jesus. But they go about it by asking this interesting question about marriage and the resurrection.

1. Now, I say this is a disingenuous question, because, as we've already noted, they don't even believe in the resurrection in the first place.
 - a. But here's the deal, the common Jew, following largely the teaching of the Pharisees, did. And if they can trip Jesus up on the issue of the resurrection than the commoner will turn on Him and the enemy of my enemy is my friend. We won't have to fear the people anymore because they'll want Him gone too.

- B. So they try to bring out what they think is a logical incoherence regarding the resurrection by recalling what's been referred to as "levirate marriage."

1. The idea comes from the Torah, from [Deut 25:5-10](#) in particular, and Moses there is just saying listen if a guy marries a gal and he dies before they have a son, then his brother needs to come in and marry her and provide protection, finances, and offspring.

- a. It sounds really strange to us, I know, but it's actually merciful provision here, for both the wife and deceased husband.
 - i. In a patriarchal, agrarian society, if this woman has no boy, she's not going to have provision, she can't get a job, she'll have a harder time getting married because she's been married once before. So this is kindness to her.
 - ii. And there's concern for the deceased husband as well in that the first boy is considered his and would carry on his name and secure his inheritance and things.

(1) So we're quite a few steps removed from this obviously, and it seems weird to us at first read, but in those days, this was mercy.

C. But these Sadducees aren't concerned with that. They're just concerned with the way this breaks down in view of the resurrection.

1. So they come to Jesus with this hypothetical question: Let's say a guy is married and he dies childless. Then his brother marries the wife and he dies childless. Then the next brother and the next brother, seven guys, no kids. And their big punchline comes in v. 33: ["In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife."](#)

- a. They think they've got Him. He's on the hook. He's going to have to admit it doesn't make any sense. He may even waffle on the resurrection, and if He does, the crowds are going to turn on Him. It's over.

(2) Why Are They Attempting It?

A. Now, quickly, why? Why are they playing this game? Why are they so opposed to Jesus?

1. Well, in short, we could say of them what Paul says of Demas in [2 Tim 4:10](#), do you remember this? They're ["in love with this present world . . ."](#) They like what they have and they don't want Jesus messing that up. "We got power, prestige, comfort. Jesus comes into the temple and drives the moneychangers out of the temple stops the buying and the selling, calls us out, messes up our profits and things. He's talking about being Messiah, some are saying that might mean doing away with Rome, we can't have that. We're cooperating with Rome to keep our status."

- a. These guys are ["in love with this present world . . ."](#) They're not thinking about the next. They don't even want to believe in it.

B. I wonder if some of you tuning in are in a similar place.

1. You've got friends telling you about Jesus—about sin and judgment and salvation and the gospel and heaven and hell, but, frankly, you don't want it to be true. You like your life. It's going pretty good. You haven't faced up to the fires yet. You've heard about it on the news, as it were, but it hasn't charred up your life yet. You're still thinking lasting satisfaction can be found here.

- a. So you've got all your arguments, all your reasons, but a lot of it is just smokescreens. We like to act like we're so concerned with truth when at bottom a lot of times it's just about what we want.
 - i. "Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me . . ." (2 Tim 4:10).
 - ii. "And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness . . ." (John 3:19).
- C. It's not about seeing the light. We see the light, we just don't like it. Get me back in the dark with my sin. We twist what we know to serve what we want. We leverage our logic to serve our loves.
 - 1. And it's just a matter of time before all this gets uncovered.
- D. We always think Jesus is trying to take from us when truly He's trying to give . . . something more, something better, something that won't let us down in the end but will endure . . . forever.
 - 1. And that's where we see Him go next . . .

(2) A Dazzling Answer (vv. 34-40)

Neither the Scriptures Nor the Power of God

- A. This whole scene is recorded in Matthew and Mark's gospel as well, and there there's a significant statement in theirs that Luke doesn't record. It serves as a sort of hinge in all of this, so I wanted to insert it here.
 - 1. In [Matt 22:29](#) we read that Jesus, hearing all this from the Sadducees, turns and says quite bluntly: "You are wrong . . ."—and then He gives these two reasons why—"because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God." "You're talking about the Bible, but you don't know it. And clearly you don't get what the God of this Bible is capable of either."
 - a. Now these two ideas in Luke (and the other accounts) come out in reverse order. He talks first about the power of God and then shows them how the resurrection is right there in the Scriptures, even in the Torah.
 - i. We'll really only have time this week to just touch on the first, and we'll come around next week and dive a bit deeper.
- B. So, for now, let's look at what He says concerning the power of God—what God is able to do, what He's going to do in the age to come. This comes out in [vv. 34-36](#) in particular: " ³⁴ And Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, ³⁵ 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, ³⁶ for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection."

