



CHRISTIAN CRUSADERS

7401 UNIVERSITY AVE., CEDAR FALLS, IOWA 50613

(319) 277-0924

INFO@CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

WWW.CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

What Jesus Said About the Afterlife

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Rev. Steve Kramer

TEXT: Luke 20:27-40 (ESV)

There came to him some Sadducees, those who deny that there is a resurrection, 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. Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife, and died without children. And the second and the third took her, and likewise all seven left no children and died. Afterward the woman also died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife."

And Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, 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, for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. 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. Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him." Then some of the scribes answered, "Teacher, you have spoken well." For they no longer dared to ask him any question.

On the final episode of the podcast *Dolly Parton's America*, Dolly offered various responses to the question, "What is the theology of Dolly Parton?" And when asked about her thoughts on the afterlife, she responded,

You don't really know. You just hope and have faith. That's what faith is. I think it's not the end of me. I don't think it's the end of any of us. I think we are recycled. And if nothing else, we just go back into that great flow of divine energy and hopefully we spread ourselves around in other wonderful ways.

How about you? Have you spent much time wondering about the afterlife? What it's like? What happens when you die? Many people have thought about it down through the ages, and there are shelves full of books written about it that lots of people purchase and read, looking for some peace of mind as they consider the end of their life. Even

Hollywood has attempted to take on this subject with movies and television shows depicting the afterlife.

Well, we learn a bit about this subject in Jesus' debate with some Sadducees in our passage for today. The Sadducees were a wealthy, aristocratic class of Jewish people. They believed only in the authority of the Torah – the first five books of the Old Testament – and they did not believe in a coming messiah or a messianic age to come. And they believed that the idea of resurrection from the dead was ludicrous. And to make their point, they cooked up this ridiculous story about a woman who wound up being married to seven brothers in this life because of the Law of Levirate Marriage found in the Book of Deuteronomy. It says that if a man's brother dies having a wife but no children, then he must take the widow and raise offspring for his brother. So, the Sadducees cooked up this wild scenario that they thought would show the logistical complications of resurrection from the dead and the ridiculousness of the whole concept. And they tried this out on Jesus. It was a story about seven brothers. The first brother took a wife and died and without children to carry on his name. So, the second brother took her as his wife, but he died without children. Then the third took her and he died. And then the same thing fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh. And never were there any children. The Sadducees then smugly asked Jesus "In the resurrection, whose wife will the woman be for? The seven had her as a wife." While Jesus, of course, knows what they're up to. They're trying to make him look foolish with this crazy hypothetical situation and their follow up question to it. They were hoping to get him to misspeak in his arguments so that this "teacher" would lose his credibility in the eyes of the crowds that were so taken with him at the time.

But this proved to be no problem for Jesus at all. He educates them about the resurrection from the dead and the age to come with his divine knowledge and authority. And he tells them two things. First, he says,

You don't understand the concept of resurrection from the dead at all. In this age, yes, you marry and are given in marriage, but in the age to come, no one marries, no one's given in marriage, it just happens now. You're thinking along the lines of resuscitation or revivification, when where you'll come back to the same life as you know it now and everything will just be the same.

That's not what God has in mind about the resurrection. This is a totally new and better thing. There's no more death. People can't die anymore. No concern or need then, for births and carrying on family names. No need for marriages, for procreation.

Resurrection people are equal to angels and are referred to as beloved sons of God, Sons of the resurrection.

I appreciate Pastor Mark Mitchell's comments on these words of Jesus regarding resurrection and marriage. He said,

I know that some people have a really hard time with this. If you have a good marriage and you really love your wife or your husband, it's hard to think you won't have that kind of relationship in Heaven. But this passage helps us understand how truly amazing Heaven is going to be. It will be deeper and better than even the best of marriages.

And this is also comforting news for those who are unhappily single or who have been through a painful divorce or have been unable to have children. This world is not all there is. You have a future in Heaven that is bigger than all that. So, your relationships with your brothers and sisters in Christ will last forever. But your family relationships will change in eternity. I remember that the Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthian Christians that at the resurrection, everything's changed. We shall be changed. New bodies, immortal, imperishable. Everything new and improved. Christian writer Joni Eareckson Tada, who became quadriplegic in a swimming accident as a teenager, describes how wonderful this truth is for her. She says, "I have hope in the future. The Bible speaks about bodies being glorified. I know what that means now. It's the time after my death here, when I, the quadriplegic, will be on my feet dancing."

So, in this opening argument of Jesus, we have a glimpse of life in eternity. It's something totally different. Jesus doesn't stop there, though. He goes on and challenges their unbelief in the resurrection by using Scripture. He refers to the Exodus story of Moses and the burning bush. Remember, he's using now the book that they see as the authority. He points out to them that even Moses in his recording of this story shows us the truth about the resurrection from the dead. He refers them to God's statement to Moses about himself. He said, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Note God's statement to Moses was said in the present tense: "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." And there's some simple logic to be considered. This statement doesn't make any sense, Jesus is pointing out, if they are not alive because God is God of the living, not of the dead. So, for instance, if someone comes to you and says, "I was your mother's best friend," that may be because your mother is dead, or somehow the relationship changed. But if she comes to you and says, "I am your mother's best friend." The assumption is that she's still alive and the relationship is still dynamic. And

that's why Jesus then goes on to say "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. For all live to Him." They must be living with God. Therefore, there is a resurrection from the dead.

