

*All to God are Alive*  
Luke 20:27-38  
November 6, 2016  
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*Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus and asked him a question, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers; the first married, and died childless; then the second and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. Finally the woman also died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her." Jesus said to them, "Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Now he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive."*

A grandmother was visiting the home of her newborn granddaughter and as she passed the nursery where the baby was sleeping, she caught a special moment between the 4 year-old older sister, gently caressing and kissing her new baby sister through the crib, unaware that the grandmother was watching. Then, the grandmother heard something that took her by surprise. The older sister whispered to the baby, "Will you remind me what it's like to be with God? Because I'm starting to forget." The grandmother quietly passed by, pondering the profound words.

I told this true story to the Compassionate Kids on Wednesday, and that it is often thought that children are closer to God the Creator because they are indeed fresh from the source. I said I would love to hear their thoughts about what heaven is like. I asked them if I could share their responses with you all today, and they said yes. Here is what they said:

"Heaven is a happy place. There are golden gates, and Jesus opens them and it's bright and in the clouds and Jesus welcomes you. There is no war, no hate, no anger or sadness, and everyone is happy and polite. There are animals who are tamed and not fighting. You see people you loved. I wonder where heaven is, is it in the clouds, but you can't see it? A parallel universe, maybe. It's hard to wrap your mind around it. Maybe there's a portal that beams you up. Maybe you have a key. It's a joyful place where everyone cares and loves each other. It's exuberant. I think church is like heaven on earth. It's a warm place and everyone cares about each other. Compassionate Kids is like that, too." These are all direct quotes from the children.

We talked about how as Christians, we try to partner with God to help create heaven on earth. That what we imagine heaven to be like, we can imagine the world here on earth to be like, too, and we can help to create that. And it sounds like they have already experienced this.

As the Compassionate Kids so wisely said, it is hard to wrap your mind around it. It is hard to know because we don't know.

In the Gospel passage today, some Sadducees in Jerusalem come to Jesus with a trick question. In a prior passage in Luke, Jesus has just turned over the tables in the temple, attacking the sacrificial practices where the successful and prosperous Sadducees supposedly had primary influence. They are now looking for ways to discredit Jesus' teachings and have him killed. Various groups have tried to trap Jesus with questions about his authority, about paying taxes, and now, about resurrection. The Sadducees, like the Pharisees, were a faction within first century Judaism.

The Sadducees have a traditional reading of the Torah, whereby only the original five "books of Moses" or the Pentateuch, were fully authoritative. In their reading of Scripture, there is no belief in resurrection or angels, while the Pharisees, another prominent Jewish sect, relied also on the books of the Prophets and Psalms, which contained and embraced apocalyptic ideas including resurrection and existence of spirits. Some Sunday schools teach the children how to remember the Sadducees as different from the Pharisees by this, "They didn't believe in resurrection, and so they were sad, you see."

The Sadducees pose a question to Jesus, trying to stump him or prove him wrong about the resurrection. They base their question on a law from Deuteronomy 25:5-10, called levirate marriage (*levir* coming from the Latin for "brother in law"), which stipulated that if a man dies, leaving his widow without a child, the man's brother should marry the childless widow and father a child for the one who has died, to carry on lineage and the family name.

The Sadducees concoct a scenario where a man dies, leaving a widow and no child, and each of his seven brothers marry the woman consecutively after dying, none of them having fathered a child before the woman dies. Therefore, the Sadducees ask, to whom will the woman be married in the resurrection? They are trying to argue that God would never create a condition in which God's will would contradict God's law; so, to insure the sanctity of marriage found in the Law, the Sadducees imply that God would never create an afterlife.

They must be thinking, "Aha, we've really got him now!" as there seems to be no qualifying answer to refer to in Scripture, thereby confirming their opposition to the belief in resurrection. Jesus is on his way to being executed, and the Sadducees are

asking questions of him that aren't genuine. They don't really care about the answer. They've already made up their mind. They are just trying to trick him.

Does this remind you at all with what we have been consumed with leading up to this Tuesday, the day after tomorrow (the Presidential election)? Two sides trying to trap one another, trick one another, to expose the flaws and inconsistencies of the other, to ask a question that will merely provide a newsworthy and offensive answer that the media can eat up.

Like the Sadducees, in this election of so much alarm and fear, perhaps we, too have been asking questions that aren't genuine and to which we really don't care to hear the answer because our mind is already made up. We really want confirmation of our beliefs and evidence to convict those with whom we disagree. Commentator Jill Duffield writes, "We come to the condemned man facing his execution and ask things that are irrelevant given the timing. Long before this late hour we should have been concerned about widows and those facing execution, not in the resurrection, but right here and now."

