

# In the Resurrection . . . ( Part 2)

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## Introduction

### The Text

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

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

### A Comfort for the Christian

- A. It seems to me there is perhaps no more important subject we could be considering in trying times like these than the one before us: namely, the age to come, the resurrection, eternity.
- B. I’m sure many of us have been struggling lately, feeling like the world is just falling apart all around us, like we’re on a sinking ship and everything we’ve ever known is going down, bottoming out, flatlining.
  - 1. I’m sure many of us in various ways have been dealing with discouragement, hopelessness, depression, despair.
    - a. I almost, almost, thought you know what I’m just going to preach sitting down today. Because that’s just how I’ve been feeling. I’m sure that’s how many of you are feeling. Another heatwave? Another fire? Another sky full of smoke? Another shooting? Another protest? Another political firestorm? Another threat to our health? Another downturn in the market? And on and on it goes.
- C. So it’s good to remember in times like these: God is here. God is not absent. He’s not unsympathetic. He’s not helpless. He’s not asleep at the wheel. He’s in this. He’s on the move. His kingdom never retreats. He’s taking the world and His children somewhere. He’s working towards something good, something unimaginably good, something He’s been telling us about from the beginning.

1. And that's what's going to come out in this text as we continue our trek through it, picking up from where we left off last week.

## A Threat for the Sadducee

- A. Now, for us, the idea of eternity, the resurrection, and the age to come, may well be a comfort—indeed it's intended by God to be so. But for these Sadducees here in our text, the idea was not so much a comfort as much as it was a threat.
- B. The Sadducees, you remember, represent this sort of liberal religious and political party there in Israel, standing in contrast in many ways with the Pharisees, who were much more conservative.
  1. These Sadducees, it seems, only received the first five books of the Bible, the Law of Moses.
  2. And, consequently, they rejected a number of things other Jews held to, not the least of which was the belief of an afterlife, a resurrection, an age to come.
  3. Furthermore, these guys actually had a bit of power in the temple and the Sanhedrin, they had the priestly heritage, the education, and the wealth. Things were pretty good.
- C. I suppose, in one sense then, we could say that the Sadducees were what we might understand today as “secular”.
  1. The word “secular” comes to us from the Latin *saeculāris*, which means “of the age.” It's come to refer, therefore, to things that concern this present age, this world as we now know it. And this, of course, has been contrasted with those things of religion, those things that deal particularly with the age to come, with eternity, with reality above and beyond this world.
    - a. So you see how the term secular, then, can, in one sense at least, rightly be fastened to these Sadducees, for, while they are, externally religious, they are it seems fundamentally secular.
      - i. For they are only interested in religion insofar as it pertains to this present life, this present age. They do not believe in anything beyond, any age to come. It's about getting the good life here and now—and maybe using a bit of religion to try to get that.
- D. And Jesus is always a threat to the secular person conceived along these lines. You want to live it up in this life as if this place is all there is, get yours now—“Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.”
  1. And then along comes this Rabbi from Nazareth speaking about heaven and hell, taking up your cross and following Him, giving up things and even suffering for the kingdom of God, living with hope fixed not here but on the age to come.
    - a. It's distasteful, it's disruptive to your plans, your agenda. And so you want to get rid of Him.

- E. That's where some of you may be. And that's certainly where these Sadducees are. So they throw out a question, a "Disingenuous Question", trying to trip Him up in what He says so they can flip the people on Him and get back to living the good life.
  - 1. Now, as we saw last time, they're referencing a law from the OT, the Torah in particular, and spinning out a hypothetical situation that they think makes belief in the resurrection or the afterlife look ridiculous.
    - a. But, in the other gospel accounts of this, Jesus' rebuke comes forcefully back at them and He essentially says this: "You guys are wrong! You don't know God's power. And you don't know God's word" (cf. [Matt 22:29](#)).
- F. So we're going to take these up one at a time. Regarding God's Power, we'll talk about what I'd call (1) Anemic Imaginations ([vv. 34-36](#)). And regarding God's Word, we'll discuss (2) Faulty Interpretations ([vv. 37-38](#)).

