

## **Luke 20:27-40**

### **The Resurrection and Marriage**

You can judge a man by the quality of his enemies....

Jesus has gathered quite a collection.

Chief priests, teachers of the law, elders, Pharisees, Herodians...

Highly religious and highly political in their make-up, they have developed a hatred for Jesus, this popular Rabbi who attracts huge crowds, who teaches with authority, and who is being increasingly clear and unequivocal about his mission and his identity as the Messiah – the anointed one of God - who has come to save his people from their sin.

Jesus has seen off the challenges of all of these to his authority. He has seen through their trick questions and their attempts to entrap him. He has silenced his accusers...for now.

And now – like some ancient tag team wrestling match – it's the turn of the Sadducees, another grouping who decide that they want to have a go at Jesus.

During Jesus' time, the Sadducees held the high-priestly office. These were the priestly elite. Ananias and his family were Sadducees. The Sadducees were wealthy materialists who did not believe in life after death. They did not believe in the resurrection. They didn't believe that eternal judgment awaited anyone. They did not believe that God intervened in the lives of men and women. They lived for this life alone, and they held sway and exercised considerable influence with their wealth and status.

Paul used some of this to his advantage when he was hauled in front of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish governing body, to turn the Pharisees and Sadducees against each other.

## Acts 23:6-8

### 27-33:

So the Sadducees, who do not believe in the resurrection, come to Jesus and ask him a question about the resurrection. They have a little conundrum, a little riddle that they want to put to him. Their question refers to the Old Testament Levirate custom which stipulated that if a man's married brother died childless, he must marry the widow.

The riddle states that there are seven brothers. The first one marries a woman, but he dies childless. So the next brother steps up to the plate and marries her, but he also dies childless. And so the woman works her way through all seven brothers – not so much seven brides for seven brothers – but one bride for seven brothers. All seven end up marrying her and all seven die childless.

Talk about the black widow! Can you imagine being the seventh brother. You have watched every single one of your brothers marry this woman. You have been to every wedding, you have watched them cut the cake, you have listened to the speeches, and then you have watched your brothers die prematurely. I think if you were the seventh brother, you would be afraid – you would be very afraid. I think you would be cooking your own food and sleeping in a separate bedroom at night with a lock on the door....

This woman comes with a serious health warning. But the point that the Sadducees are making, the question they are asking is:

**33: "Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?"**

This backs up their assumption that there is no resurrection – it is an absurd idea and it is in no way proven in the scriptures, the Torah, the first five books of the bible as we know it. They drop the riddle in Jesus' lap and they wait smugly for his

answer.

The Sadducees could be representative of so many people today who are rationalists, who do not believe in God, or believe that he is a distant, disinterested Deity who is in no way involved in our everyday lives. People that do not believe in the supernatural, that think that this life is all there is, that believe only in the here and now, in the material....

There are some who view the Bible in a similar way. When I was at University, I studied Theology as a subsidiary subject. The Theology professors were very knowledgeable people. They dissected the Bible, they critiqued it, they rationalised it – but they did not necessarily believe in the God that the Bible spoke of, they did not believe in the miraculous, in the supernatural, in the afterlife.... They studied the Bible like any other text book.

Materialist. Rationalist. Naturalist. Humanist.

If there is a God, he is not directly involved in our life. He is not a personal God with whom you can have a relationship. This life is all there is. There is no life after death. There is no resurrection. No final judgment.

The Sadducees are not all that far away from popular views that you might encounter today.

They challenge Jesus with the riddle. They challenge him with the lack of proof of resurrection in the Torah, which they know back to front. And they sit back satisfied...

Jesus responds to them and knocks down their arguments on two fronts. Firstly, they don't understand the scriptures and secondly they don't understand resurrection.

Mark's version puts it even stronger:

**“Are you not in error because you do not know the scriptures or the power of God” (Mark 12:24)**

These were the dons of Jesus' day. Religious intellectuals who felt that they had God and the Scriptures all sown up. You don't understand what the scriptures say, and you do not understand the power of God! Says Jesus. You are badly mistaken.

We don't want this to be said about us! We don't want to become rationalistic in our relationship with God. We don't want to become what Paul describes: people who have a form of godliness, but no power.

Lots of knowledge. The outer appearance of wisdom and knowledge. But we do not understand the scriptures and we have no concept or true experience of the power of God in our lives...

We need the **word** and the **Spirit** in our lives and in our Christian walk. The Bible, as we read it and engage it with it and eat it and live it, should change us, and empower us and transform us – it is living and powerful and sharper than a two-edged sword.

The Sadducees had no experience of the power of God and they did not have the true revelation of Scripture.

You can go to church, study the Bible, listen to talks, have a degree of knowledge and understanding – and still sit with the Sadducees in that you do not really know what the Scriptures are saying and you do not know the power of God in your life.