1. Now, there are a number of observations I want to bring out here—things Jesus says about this age to come—but this morning we’re only going to look at one of them.

Observation #1: In the Age to Come We Will Neither Marry Nor Be Given in Marriage

- A. The sons of the resurrection as Jesus calls them, those who are counted worthy to enter into the age to come as it’s going to be brought in by Jesus, “neither marry nor are given in marriage” (v. 35).
- B. So what will the new heavens and new earth be like? First thing Jesus says: “No marriage” . . .?!
 1. For some of us this might sound like heaven to you—“You mean I don’t have to deal with his snoring anymore?” . . . “You mean I don’t have to deal with her honey-do lists on my days off anymore?” . . . Sign me up!”
 2. But for most I imagine, upon first hearing that, it probably strikes you as a bit of a drag, as somewhat of a letdown. You say: “I knew it! Heaven really is going to be a bunch of people just sitting around on clouds playing harps. Listen, I’m not a musical person and I’m afraid of heights. So no cloud and no harp for me, thanks you. I’ll take this age any day over the age to come!”
- C. Our culture has made the romantic relationship the be-all-end-all, right? It’s our idol of choice, I think.
 1. Megan and I like listening to country music (don’t judge me). And recently Chloe’s been like: “Dad, why is every song about a girl?” I said: “That’s not true. They sing about other stuff . . . like trucks and tractors, right?” But she’s onto it.
 - a. Our culture tells us that’s where you find fulfillment and so we’re all longing for that and we’re looking around for it and, some of us, may even be willing to compromise some of our Christian convictions to get it. “I just want that significant other!”
 2. And beyond this—I’m sure you’ve noticed this revolution happening all around us these days—you are now defined, according to our culture, by the type of person you are romantically and sexually interested in. This is the deepest part of you. It’s equivalent to your identity. “I am . . . a heterosexual, a homosexual, a bisexual, and on it goes. That’s who I am.”
 - a. “And in heaven Jesus is saying that there will be none of this? How dull. How drab. Why would anyone want to go there? I’ll pass.”
- D. But if that’s what you come away concluding here, then you’ve missed it! And you’re veering off into the same sort of error as these Sadducees.
- E. Now, this the first thing Jesus goes after with these guys, because it’s what immediately comes at their question and unravels their supposed logical dilemma.

1. You see, they could only conceive of the age to come in view of the age that now is. So the idea of seven guys being married to the same woman seemed ridiculous.
2. But they had not yet considered the power of God whereby He can take life as we know it and utterly transform it, elevating it to some other richer, fuller, more glorious plane of existence.
 - a. Their expectations and interpretations were wrongly restrained by their present experience and anemic imaginations. They couldn't wrap their reason around it, they couldn't wrap their imagination around it, and so they rejected it.
 - i. And Jesus is saying, "Are you kidding me? You don't know the power of God. You claim to believe [Gen 1](#) that God created all things ex nihilo from nothing, with a word from His mouth, and yet you don't think He can raise the dead, you don't think He can move humanity and the world to a higher plane of existence—one that you, in this age, won't even be able to fully imagine?"

I Can Only Imagine

- A. The Apostle Paul tries to help us anticipate this, that what's coming is beyond comprehension, it exceeds our capacity to imagine, not to mention reason, and, of course, He's God:
 1. So [1 Cor 2:9](#), talking about what God has in store for His kids, Paul writes: "[N]o eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him."
 2. Or [Eph 3:20-21](#), he closes out his prayer for the saints like this: "²⁰ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."
 3. And then in [1 Cor 15](#), he speaks of this sort of unimaginable, mysterious reality of God with regard to the resurrection in particular: "⁴⁰ There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. ⁴¹ There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

⁴² So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³ It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. ^{44a} It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. . . .

⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed" (vv. 40–44a, 51-52).
- B. He says it's a "mystery", it's going to exceed the boundaries of our expectations.