## (1) Anemic Imaginations (vv. 34-36)

### Their Fundamental Error

- A. Now, last time we started off on this one. And we noted in particular that these men made one fundamental error in their calculation of things. They thought they found a situation that makes the resurrection look ridiculous, that proves it couldn't be for real—if numerous guys were married to one girl, how could she be all of their wives in the resurrection.
  - 1. But when Jesus brings up the idea of them not knowing the power of God, what He's essentially saying is this: "You are wrongly calibrating your expectations of the age to come with your experiences in the age that now is. You suppose that eternity would merely be an elongation of this present life. You have no conception of the ability of God to transform and resurrect in such a way that all of life will be put on another plane of existence altogether!"
    - a. Oh sure, let it be understood that the world we now know will be organically related to the one that will then be—just as our present bodies will in some sense be related to the resurrected bodies we receive on the last day (the disciples still recognized Jesus, after all)—but it is as a shadow relates to the substance, as a seed relates to the tree, as a droplet relates to the ocean.
      - i. There is organic connection and correspondence, but there is also dramatic and miraculous transformation!
- B. Hence, there will be no marriage as we've known it in heaven. For all shall be the bride of Christ and participate in the marriage of the lamb ([Rev 19](#)).
  - 1. Whatever good we've experienced in our earthly marriages—intimacy, communion, ecstasy, joy, partnership, friendship—raise that to the millionth power and you might be close to getting a small fraction of what it will be like on that day and for every day thereafter.

- C. Now that's as far as we got last week and you can see how the idea of Anemic Imaginations factors in here. These guys couldn't imagine a life beyond this one. And, so often, we can't either.

## More on Imagination

- A. Now, Jesus goes on to tell us more about this age to come, and I'll bring that out in a moment, but I wanted to say just a little more about imagination. Because I want us to have it just settled in our soul that the new heavens and new earth, the resurrection, the age to come, it is going to quite literally blow our minds.
- B. In thinking about all of this, it occurred to me that I often tend to think of my reason as being grounded in and tethered to the facts, while my imagination is cut free and able to soar to the clouds. So one is grounded and tied to reality. The other is free and able to redefine reality.
  - 1. I think we often have this conception, but I've come to realize it's not exactly right. My imagination, as free as I might think it is, is still inevitably bound to my experiences and what I've known in this present age. In other words, we can only imagine in categories that already exist.
    - a. Let me give you a silly example: the unicorn. Whoever came up with that probably thought he was being super creative, imaginative. Wow, what a magical creature.
      - i. But we're like: "C'mon man, I see what you did. You just took a horse and gave it a horn." And if you want to get really fancy you might put some bird wings on it and then you've got an alicorn. (You like that?! I've got little girls into My Little Pony right now.) But you see, we can mash up stuff we've already known, but we can't get beyond that. We can come up with a new recipe but we're still using the same old ingredients.
  - (1) Even our imaginations are still tethered, limited, restrained.
- C. All over creation, God has tried to prepare us for this reality—that He's way bigger, that His power is far beyond anything, not just that we can wrap our reason around, but that we can even wrap our imagination around.
- D. Last week I used the analogy of a little seed to a coastal redwood. But this week I want you to think about the stars, the universe. Why did He make it so vast, so seemingly endless?
  - 1. Megan and I have just finished up watching a show about this crew trying to be the first to land on Mars. And it's this big thing, right? We got so pumped and acted like we're such a big deal when we made it to the moon. How much greater, Mars?! So it's all intense and they finally make it and everyone is going crazy.
    - a. And then I just sat back and thought. Wait . . .
      - i. Mars is just one planet away from Earth in one solar system in one galaxy.

