

Pentecost, 22 / November 9, 2025

Luke 20:38

“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. For He is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to Him.”

The Resurrection and the Life

Jesus’ conversation with the Sadducees is His last interaction with representatives from the major Jewish religious groups of the time. The Sadducees were the smallest group in numbers, but the most powerful in terms of their position in Jewish society in general and in Jerusalem in particular. The Sadducees were responsible for the temple service, the daily sacrifices, morning and evening; personal sacrifices offered by pilgrims; the sacrifices offered at special festivals; most notable of which was the day of atonement, when sacrifice was offered for the sins of the people during the course of the previous year. The high priests came from the ranks of the Sadducees.

The Sadducees were distinct from other Jewish religious groups in that they accepted only the five books of Moses as scripture. Sadducees represented the Jewish people before the Roman authorities. The Romans expressed their authority by choosing which of the Sadducees served as high priest in any given year. The high priest at the time of Christ’s crucifixion was Caiaphas, but the true high priest was his father-in-law Annas. The Pharisees, Herodians, teachers of the law and Sadducees didn’t like Jesus, but because of their control of the temple and their influence with the Roman authority, the Sadducees had the power to do something about Him.

The Sadducees controlled the temple complex and were responsible for the temple service, but they weren’t spiritual people. They were materialists, believing in nothing beyond this life. They believed in neither angels nor spirits, certainly not in the resurrection of the body. They thought only in terms of this life, which is why they challenge Jesus’ teaching on the resurrection with an absurd example taken from the custom of brother-in-law marriage, practiced widely in the ancient near east and included in the books of Moses, in which a man would raise up offspring for a deceased brother who was childless in order to preserve his family line. Seven men married one woman. Whose wife would she be in the resurrection? Jesus said their argument was invalid, because this life and the resurrection life are completely different. In the resurrection life there is neither death nor marriage.

Their argument was most defective in that it misunderstood the nature of God and underestimated His power. All are alive to God as their creator even if their bodies are dead. Jesus makes His point by saying the Lord is referred to by Moses as the God of the patriarchs in the present tense; not only in the past, but even now. All are alive to Him. Jesus will make His point perfectly clear in His own resurrection, which shows both God's power of life over death and fulfills the promise He spoke, even through Moses, to resurrect the dead and make all thing new.

The resurrection was generally disdained by Greek and Roman Culture. According to Greek philosophical thinking, the spirit was superior to the body. The body was essentially a vessel for the soul in life, to be discarded at death, which was seen as the soul's liberation. In some religious/philosophical groups the material element of creation in general and the body in particular were imperfect manifestations of a corrupt inferior god. Greek philosophy stressed the immortality of the soul, not the body. When St. Paul began to speak about the resurrection of the body to Greek philosophers on Mars Hill, they immediately terminated the audience, thinking the whole thing foolishness.

The Sadducees had much the same mindset. Jesus argued for the continued existence of the patriarchs after their physical death from the books of Moses, but He knew that throughout the Scriptures the resurrection was taught, whether the Sadducees accepted those books or not. Isaiah sang, *"Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise. You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a dew of light and the earth will give birth to the dead."* Jesus' own resurrection was prophesied in Isaiah and the psalms. The apostles quoted Psalm 16 in testimony to Jesus' resurrection and the resurrection believers will receive through Him. King David sang, *"For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption."*

God created everything good, both things seen (the material) and things unseen (the spiritual). It makes no sense to value spiritual things above material things, or material things above spiritual things. All things visible and invisible were made by God through Christ and are part of His good creation. Genesis says that the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the earth. He became a living being when God breathed into Him the breath or spirit of life. In the first book of Moses, life comes through the union of the material and the spiritual. Death comes when the spirit departs from the body. The soul or spirit, returns to God and continues in Him, but the fulness of life the restoration of life, comes through the reunification of the body and the spirit in the resurrection.

The resurrection, which was foolishness to the Greeks and absurd to the Sadducees, is the heart of God's redemptive activity in Christ Jesus. Sin brings death. Sin was not atoned by the sacrifices of the Jerusalem temple, but by the sacrifice of the temple of Jesus' body. The resurrection of the body of Jesus and of believers, is the result and the effect of the atonement of sin. It is the purpose for which Jesus' came, to made a new creation. Jesus' own resurrection is testimony the Father accepted His sacrifice for the atonement of human sin. Jesus' resurrection is the assurance of the resurrection of believers to a new and eternal life.

The Sadducees showed their misunderstanding of the scriptures and the power of God, by their inability to conceive of the resurrection as anything more than a physical revivication to life in this world. 'Seven men married her, whose wife will she be?' they asked sarcastically. How odd that they couldn't imagine a woman having seven husbands, when men in their culture sometimes had multiple wives. King Solomon had 800 wives, but a woman with seven husbands was as inconceivable to them as the resurrection. Jesus' reply stresses the difference between life in this age and in the age to come. The age to come is not simply a continuation of life in this world, even as the resurrection of the coming age is not the same as the resurrections that occurred in the Old Testament through Elijah and Elisha and in the New Testament, by Jesus and through the apostles. All those raised in the Old and New Testaments, including those raised by Jesus were revived to a temporary continuation of life under the terms and conditions of this age. Only Jesus was raised in terms of the age to come.

Everything will be completely different in the age to come. First, as Paul says in Thessalonians, our bodies will be transformed to be like Jesus' glorious body. Our bodies will not be the same in the age to come as they are in this present age. They will no longer be infected by sin, vulnerable to injury or illness and no longer be subject to death. Jesus said the children of the coming age will be like the angels, spiritual beings with a material presence. The interpersonal relationships of the coming age will be different from those of the present age. Jesus said people will neither marry nor be given in marriage. Solomon won't have eight hundred wives and the woman of whom the Sadducees spoke, won't have to worry about what to do with her seven husbands. We will all be sons of God, whether male or female, children of the heavenly Father.

Most importantly there will be no more sin, no more devil and no more death. In Revelation it says the former things have passed away. God says, "*Behold, I am*

making all things new!" There will be no sin in the world around us and no sinful nature within us to provoke us to sinful behaviour. Try and imagine a life without sin. It is as hard to imagine as the Sadducees imagining a woman with seven husbands. Try and imagine a life without death. There will be no more aging. Try and imagine that! Everything will be different because in Christ, God will make us and all things new. He is the resurrection and the resurrection life!

The Sadducees knew neither the scriptures nor the power of God in their misunderstanding of the resurrection, but they knew the resurrection was at the heart of Jesus's message. That's why they challenged Him on it. Actually, it was probably less a challenge and more of an attempt to ridicule Him for teaching something they saw as so foolish. They were correct to identify the resurrection as central to His message and the purpose for which He came. Jesus called Himself "*the resurrection and the life.*" He said whoever believed in Him would come to the Father in peace, now through faith; fully and forever in their own resurrection. He said that whoever believed in Him would live again and that those who believed in Him would never truly die, because even as all people are alive to God as their Creator, all who believe in Jesus are alive to God as His children. Whether we are in the body in life or out of the body in death, our spirits are always united to God through the resurrected Christ. When Christ returns and calls us to rise from the dust of death, we will experience the fulness of the resurrection life in the presence of God, body and soul, in the resurrection of Christ.

God in His grace keep us to that day. In Jesus' Name. Amen