1. In earlier verses he says it's like the transition from seed to plant. You look at a little seed and you think really what's this going to become. But you put it in the earth, you let it die, so to speak, and out erupts coastal redwood.
 - a. Just before the fires we actually camped in Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park and we walked that old grove there and one of the rangers showed us a seed, just this little thing you could hold between your fingers, and we all stood in awe together at the fact that this little thing would grow up to tower over the landscape. The tallest tree in the park is approximately 277 feet tall, about 16 feet wide, and around 1,500 years old. And it comes from a little seed.
 - i. And Paul is saying: "Do you want an analogy for the resurrection and life in the age to come, how about that!"
 - (1) One commentator, referencing this text (1 Cor 15), writes: "Like the apostle Paul, Jesus [in Luke 20] [is asserting] that eternal life is not a prolongation of earthly life, but life in an entirely new dimension" (PNTC).

C. I love what C.S. Lewis says on this idea of trying to imagine what heaven's going to be like. You know, in some sense he wrote a whole book about this entitled The Great Divorce.

1. And concerning this work he remarks: "No, I don't wish I knew Heaven was like the picture in my Great Divorce, because, if we knew that, we should know it was no better. The good things even of this world are far too good ever to be reached by imagination. Even the common orange, you know: no one could have imagined it before he tasted it. How much less Heaven."
 - a. Think about this. Lewis is exactly right. How could you describe what an orange tastes like to a person who's never tasted one. How would you help them prepare for it? Aren't there things that you just can't fully get until you experience them?
 - i. In the same way, have you ever thought about this: How would you tell a man born blind about the beauty of a sunset—how would you tell him about the color pink and orange and purple and blue? Could it even be done? Certainly not satisfactorily.
 - ii. Or how would you tell a man born deaf about the wonders of music—what it's like to sit and listen to an orchestra or a rock band? Could it even be done? Again, certainly not satisfactorily. And that's the point!
 - (1) The age to come, brothers and sisters, is, quite literally it would seem, going to blow your mind!

So What About Marriage?

- A. So now, finally, with regard to this issue of marriage in particular: human marriage was never designed by God to be some sort of permanent fixture in His eternal plan, no, it is to be a shadow

pointing to an everlasting substance, a north star pointing us onward towards an even richer and more delightful reality, a seed that will someday soon erupt into a coastal redwood!

1. In other words: human marriage in this age is a beautiful thing, but it's always been signpost pointing beyond itself to what the book of Revelation describes as the "marriage of the Lamb" (Rev 19:7).
- B. Marriage, Paul says in Eph 5, is ultimately a picture of what Christ is going after with the church. And whatever intimacy, whatever pleasure, whatever joy you experience in your earthly marriage it will be nothing compared to the marriage we will enjoy with our heavenly bridegroom.
1. Isn't that true, those of us that are married, does it ever really work out the way Hollywood portrays it, the way the music describes it? Yes, of course, you have some good times, but isn't it also hard? You have times where you feel hurt and misunderstood and rejected and things like this.
 - a. Like me driving down Highway 1, we get that there is something beautiful but still broken about it, that it is significant but not ultimate.
 - i. And that's it. It's pointing us forward to that marriage that will not let us down . . . ever. We will be known and loved, uncovered and unashamed, cherished and nourished, protected and provided for.
- C. And so Jesus is saying to these guys, in essence: "Whose wife will she be? None of theirs. She'll be Mine!"
1. No there won't be human marriage, but there will be a marriage between the Son of God and man, the church, the bride of Christ.

How Do We Get in on This?

- A. So how do you get in on that? Because it's not just automatic. Revelation tells us some are raised to eternal life but others to eternal death.
1. Some of us, like these Sadducees, just love the world too much, we like what we've got going, we like being in control of our own thing, we refuse to see that it's broken. And our hearts are settled in it and in opposition to Jesus. And we're going to go down with the ship.
 2. But others of us, man we're driving down Highway 1 and we see it. This place is beautiful yes, but it is broken. And, if I'm honest, I know that brokenness is not just out there . . . it's in here. I've turned away from God, I've tried to do my own thing, I've tried to make this place ultimate, I didn't want to answer to Him.
 - a. I thought all along He's trying to take from me, now I realize He's trying to give. He gave His own Son for my sin so that I could be a bride. He's come to wash, He's come to clean, He's come to get this party started.

- B. Listen to this, Eph 5:25-27: “²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”
1. So how do you get in on this age to come and wedding of the Lamb and eternal life and joy? You turn from your sin and you grab ahold of Jesus. He’s the firstborn from the dead, the firstfruits of the new creation, the inbreaking of the age to come, and we tie our heart and hope and life off onto Him and He’s got us.