- ii. In our solar system there are 8 planets (poor Pluto got downgraded, I guess). We can't even make it to one of those. This is just a show. We've made it to the moon. Yay. We've come nowhere near making it to another planet.
  - iii. And, again, we're just talking about one solar system. Scientists estimate there may be upwards of 100 billion solar systems in the Milky Way Galaxy.
  - iv. And, again, we're just talking about one galaxy. The Hubble Space Telescope reveals an estimated 100 billion galaxies in our universe, but that's just what they can see now. As technology increases, they know they'll just keep seeing more.
- E. And I just thought, my goodness, as human beings, we pride ourselves on our accomplishments and what we're able to do, but we've done nothing, we've gone nowhere.
  - 1. And we live our lives ever before this immeasurable expanse that's just screaming out to us about the glory and the greatness of God . . . but we hardly take notice.
    - a. God is over it all. He doesn't have to travel to Mars, He's already there. He doesn't have to try to count the stars, He's named them all. Yet we act as if He's going to have to bow to our reason, fit within our capacity to imagine.
- F. So we've got to be careful. With regard to this text and what Jesus is saying here, we've got to be careful we don't impose the limits of our anemic imaginations upon our conceptions of heaven and what God is able to do in the age to come. The reality will exceed our notions every time. Again, it is going to quite literally blow our minds!
  - 1. And yet still Jesus wants us to try to think about this age to come and grow in our understanding and expectation of it. So we carry on . . .

## Three More Observations

We saw last week that In the Age to Come We Will Neither Marry Nor Be Given in Marriage. This week I'm going to bring out three more observations for us to consider . . .

### Observation #2: In the Age to Come We Cannot Die Anymore

- A. You saw that, right, in v. 36: [“<sup>35</sup> 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,<sup>36</sup> for they cannot die anymore . . .”](#)
- B. The author of Hebrews talks about how Jesus came to [“deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery” \(Heb 2:15\)](#).
  - 1. And this always confused me. Because, while there are some of us, no doubt, who would say we are painfully afraid of death, I would wager most people aren't really thinking too much about it. And yet the author here says it's ultimately this fear of death that has us enslaved—we're in bondage because of it.

- a. And I was thinking, “Why? Am I doing what I’m doing because I’m afraid of death?”
- C. And then it hit me: I think death essentially equates to the ultimate expression of loss. And when it comes to loss, that’s a category that I see enslaving us. If you search your motives and things, I imagine you’ll find it’s true. We do most all that we do out fear of losing one thing or another. You could say . . . we’re enslaved by it.
  1. We’re afraid of losing our job, so we sacrifice everything else in our life to keep it.
  2. We’re afraid of losing our looks, so we obsess over diets and exercise and calories.
  3. We’re afraid of losing the approval of our peers, so we only show them carefully edited versions of ourselves and hide all the stuff we’re ashamed of.
  4. We’re afraid of losing our possessions, so we keep our homes and our lives locked up tight.
  - a. We do all that we do in an effort to keep what we have. And we’re enslaved by the fear of losing it.
- D. And death comes in really as the final nail in that coffin (no pun intended). It’s the ultimate expression of loss, the climax of deprivation, the victory of vanity. You’re going to lose it all in the end, no matter what you do, death is going to take it.
  1. Life, as it were, is this slow-motion slip down the slope of loss ending in the dark dank hole of your own grave. And we feel it. The fear of death.
    - a. That’s why Iris Murdoch says: “A death is the most terrible of facts.” It’s so final.
    - b. Or T.S. Elliot: “I will show you fear in a handful of dust.” From dust you came and to dust you shall return. No matter what you do, death always gets the last word.
- E. Until Jesus!
  1. So the English poet George Herbert writes: “Death used to be an executioner, but the gospel has made him . . . a gardener.”
    - a. He used to take whatever I had left and drive that last nail in.
    - b. Now, because of Jesus’ sacrifice and resurrection, death for me is more like a gardener dropping a seed in the soil and in the warmth of tomorrow’s sun new life will burst forth!
      - i. Or 1 Cor 15:54-57: “<sup>54</sup> When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”<sup>55</sup> “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”<sup>56</sup> The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.<sup>57</sup> But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”
- F. “[T]hey cannot die anymore . . .” (Luke 20:36). If you’re in Christ, you don’t have to be afraid of loss, you don’t have to be enslaved to the fear of death. You’re free!

