

## **SPIRITUAL WARFARE: TO GOD WE ARE ALL LIVING**

Luke 20:27-40 (and Daniel 12:1-4, 8-10)

### **Luke 20:27-40 The Resurrection and Marriage**

<sup>27</sup> Some of the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question.

<sup>28</sup> “Teacher,” they said, “Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.

<sup>29</sup> Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless.

<sup>30</sup> The second <sup>31</sup> and then the third married her, and in the same way the seven died, leaving no children. <sup>32</sup> Finally, the woman died too. <sup>33</sup> Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?”

<sup>34</sup> Jesus replied, “The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. <sup>35</sup> But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, <sup>36</sup> and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God’s children, since they are children of the resurrection.

<sup>37</sup> But in the account of the burning bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord ‘the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ <sup>38</sup> He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive.”

<sup>39</sup> Some of the teachers of the law responded, “Well said, teacher!” <sup>40</sup> And no one dared to ask him any more questions.

### **Daniel 12:1-4 The End Times**

12 “At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. 2 Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. 3 Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. 4 But you, Daniel, roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge.”...

<sup>8</sup> I heard, but I did not understand. So I asked, “My lord, what will the outcome of all this be?”

<sup>9</sup> He replied, “Go your way, Daniel, because the words are rolled up and sealed until the time of the end. <sup>10</sup> Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand.

<sup>11</sup> “From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days.

## MESSAGE:

The encounter between Jesus and the Sadducees is a perfect example of the war which has always gone on—and still goes on—between the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God. It takes place only a few days after Jesus had driven the merchants and moneychangers out of the temple and accused the Jewish leaders of being false shepherds. They were shocked by his actions and enraged by his accusations so they decided to retaliate by trying to discredit Jesus in front of his followers. They went about it by trying to bait him with a loaded question of the *“Have you stopped beating your wife?”* variety. The Pharisees had already used this tactic when they asked Jesus whether or not they should pay taxes to Rome. They thought that this would put him in a no-win situation: if he said “yes,” it would turn the people against him because they hated paying taxes to Rome. If he said “no,” he would be encouraging them to rebel against Roman law—a crime punishable by death. But Jesus had outwitted them by responding, *“Render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and unto God what is God’s”*—an answer which left them with nothing to say.

Since the Pharisees had failed to trip Jesus up, the Sadducees decided they would have a go at it. You see, the Pharisees and Sadducees were two different groups of Jewish leaders. The Pharisees came from what we would call the middle class of Jerusalem and were Biblical literalists who believed and taught only what was in the *Torah*. The Sadducees, on the other hand, were from the upper class and considered themselves the “intelligentsia,” the intellectual elite, and they tended to pick and choose what parts of the *Torah* to believe and what parts could be discarded. In today’s way of thinking, the Pharisees were fundamentalists from Alabama and the Sadducees were professors from Harvard Divinity School. They were both experts in the Jewish law, however, and although they violently disagreed on several points of interpreting and applying the law, they were in complete agreement on one thing: Jesus was their enemy.

Being intellectuals, the Sadducees were convinced that greatest faculty God had given man was his power of reason. We would call them rationalists. They trusted the evidence of their senses and the power of logic, and they questioned the truth of anything which couldn’t be demonstrated logically or proven empirically. To give credit where it’s due, they were wiser than many modern day rationalists who extend their skepticism to doubting even the existence of God. The Sadducees didn’t go that far, however they did go so far as to deny the existence of angels, which could neither be demonstrated logically nor empirically proven, and they flatly denied that there was any such thing as the resurrection of the dead or an afterlife—ideas which to their way of thinking were absurd. The prophet Daniel had written: *“Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life and others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.”* (Daniel 12:2-3) But, like many of today’s liberal Bible scholars, if a particular teaching of the Scriptures didn’t seem reasonable to them, it was simply rejected. So, Daniel notwithstanding, for the Sadducees there was no life after death; no resurrection of the dead.

And this was the issue the Sadducees decided to use in their effort to discredit Jesus. They began by asking him what appeared to be a technical question about something called “Levirate marriage.” The tradition of Levirate marriage derived from a law in *Deuteronomy* which stipulated that if a woman’s husband died and he was survived by a brother who was not married, that brother should take the woman as his wife, provide for

her and give her children. (*Deuteronomy 25:5ff.*). The Jews considered this an honorable act, one which showed loyalty to the family and, by extension, strengthened the covenant community of Israel. The Sadducees, however, cast it in a sarcastic and flippant manner in order to ridicule the idea of an afterlife. *“If a woman’s husband dies and she marries his brother and he dies and she marries his brother’s brother, and he dies, and she marries his brother’s brother’s brother and he dies and so on up to seven brothers—whose wife will she be when the resurrection comes?”* Their question was merely a ruse to make the whole idea of the resurrection of the dead and afterlife look ridiculous. In this way they hoped to discredit the centerpiece of Jesus teaching: his proclamation of eternal life.