Please God help us not to have a merely intellectual, rationalistic engagement with the Bible which is bereft of a true relationship with the author.

## Illustration of man falling in love with the author and then the book

When you know the author, you read the book in a completely different light. The Bible is alive and powerful and reveals Christ to us.

### 34-36:

Their riddle is based on a wholly false premise. There is **this age** and **that age**. In this age there is marriage. In that age there will be no marriage. People will no longer die. People will be like the angels of God, children of the resurrection, God's children. In this life, there is marriage and there is death and there is pain and sin and suffering. In that age, following the resurrection, there will be no pain or sin or suffering or death. And there will be no marriage. There will be no need to have children, because we will live forever.

This is interesting. If you are happily married this might freak you out or make you sad. If you are unhappily married this might provide you with great relief. If you are single this might fill you with hope or disappointment. But there are a few things that this makes clear:

### 1) Singleness is not God's plan B.

Too often, Christians assume that because marriage is important, singleness is either a plan B or it's a transitional state. When we listen to Jesus' teaching, we find that it is neither a plan B nor a transitional state. It is marriage that is temporary and transitory. Marriage is still good – but so is singleness.

Contented singleness, like contented marriage, finds its adequacy in Christ. Married people – we must not rely on our spouse to fulfil our hopes, which only Christ can fulfil. And singles who might marry, you must not rely on marriage to fulfil your hopes: only Christ can do that.

Tim Keller:

“Without a deeply fulfilling love relationship with Christ now, and hope in a perfect love relationship with him in the future, married Christians will put too much pressure on their marriage to fulfil them, and that always creates pathology [or suffering] in their lives. But singles, too, must see the penultimate [impermanent] nature of marriage. If single Christians don’t develop a deeply fulfilling love relationship with Jesus, they will put too much pressure on their *dream* of marriage, and that will create pathology in their lives.”

(Meaning)

The church needs both married and singles if we are to understand the glory of God’s gospel:

John Piper:

“Marriage has its unique potential for magnifying Christ that singleness does not have. Singleness has its unique potential for magnifying Christ that marriage does not have. To God be the glory in the Christ-exalting drama of marriage and in the Christ-exalting drama of the single life.” (This Momentary Marriage)

In that age, according to the Bible, we will have glorious new resurrected bodies. We will have no unrighteous desires, no debilitating habits, no proud thoughts, no depressions, no besetting sins, no brokenness, no addictions, no selfishness. And all relationships in heaven will be glorious and on a whole different plane. We will be our sinless, perfected selves at our ultimate best! We will be like the angels in beauty and strength. Children of God. Children of the resurrection. The Sadducees don’t believe this. This, says Jesus, is how it will be.

This life is not all there is.

## **2) Resurrection is scriptural reality**

**37-38:**

Jesus then goes on to debunk their belief that there is no

scriptural support for the resurrection within the Torah, the first five books of the bible in which the Sadducees are specialists. Moses calls the Lord, “the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” He is the God of the living and not of the dead.

In Mark’s version, Jesus concludes: “You are badly mistaken!”

The resurrection is a reality.

**Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-21**

If we focus in only on this life, if there is no resurrection, no eternity – we have no hope, we are to be pitied, our faith is futile and hollow.

But.... But if it is true – what hope we have! Though our physical bodies die, we will live for eternity. Though there is death, there will be resurrection. Though this life is short, we will live eternally in the presence of our living and loving heavenly Father – children of the resurrection, children of God.

This hope is an anchor for our soul. God has put eternity in our hearts.

What about you? Where do you stand?

Are you like the Sadducees who believed only in this life – in what they could see and feel and experience at a rationalistic, material level.

Are you like the Sadducees who did not know the Scriptures or the power of God?

Paul prayed this prayer:

**“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.” (Phil. 3:10-11)**

You can pray the same prayer. You can know Christ. You can know the power of resurrection in your life, along with sharing in Christ's sufferings – you can attain to the resurrection from the dead.

You can get to know and love the author, and you can receive a whole new revelation of him through his book.

Don't be like the Sadducees who did not know or understand the scriptures or the power of God.

You can know Christ – and you can know the power of his resurrection in your life.

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### **COMMUNITY GROUP QUESTIONS:**

1. Who were the Sadducees and what were their beliefs? (See also Acts 23:6-8).
2. Compare Jesus' response to the Sadducees as recorded in Mark's gospel (Mark 12:24). How can we avoid treating the Bible like a text book while missing out on its transforming power?
3. What does Jesus' response tell us about the resurrection life?
4. What does this tell us about singleness and marriage?
5. What difference does Jesus' teaching make to our perspective on growing old, pain, sickness and death?
6. Read Paul's teaching on the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12-21). Why is the doctrine of the resurrection so important?
7. Read Phil. 3:10-11. What does it really mean to know Christ and the power of his resurrection in our life?