Observation #3: In the Age to Come We Will Be “Equal to” Angels

- A. That's where Jesus goes next in v. 36: "for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels . . ."
1. Now, in the Greek it can be rendered "like the angels" and I do think that is the sense here (indeed Matthew and Mark's account make this rendering more explicit).
    - a. The idea here, then, is not so much that we will be equal to the angels in terms of status but that we shall be like them in the specific things here outlined: namely, in that we shall no longer marry nor shall we die.
- B. But I do think there is something worth considering here for a moment. You see (and I know this sounds absurd to say out loud) it would seem from Scripture, that men and women—in Christ, in the resurrection, in the age to come—far from being beneath the angels or even equal to them, we shall, in some sense at least, be superior.
1. In many ways, it would seem men and women are situated above the angels, if not in being, class, or rank, then at least in God's heart.
- C. Now, I don't have much time here but let me at least just rifle off a bit of evidence for this:
1. For one, angels were not created in the image of God, only human beings were.
  2. For another, the author of Hebrews writes: " <sup>16</sup> [S]urely it is not angels that [Jesus] helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. <sup>17</sup> Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (Heb 2:16–17). God didn't send His beloved Son to die for fallen angels. Nor did Jesus take on the form of an angel, He took on flesh and blood, humanity, and He died to help, to save, us.
  3. Hence, Peter writes how the angels are longing to look into the things of the gospel—the things God is doing for us and revealing to us in Jesus (1 Pet 1:12).
  4. Furthermore, angels, the author of Hebrews tells us again, are "all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation" (Heb 1:14). Not only does God send Jesus to help us and not them. God also sends them to serve us. It's astounding!
  5. And then in 1 Cor 6:3, Paul says that in the age to come we shall be judging angels, whatever that means!
  6. In Eph 2:6, Paul says that God has "raised us up with [Christ] and seated us with him in the heavenly places." We share His seat. Not the angels, but redeemed sinners like you and I.
  7. And in Rom 8:29 we're told that "those whom [God] foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." The image of God that was marred in Adam will be restored and fully realized in Jesus . . . and, through Him, in us! We're being brought in as Christ's brothers and God's children in a way that the angels never will be.
- D. So in the age to come we'll be "like the angels", but, in a sense, our position will be higher and our experience will be richer. Which is why Jesus goes on to say . . .

Observation #4: In the Age to Come We Will Be Sons of God

- A. So Jesus concludes v. 36: “[they] are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.”
- B. Now listen, ladies, if I have to be okay being the bride of Christ as an image of covenantal intimacy and union with Jesus, you’ve got to be okay being called here a son of God.
  - 1. The point is not the gender. The point is that in those days that son would enjoy a privileged place in the family and have rights to the inheritance and things. And Jesus is saying, in Him, that becomes ours—men, women, in Christ, we are all in this sense, beloved sons of God!
- C. I thought of 1 John 3:1-2 at this point as he also conceives of this reality in view of the resurrection: “<sup>1</sup> See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. <sup>2</sup> Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”
- D. Listen, this idea of being a son or being a beloved child of God, it really touches on our sense of identity—it gets at who we fundamentally are. And we need to just sit on this for a moment, because we’re so prone to go elsewhere and get all out of whack, right?
  - 1. We are prone to attach our identities to all manner of different things: people’s opinions, our vocations, our possessions, etc. And right now, I think this pandemic and all the turmoil of 2020 is probably rattling a bunch of that stuff.
    - a. You’re maybe having to rethink work, maybe you lost your job, maybe you’re losing your stuff, your money, your house, maybe relationships are tense and strained and you don’t have community.
      - i. All the stuff you’ve tethered your identity to, all the stuff you’ve used in the past to prop yourself up and give yourself a sense of worth and justification, well it’s gone or at least threatened.
- E. And here we come to God’s declaration over you that’s as stable as the age to come: “You are my beloved child.”
  - 1. Let that settle deep in your soul, let that stabilize your heart. You may lose all that other stuff, but if you’re in Christ, you’ll never lose this. Don’t build your identity upon anything else!

## (2) Faulty Interpretations (vv. 37-38)

### Compassion without Compromise

- A. Jesus says: “You guys don’t know the power of God.” But He also says: “You don’t His Word either.” And that’s where He goes next in vv. 37-38: “<sup>37</sup> 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. <sup>38</sup> Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him.”