Here's why Jesus is our Savior. He doesn't fall for it. He refuses to play the game, to become ensnared and entrapped, or to provide a similarly snarky response. Jesus sees through their ploy, and takes advantage of a teachable moment. He knows that they believe this life is all there is, and that belief in the resurrection can often mean people aren't as accountable in this life, knowing there's another life to come. For the Sadducees, one had to make the most of this life because this was it.

He answers in two parts. First, regarding the dilemma of whose wife of the seven brothers will the woman be, Jesus claims that there is no marriage in the age of resurrection. No one marries nor is given in marriage. Marriage will not be necessary. Indeed, he says, people are unable to die because they are like angels, and are children of God. Angels do not die, and therefore they neither marry nor are given in marriage.

Marriage at that time was for procreation. In 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine, levirate marriage offered an opportunity for descendants to carry on the name and lineage of the deceased, and it also protected women because it gave them a household to belong to when their husbands died. However, women were considered property. In the resurrection, then, Jesus is saying, women don't belong to men. They belong to God.

In this age, marriage provides security through having a household, having property, and procreation. In that age, issues of lineage and reproduction no longer apply. Everyone is a child of God. Security is found in the resurrection age in God. The Sadducees denied the resurrection based on the assumption that our earthly conditions continue in the heavenly realm. Jesus explains that they have a

misguided concept resurrection, and their failure to accept it is because it is actually completely different from life as we know it here and now.

Next, Jesus honors the Sadducees tradition by referencing Moses in the Torah, as they did. Jesus uses the passage from Exodus of Moses' encounter with God in the burning bush to verify life after death. In this revelation, God says, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." If they were not alive, God would reveal that God WAS or *used to be* the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (We do this today, right? I sent a Mother's Day message to a mom who had recently lost her only child, saying, "You ARE a great mom!" After all, she would always be this child's mother, and he, her son.)

In some sense, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are thus still alive, hence the justification of resurrection. "God is not God of the dead," Jesus says, "but of the living; for to him all of them are alive." Theologian Eberhard Busch asks, "What does it mean to say, 'to him, all are alive?' It means all who lived before us and who are now not among us are living to God. Because of that connection with God, they are also not dead to us. They have not only spoken in their former times, they still speak to us today. We do not live without them." Jesus reaffirms the resurrection, and the position that even in death we are not separated from God.

Before long, the Sadducees will receive the living proof of Jesus' defense of the resurrection when he himself dies, and then rises again three days later.

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, who wrote *On Death and Dying*, wrote a sequel based on the many frequently asked questions she receives from professionals and family members who care for the dying. In the sequel, called *Questions and Answers on Death and Dying*, Kubler-Ross is asked, "On all your research on death, what is your personal belief of what happens after death?" She answers, "Before I started working with dying patients, I did not believe in life after death. I now do believe in a life after death, beyond a shadow of a doubt." She also said that working with dying patients over many years has made her much more religious, which has become a philosophy of life she learned from her terminally ill patients.

My grandfather visited heaven. He had an experience that is talked about repeatedly in many movies and books. He had a heart attack and was pronounced dead for 2 minutes. The monitor showed a flat line, and the doctors urgently tried to save him. Here is what he said about that experience on the hospital bed the day that he died and was brought back to life. He went from horrific incomprehensible pain to complete peace.

He was then looking at himself from above, watching the doctors desperately trying to keep him alive. As he moved farther and farther away from the body on the hospital bed, he started moving closer and closer to a bright, white light. As he edged toward the light, he realized he was in a state he had never experienced, and he described a sense of nirvana, or ultimate peace and freedom from pain, worry,

and negativity. It was ultimate bliss. Then he looked upon the most beautiful landscape he had ever seen and he wanted to go there. Then suddenly, he was back on the hospital bed in his body in pain, the doctors cheering around him. They were successful. He lived another 20 years. He said he was never ever afraid of death after that experience.

Though the gospel passage from Luke doesn't answer all our questions about death and resurrection, it does give us hope. To God, all are alive. Jesus points us to the faithful God, who loves us immeasurably. Though we don't know the specifics, we can be assured that the resurrection happens on account of God's power and grace. God is in charge. God gives life, to the living and to those who have died.

The good news is that the children of God will not be forsaken, even in death. We need not be shaken or alarmed or fearful because God is faithful and life-giving. God is faithful and life-giving no matter who is elected president, regardless of anyone's political affiliation, and whether or not people vote the same as we do.

God wants all of us to live, abundantly and together. Let us embrace God's gift of everlasting life; even if we can't wrap our heads around it, we can have faith and trust in the good Lord, who always guides us in life-giving direction when we seek it.

Thanks be to God.

