

“We Are God’s Living Children”

What happens when I die? It is a question that many have asked. And it is a question that many have attempted to answer in a variety of ways. Movies have tried to address it. Books have spoken about it. Scientific studies have even been attempted concerning death and near death experiences. But death remains for us a line that if we cross it, we will only cross it once. And death remains a fact of our existence with the possible exception that Jesus returns to earth first.

But the promise that really defines Christianity and lies at the heart of so much of Scripture’s teaching is that death is not the end for us. God has created us to live with him, and our souls live on after the death of our bodies. What is more, the day will come when our bodies are raised back to life. We will live with our God, body and soul, forever. This is the message of Easter which we celebrate each week: that because Jesus lives, we, too, will live.

This Saints Triumphant Sunday, we turn our attention to an enlightening discussion about the resurrection. We hear Jesus’ assurance that we are God’s living children. We are and we will remain God’s living children.

This discussion started when some men from the religious sect of the Sadducees came to Jesus. This account actually took place on the Tuesday of Holy Week. At this time, Jesus faced many questions from a variety of people as he spoke and taught. Many were trying to trap Jesus somehow in his own words. They were jealous of his popularity and wanted to maintain their own lofty positions. These Sadducees certainly fall into that category. This was a relatively small group, the sect of the Sadducees, but they tended to be very influential.

Our text mentions one peculiarity of the Sadducees. They did not believe in the resurrection. Though not directly mentioned here, the Sadducees did not accept all of the Old Testament, either. They held only to the first five books, the books of Moses. They also did not believe in the existence of angels.

These men approached Jesus with a complicated question. They quoted a law in the Old Testament that dealt with preserving the family line of a man. When a married man died without any children, his brother would marry the deceased man’s wife, and the firstborn would carry on the family name of the deceased man. This was called the levirate law. The Sadducees, not believing in the resurrection, used that law to make up a complicated situation. Their far-fetched hypothetical situation involved a family of seven brothers, each of whom married a woman and then died without any children. Each brother in line was compelled to take this woman as his wife according to the law they had quoted. The complication was this: if all seven men and their wife rose from the dead, who would be married to her? All seven? That couldn’t be. Which one?

And with this question, they thought they had Jesus trapped. They had used the very Scriptures that he claimed to uphold and represent against him. They had shown that he couldn’t really hold to the teaching of the resurrection and correctly understand marriage at the same time. Something had to give.

People challenging Jesus. Does that sound familiar? People using the Bible against itself. Does that sound like something that still happens today? Denying the resurrection of the dead. Does that sound like people around us? The Sadducees of Jesus’ time land fairly closely to today’s rationalists, who don’t believe or buy into anything that they can’t see or touch or experience. They are those who insist that everything has a logical natural explanation that we can seek out and ultimately find. They pick and choose all sorts of Bible passages to take out of context in order to challenge or test believers.

And often times, we find a little Sadducee living in our own hearts. We might not deny anything outright, but so often we live our lives as though the here and now was so much more important than the resurrection that we might as well be denying its reality. We get so focused on the things of this world,

things that we can taste and touch, that we lose sight of eternity. We value earthly relationships and activities more than we value our relationship with God and the opportunities he provides for strengthening that relationship. It wasn't the truth that the Sadducees were seeking, it was their own greatness. And so many of the temptations that we face boil down to the same thing: serving our own selves.

But Jesus raises our sights, and those of the Sadducees, beyond the here and now. Even though we cannot fully appreciate it, the resurrection is a reality. With the limitations that we have as sinful human beings, we can't possibly comprehend exactly what that means or entails, but Jesus does give us a few insights. The age of the resurrection, eternal life, is different in many respects from our earthly lives. In this world many people marry and form families, and those relationships are among the most important to them. In eternity those relationships are not so important. Then the only relationship that truly matters is that between God and his children.

And when Jesus is talking about God's children, he's talking about you and me. He's talking about the people for whom he died, the people who through Baptism and the Word have come to trust him as their Savior. Jesus describes them as, **"those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead."** That word "worthy" is a terrifying one when we consider how often we have failed to do what God would have us do, and how often we have served ourselves instead of serving him. By ourselves we are far from worthy. But we are worthy because Jesus has made us worthy. Jesus has given us his worthiness. It doesn't depend on our smarts or our success or on anything else that we do. It depends on what Jesus has done for us and in our place. Now we are worthy.

As God's children, made worthy by Jesus' death for us, we will live with him forever. That is the other major difference between this life and the next that Jesus lays out. Like the angels, and remember the Sadducees didn't believe in angels, so Jesus was again pointing out their errors. Like the angels, we will no longer die. The earthly death that so many fear is the grim result of sin in our lives. It has been a part of life since Adam and Eve first disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. But far more terrifying is an eternal death, a separation from God and God's gracious presence forever. That is what God has saved us from. We are his living children, and even though we die an earthly death, we will live forever. Together with all believers on the Last Day, our bodies will be raised to life. We will never again face death. We will live with our heavenly Father.

And there is only one place that we can go for this incredible message, only one place where we find this good news. That place is in the Word of God, in the Bible. When Jesus corrected the Sadducees concerning their misguided question, he pointed them to the Scripture. He even specifically referenced the books of Moses that these men accepted to the exclusion of the other Old Testament books. Jesus explained that in calling himself the "God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," God was anticipating the resurrection. As Jesus explains, **"He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive."** All of these men, who had lived long before this conversation took place, were sinners whom God had called to be his own. Though they had died on earth, their souls lived on, awaiting the day of their resurrection.

We have the same comfort in our own lives and in the lives of those we love. The faithful believers who have gone before us are not gone, are not lost. They, too, await the day that God reunites souls and bodies of his faithful for eternal life in heaven. In the same way, whether we die an earthly death or Jesus returns, we will live with him forever.

Many have tried to explain what happens after death, but we know because God has revealed it in his Word. We are God's living children, now and forever. Let us always treasure that message and share it with others.

The Text: Luke 20:27–38 (NIV84)

²⁷ Some of the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question. ²⁸ “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 have children for his brother. ²⁹ Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. ³⁰ The second ³¹ and then the third married her, and in the same way the seven died, leaving no children. ³² Finally, the woman died too. ³³ Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?”

³⁴ Jesus replied, “The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. ³⁵ But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, ³⁶ and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God’s children, since they are children of the resurrection. ³⁷ But in the account of the 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.’ ³⁸ He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive.”