Now this is a typical device that is used by skeptics to discredit religion. They subject God to the standards of human reason and when God fails to meet those standards, they dispense with him altogether. They put forth conundrums like, *“If God is all-merciful, why does he allow suffering?” “If God is completely good, where did evil come from?” “If God is all-powerful, can he make a boulder so big he couldn’t lift it?”*

Such questions may be titillating but all they amount to is an attempt to judge God by human standards. They demand of God that he fit the mold of what man thinks He should be and when God doesn’t fit that mold, man is justified in denying his goodness or even his existence.

It’s been said that one of the most common errors of human judgment is to reason without sufficient data. Yet this is exactly what people do—and are bound to do—when they try to draw conclusions about God using the limited information they have as humans. This was Job’s problem: he tried to comprehend God’s motives and actions without having the basic information he needed to do so. God points this out to Job, saying, *“Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Who stretched out a measuring line across it?”* (*Job 38:2-3*)

God is our Creator and we are His creations; we are the pot and He is the potter, and we can understand no more about Him than He has chosen to reveal to us. As Paul wrote, *“Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’”* (*Romans 9:20*)

What God does want us to understand about Him He has revealed in to us in two ways: through nature and through the Bible. In nature, God has shown us that we can understand certain things about him through our powers of observation and reason. Paul describes this natural revelation of God in Romans: *“...what may be known about God is plain to [man], because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made...”* (*Romans 1:19-20*) When we examine the intricate order of creation and the incredible complexity of living organisms, we are led by our powers of observation and reason to conclude that there is a design to things and that design requires a designer. As the Psalmist wrote, *“I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”* (*Psalms 139:14*)

In the Bible, God has revealed to us His plan to deliver mankind from the curse of death, by sending His Son to pay the penalty for our sins.

In nature, we see the creative handiwork of God. In the Bible we see the love and mercy of God.

In nature God shows us that He is a God of power and majesty and order. In the Bible He shows us that He is a God of mysteries and miracles and salvation.

There are two common mistakes people sometimes make when they think about God. The first is to restrict our knowledge of God to the revelation He has given us of Himself in nature, and ignore the spiritual revelation He has given us of Himself in the Bible. Such people are inclined to things like, *"I know God exists but I have no idea who He is or what He's like."* They are right in acknowledging God—maybe even worshipping Him—but miss half of the knowledge of Him that is available because they have not believed in His Word. The second mistake people make is to try to figure out things about God which He has chosen not to reveal to us. Luther said, *"Be very careful of imagining things about God you do not know, lest you make Him out to be what He is not."* On one occasion someone asked Luther what he thought God was doing before He created the world and Luther responded that He was making whips to beat fools who asked stupid questions. If we speculate about God in areas where He has chosen to remain silent, our speculations will only lead us astray.

But look at what God *has* revealed to us! He has revealed Himself both naturally and spiritually in Jesus Christ! Jesus is the Word of God through Whom everything was made that has been made (*John 1:3*) and He is also the One who speaks to us the words of eternal life! (*John 6:68*). And it is these Words of Life that Jesus speaks in response to the Sadducees after they have failed to embarrass Him with their trick question. There is no need for marriage in heaven, He says, because marriage was given to mankind for two reasons: so that people would not be alone, and so that they might beget children. But in heaven, God's children are in perfect and eternal communion with Him and will never be lonely again. And once they are immortal like angels there will be no further need for procreation.

So the question that was intended to embarrass Jesus becomes an embarrassment to those who asked it. *To the very ones who were conspiring to kill him, He speaks words of life.*

Then Jesus adds icing to the cake: there is no need to wait for eternal life—all who believe in Jesus have eternal life right now. God, who is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is the God of the living and not the dead. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are eternally alive to Him just as we who are God's children through faith in Jesus Christ are eternally alive to Him.

There will always be Sadducees—rationalists who reject God's inspired revelation in his Word and confine their thinking to what they can see and think and imagine. And there will always be Pharisees—legalists who use God's Law and their embellishments of God's law to outwit their neighbor. To both, we must always stand ready to speak the words of life: Christ died for your sins to give you eternal life! Let Him be alive to you so that you can be alive to Him, for He is a God of the living, and not the dead.

Amen.