

## *To God Alone Be The Glory*

[Slowly] So how was your week? Pretty much the same as last week? Some good, some bad. Good thing we got Thanksgiving to look forward to.

You might be content with the “same old, same old,” but lots of folks find life *bo-ring*. So they seek out excitement. Sometimes the excitement gets wild and crazy, but anything that takes their mind off their boring life seems like a plus. No wonder serious illness throws people for a loop! No wonder death catches so many off guard. “You weren’t expecting your elderly loved one to die?” “No! I was too busy living!”

I’m not proposing that we contemplate death every waking moment of our lives, not even once an hour. But once a day is good. If your parents prayed with you that very common bedtime prayer when you were young, you thought about death once per day. You used to say every night (and maybe you still do): “Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take, and this I ask for Jesus sake.” What if you die this week? This congregation had five people die in September and October. Will it be your turn in November? or mine?

“Pastor, isn’t the sermon text about marriage?” No, not really. It’s about the resurrection. It’s trying to teach us: **THERE IS LIFE AFTER DEATH.** Let’s

learn from God himself what is going to happen, and what’s not going to happen. And may the Holy Spirit adjust our thinking to match God’s.

It’s Tuesday of Holy Week. Two days ago Jesus marched into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, and the multitudes cheered with delight. Yesterday Jesus went to the Temple and cleansed it of its thieving marketeers. Jesus’ enemies have had their fill of him. They want him dead now. One group, the Pharisees, just tried to make Jesus look bad by asking him a supposedly impossible question about whether they should pay taxes to Caesar. It didn’t work. Now it’s the Sadducees’ turn. Time to show those lightweight Pharisees why the Sadducees hold most of the governmental power: superior reason. The Sadducees accept only the first five books of the Bible as binding or authoritative. They don’t believe in the resurrection or in angels. This frees them to concentrate on holding power. They’ll show this Jesus a thing or two. No one has ever been able to answer their question without falling on his intellectual fanny.

There IS life after death, but not everyone believes this. In fact, **I. Man’s Reason Denies It** (27-33). The Sadducees of old are a lot like the skeptics of today. Their attitude: “If you can’t prove it, we won’t believe it. Most of the Bible’s claims about miracles can’t

be proved, so the Bible is not worth believing.” Rationalists.

People like this still come up with questions to make the Bible look ridiculous. “If God is almighty, why doesn’t he just kill the devil and end all the injustice?” “If God knew Satan was going to succeed in tempting Eve, why did he let his plan go forward?” A few of you are old enough to remember the Soviet Cosmonauts who smirked and mocked: “We looked deep into space in all directions, and we didn’t see God.” “Hey, if God is all-powerful, can God make a stone so big that not even he can move it?” Sometimes skeptics are just regular people who hurt: “If God is real, why doesn’t he end my suffering? Or why does he let my loved one suffer so much?” All these questions come from hearts that are troubled with the opposite of trust.

This same attitude of mistrust, or even rejection, is what moved the Sadducees to ask Jesus their question about the resurrection. *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. 29Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. 30The second 31and then the third married her, and in the same way the seven died, leaving no children.*

*32Finally, the woman died too. 33Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?”* It may seem strange to us today that a man would take his dead brother’s widow to wife, but it was customary in those days. God used that custom to provide for the widow: she was housed and fed in the home of her brother-in-law until her son was old enough to take over her dead husband’s land. That son would then carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name would not die out in Israel. Today we don’t need this custom.

But back to the question. *33At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?* Oh, what a perfectly logical question! The Sadducees were hoping in their hateful hearts that Jesus would choose one of the seven brothers as the husband in the next age. They were ready with all kinds of questions to show why each of the seven brothers was an impossible choice. In the end Jesus would have to say, “I give up, fellas. You got me. I guess there is no resurrection. You know, I think I’ll join the Sadducees and become your disciple.”