Of course, as we consider this teaching of Jesus about the afterlife, we also must keep in mind that Jesus was in Jerusalem about to die on a cross, and then he would be resurrected on the third day, just as he had predicted to his disciples earlier. And on Easter, everything that Jesus taught, said, and did was endorsed and verified by God. It was his loud, resounding "yes" to Jesus. His resurrection really happened, by the way, look at the evidence. The tomb was found empty. No one could explain that. And he was seen by his disciples in the upper room and worshipped by some women on the road, encountered on the road to Damascus by disciples, and later on at a seashore where he served breakfast to them. The Apostle Paul reports Jesus appeared before 500 people at one time and later on appeared to him as well, on the road to Damascus and all laid down their lives for the Gospel based squarely on the fact of Jesus Christ's resurrection. They believed that because Jesus was resurrected, we shall be also. That's why Paul reasons with the resurrection doubters in 1 Corinthians 15, when he says,

If in Christ we have hope in this life, only we are of all people, most to be pitied. But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep, for as by a man came death by a man has also come the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

And so that's why Christians for centuries have professed in the Apostles and Nicene Creeds, "I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." Or "we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come."

So, there we have it. What a gracious gift Jesus has given us in this little passage for the day – divine Insight and truth on the afterlife from the resurrected Son of God. Now there is an important line that Jesus used in teaching those Sadducees regarding resurrection from the dead and the age to come. And it's not a throwaway line. We must examine it closely. It's when Jesus talks of those who are considered worthy to attain to that age, into the resurrection from the dead. We need to ask: so how does a person become worthy to attain the resurrection from the dead? Is there is there something or some things we must do in order to become worthy? Well, thankfully, the answer is no, because if that were the case, then we'd be sunk because of our sinfulness. Earning worthiness for resurrection life is an impossibility for you and me. We will

always fall short of God's standards. We'll never become worthy of Heaven by our own efforts. But here's the good news: Jesus said earlier to his disciples who had asked, "Who then can be saved?" He said, "What is impossible for man is possible for God." And Jesus was pointing to himself as the answer to that question. We become worthy to attain the new age to come and the resurrection from the dead, Heaven, through faith in Jesus, who called himself the resurrection and the life and promised this. "Whoever believes in me, though he die yet shall he live. And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." A person receives this through faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God who died as a sacrifice for our sins and rose again to give us life everlasting. Resurrection, then, is a gift that we do not deserve. But God, out of His deep love for us, generously offers it to us as a gift. And says, "Believe in my son and live."

So here is a question that only you can answer: do you believe in Jesus, the resurrection and the life? Have you entrusted yourself to his eternal care because of what he did for you at the cross? If you have trusted in Jesus as Savior Lord, then may this story for today serve as a reassuring reminder for you as you consider your mortality in this world. Rejoice in these words of Jesus. Claim them and cling to them as your comfort and confidence in your living and your dying. If someone were to ask you if you were to die today, are you certain you'd go to Heaven, your answer is and always can be "yes, because of what my Savior Jesus did for me at the cross and grave. I know where I'm headed. Blessed Assurance. Jesus is mine."

And if you haven't placed your trust in him, or perhaps you've walked away for some reason or another, you can still come to him in faith while you're still living and breathing and receive what he came to give you: a new and better life with him in the here and now that will go on forever. You go to him and ask. You can do it right now. Jesus has promised that everyone who comes to him in faith, who asks him to save them, they will not be turned away. So, it is true, the day is coming when each of us will take our final breath in this world. The death rate is, the comedian said, is 100%. The day is coming. But for those who die trusting in Jesus Christ, that's not the end of our story. Something wonderful awaits us. As the Christian apologist C.S. Lewis once remarked about this, "There are far, far better things ahead than any we leave behind." God's Word tells us that something beautiful and new and perfect lies ahead for believers in His Son, Jesus Christ, and a new day when there will be no more pain, no more death, no more brokenness or sorrow. Beyond scripture, though our little finite minds can't even begin to grasp all the details of what the new resurrected life will look

like in Heaven. As that popular Christian song says, "I can only imagine." But we do know this from Scripture that we will be with Jesus and the Father and the Holy Spirit. That perfect fellowship of love and joy is awaiting us and living in their presence. There will be perfect love and joy and peace. We have truly something beautiful to look forward to.

Author and Professor Lewis Smedes used to ask his students at Fuller Seminary if they wanted to go to Heaven when they died, and everyone, of course, raised their hand. Then he'd ask, "Be honest now, who would like to go today?" A few would raise their hand, slowly, giving what they thought was the correct answer. Looking around to see if they were the only ones. And they were. Most people you see wanted a rain check. They were ready to die. Just not today. They loved this life, as they should. But then Professor Smedes would ask "Who would like to see the world set straight once and for all tomorrow? No more common colds, no more uncommon cancers. Hungry people would have plenty. No one would lift a finger to harm another. We would be at peace with everyone, even with ourselves. Is anybody interested in that?" And there would be a frenzy of hand raising. And then Smedes would point out if that new world is what you really want, well, then Heaven's where you'd like to be. And that's where you and I will be as believers in Jesus Christ. Let's pray. Thank you, Lord, for the resurrection hope that is ours through Christ Jesus. May His assurances be our comfort and strength and confidence as we look ahead. Amen.