- B. Here's what I love about Jesus: He meets you where you are.
  - 1. These Sadducees, as we've said, seemed to have only really accepted the five books of Moses as canonical, as Scripture. They brought up Moses' words back up there in [v. 28](#) so Jesus, knowing that's the value system their working with, brings them back into Moses' words here.
    - a. He's accommodating without compromising. He draws near in compassion, but calls out with conviction.
- C. Too often, we're either good at one or the other. Either we move with compassion, but we're scared to call out, we end up compromising. Or we're full of conviction and we'll preach the truth, but we have no love.
  - 1. We can learn a lot from Jesus' example here and the incarnational principle it establishes—where we move towards people and enter their world even as we call them to step out with us into the world of the Bible and the gospel and reality.
    - a. This is what Paul is saying in [1 Cor 9:19-22](#): [“<sup>19</sup> \[T\]hough I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.<sup>20</sup> To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. . . .<sup>21</sup> To those outside the law I became as one outside the law . . . that I might win those outside the law.<sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.”](#) This isn't people-pleasing. This isn't compromise. This is incarnational ministry.
      - i. And he learned it from Jesus . . .

## Our Present Tense God

- A. These guys don't believe in the resurrection, but they value Moses. “Okay, let me tell you about the resurrection from the books of Moses”—[Exo 3:6](#): God says to Moses from the burning bush: [“I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”](#) And Jesus says: “There it is! What more do you need? There's your evidence for the resurrection.”
  - 1. And you say, Huh? Well, His whole case rests on the tense of that verb. It's not: “I was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob . . . but they're dead now.” No! It's: “I am—I still am—their God, because (by implication) they are still alive . . . I'm not done with them!”
- B. God's covenant relationship with Abraham Isaac and Jacob didn't stop when they died. If anything it was only just beginning.
  - 1. Have you ever stopped and considered the story of these guys as it's told in Genesis? On the surface, it's kind of a tragedy.
    - a. All along God's promised to give their offspring a land, Canaan, but these patriarchs die as sojourners, strangers, foreigners in that land. It's not theirs. They put their bones in a cave there in Canaan. And that's it. It's over. Again, what a tragedy.

- C. Unless “[God] is not the God of the dead, but of the living” . . . unless He’s not done with them yet. The resurrection is the only thing that resolves this tension and transforms what seems at first to be a tragedy into a surprising and everlasting comedy.
1. This is what the author of Hebrews is talking about when he writes: “<sup>8</sup> By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. <sup>9</sup> By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. <sup>10</sup> For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. . . . <sup>13</sup> These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. <sup>14</sup> For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. <sup>15</sup> If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup> But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city” (Heb 11:8-10, 13-16).
- D. For us, the idea is simply this: God will not fail you, even in death, He will still be your God, He has set His name upon you, He will not abandon you, He will bring you into the banquet room of heaven and seat you at the table next to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
1. “I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 8:11). They will be there . . . and so will you!

## Conclusion

### “Considered Worthy”

- A. Now, there is one massive question I’ve left unanswered to this point and it comes from v. 35 there.
1. Jesus makes it plain that not everyone is going to make it into this age to come in resurrection glory. All will be raised, but some will be raised to eternal life, while others to eternal judgment and death. And everything hinges on this issue of, in Jesus’ words, being “considered worthy” — “those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead . . .”
- B. And I just want to end here by asking: How do I get that? I want to be considered worthy. I want you to be considered worthy. So how do we get it?
1. The Pharisees taught it was by good works, cleaning yourself up, trying harder.
  2. But Paul, who used to be a Pharisee, said, it’s not going to cut it. It’s never enough. You may improve a bit here or there, but you’re still shot through with sinful motive and God is still unswervingly holy. No, if you’re going to considered worthy, you need to turn from all this and flee by faith the only One who is: Jesus!

- a. So Paul writes, Phil 3:4b-11: “<sup>4b</sup> If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup>circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup>as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. <sup>7</sup> But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— <sup>10</sup> that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”