No person guided by reason alone can believe in the resurrection from the dead. But behind all the logic lies a heart that doesn’t want to face the possibility of standing before God and being judged for eternity. And that, my friends, is a

silent admission that in their hearts people know there's something wrong with them, and they don't want God's help to address it.

But there will be Life after death. **II. Jesus Describes It** (34-36). He says, *34The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. 35But 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, 36and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection.* When Matthew and Mark report this event, they quote Jesus as zinging the Sadducees: *"You are in error because you don't know the Scriptures or the power of God!"*

Why would you assume that marriage lasts beyond death? God never said so in the Bible. Marriage is for this life only. That's why the marriage vow says: 'I will remain faithful to you only till death parts us.' This can be shocking to romantics who think they'll be together forever, or that the first one to die is waiting on the other side so they can be together again. Let's not make assumptions like the Sadducees because they didn't know the Bible.

Marriage for humans was necessary when God created the world because he wanted to fill the earth with people. Since people die every day, marriage and

children are still necessary. Apparently God doesn't think the earth is full enough yet.

But *35those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection... they won't marry.* Instead we will be like the angels, who never marry. There is no need. Angels don't die. So angels don't need to be replaced. In life after death we believers won't need to marry because we won't die—no need to replace people in heaven. \*Marriage on earth not only produces people, it also produces family, who will usually come to your aid when you need them. So marriage also produces a sense of belonging. But there won't be any need for blood relatives in the afterlife because, apparently, everyone in heaven will have a greater sense of belonging than is possible on earth. If you are a lonely person, you won't be lonely ever again. We will all be children of God, family in the fullest sense, with a love even better than the best relationship on earth.

Jesus could have stopped right there. He had answered the Sadducees' question about whose wife the woman would be in the afterlife. But the Sadducees had gone beyond asking a question about marriage. They had used the Scriptures to try to make the resurrection look silly. They needed correction. Would they see how clear the Scriptures are?

**THERE IS LIFE AFTER DEATH. III. Scripture Teaches It (37-38).** Jesus reminds the Sadducees, *37In 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.’* *38He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive.* Scripture would teach an entirely different thing if the Lord had said, “I was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” But by saying “I am,” the Lord showed that his relationship with the patriarchs continued after death. So Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were alive and with God when he talked to Moses that day, even though they had been dead for more than 300 years. There really IS life after death. The Scriptures had taught it all along, even in the Books of Moses, the only part of the Bible that the Sadducees accepted as authoritative.

But wait a minute. If there’s a life after death, how do we get there? Jesus gives us a clue in the text: *35“Those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead...”* Ok, how is a person considered worthy? Elsewhere in Scripture, Jesus says things like this. “*I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me will live, even though they die*” (John 11:25). “*My Father’s will is that all who look to the Son and believe in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day*” (John 6:40).

“*Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved*” (Acts 16:31). Through faith we are considered worthy for the sake of Jesus who removed every last stain of sin from our permanent record.

This changes everything. It doesn’t matter if every week is mostly the same, because each week that we carry out our duties in school, at home, at work, and in the church, takes us a week closer to life after death. So even if your week was the same old, same old, you always get to hold onto the hope of life after death through the blood of Christ. \*On your best week, this good news is still better than anything you could talk about with others. Isn’t that part of the reason we come to church Sunday after Sunday? To remind each other by our presence in God’s house, that Jesus rose from the dead, and therefore we too will get to rise from the dead, unless Jesus comes back first? \*And on the occasional week when things don’t go well, knowing that **THERE IS LIFE AFTER DEATH** removes some of the frustration, because things will not always be so frustrating. “This too shall pass,” my grandparents used to say. Knowing that the Lord would rescue them from every evil attack (2 Timothy 4:18) was enough to set their hearts on thinking and doing what is right in God’s sight, and to let him work out all the details that were too big for them to handle. **THERE IS LIFE AFTER DEATH**, thanks to Jesus, and it’s gonna be good!